

POLICE — FRONT-LINE SERVICE DEFINITION

753. Mr D.A. Templeman to the Minister for Police:

Before I ask a question, I would like to wish the member for Kalgoorlie a very happy sixtieth birthday.

I refer to the decisions to reduce the number of police motorcycles, to disband the major incident group, to cut mobile phone use and to slash the police car fleet. Given that the minister claims these cuts do not affect front-line policing, what exactly does he define as front-line policing services?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON replied:

That is a lovely question from the member for Mandurah, and I appreciate it. I will answer him in reverse order. First of all, the member referred to cuts to front-line policing.

Mr D.A. Templeman: In reverse order, the minister should deal with the car fleet first.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The government is not cutting the car fleet, and certainly not front-line vehicles. Everybody in Western Australia knows that, other than perhaps the member for Mandurah and some other members of the Labor Party. We are looking at cost savings in the overall cost of vehicles not only in WA Police, but also across government. For example, we are looking at whether we can save money by extending the term of the lease and whether we can use smaller six-cylinder vehicles rather than eight-cylinder vehicles. That will be a saving.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Will there be the same number of vehicles in the police department as there always has been?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Has the Leader of the Opposition let him in the office yet? I just wondered. I am happy to answer the member for Mandurah's question. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask me a question, please do so. There is no cut to front-line police vehicles—none at all.

The member for Mandurah mentioned motorcycles. That was a decision made by the Commissioner of Police.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Did you not agree with it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: If the member for Girrawheen wants to ask me a question, she should get up and ask me a question. I am answering the member for Mandurah's question. Will he tell his members to stop interjecting?

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You just be quiet yourself, boy.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The Leader of the House should know better. That was not the correct way to address the leader of opposition business. He should know that and if he does not, he should be told about it.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You are working hard today. You are trying to think of something to say.

The SPEAKER: I enjoy this place far more often when members respect each other. I ask the minister to withdraw the remark he made about the leader of opposition business.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Is that the word "boy"?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I withdraw. I wish someone would call me that.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will answer the member for Mandurah's question if he gets his colleagues to stay quiet. I can see a great big dummy going around somewhere. It probably would not fit in the mouth of the member who has it because it is not big enough; it would get lost in there.

I will get back to the issue of police motorcycles. It was a good question and I am happy to answer it. That was a decision made by the commissioner because he felt that we had far too many motorcycles.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am giving the member an answer. He might not like it, but I am giving it to him. The commissioner made an operational decision because he believed that we had far too many motorcycles compared with the number of police officers we have and that they were not the most effective or cost-efficient way of delivering front-line services. Some officers actually used them to go to and from work. They would park them in the station and go out in a patrol car. The Commissioner of Police made that decision. It was not mine.

Extract from Hansard

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Alan Carpenter; Speaker

Mr D.A. Templeman: Pontius Pilate.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It was not Pontius Pilate; it was none of that type of rubbish. I hope that answers that part of the question.

What was the other part of the member's question?

Mr D.A. Templeman: I wanted to know about the mobile phones.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Once again, that was not a directive from government. As I understand it, the Commissioner of Police simply asked those officers whose duties had changed and who did not need a mobile phone anymore to give them back because mobile phones cost money, and those officers were very happy to give them back. It was a very small number of mobile phones. The police have a much superior way of communicating and so not all of them need a mobile phone. The number of mobile phones that were given back was very small. I assure the member that it was not a cost-cutting efficiency measure. I think there were four parts to the member's question.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You have not answered the most important part, which is to define what you consider to be "front-line services".

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will answer that now. I consider them to be those vehicles that are used to patrol our streets. That includes vehicles that are used to chase the criminals with the blues and twos on, unmarked vehicles that are used by detectives and other officers who need to go out in unmarked vehicles, and vehicles that are used in any way to assist in fighting crime and arresting people who are speeding, hooning and driving without a licence and those types of areas. They are all front-line services. The only areas that are not front-line services, as I understand it from the commissioner, as he would define them—I believe that definition is a good one—are those officers who work in public relations or do backroom work and that sort of thing.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Forensics?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Forensics officers are front-line; of course they are. Obviously, a very limited amount of savings can be made regarding police vehicles because the vast majority—90 per cent of the budget for police vehicles—are front-line service vehicles. The amount of savings that could be made through vehicles, if we tried to save a few vehicles here and there, would be very minimal. Of course, the Commissioner of Police and the government need to look at whether better use could be made of the funds that go into the police service, by looking at lease arrangements and the amount of horsepower and the number of cylinders of vehicles, to see whether genuine savings can be made that will not in any way affect front-line services. I hope that answers the question.