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Policing cuts won't be as damaging as union is claiming, says Tory MP

By Steve Knight

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AN INFLUENTIAL Tory MP has criticised Kent Police Federation for the tone of its anti-government spending cuts campaign.

Rochester and Strood representative Mark Reckless, who is a member of both the Home

Affairs Committee and the Kent Police Authority, said he felt the images used in newspaper adverts placed by the union were misleading and could needlessly scare people.

The first advert – which appeared in all Archant KOS Media publications earlier this month – featured images of a burglar breaking into someone's home while police officers queued at a job

centre. It carried the tagline – "Consequences of 20 per cent cuts to policing? Cuts are criminal".

Mr Reckless said: "I think the use of those pictures was regrettable. Clearly the Police Federation will speak for their members, but one of the consequences is that they will scare people with some of these images.

"The one with officers queuing up outside the job centre is misleading because police can't be made redundant and have a job for 30 years. It's almost impossible to lose an officer, even if he or she is no good at their job. Rates of burglary are also now much lower than what they were."

Kent Police is currently battling to save £50 million over the next four years due to a 20 per cent cut in Home Office funding, which is expected to lead to a loss of about 500 officers (through natural wastage) and 1,000 support staff.

The force is undergoing a major restructure as a result of the cuts, which will see a reduction in the number of policing areas from six to three, and a greater emphasis on neighbourhood policing.

When the anti-cuts campaign was launched, Kent Police Federation chairman Ian Pointon said it was inevitable crime would go up, but Mr Reckless said it was not a foregone conclusion.

The Tory MP said: "We had been planning for a £53m reduction in government grants, but it's actually more like £43m, so I have to question whether it's absolutely necessary to lose as many



POLICE AUTHORITY: Tory MP Mark Reckless


members of staff as originally projected.

"But we've seen a considerable fall in crime since the early- to mid-1990s, and over that time police numbers have gone up and down and there hasn't been a clear connection between the two.

"What's important is how we do policing now, and I'm really pleased with the new policing model for Kent that will give more responsibility to neighbourhood officers. It's much more efficient and effective to have small investigations led by officers who know their areas best.

"I would obviously prefer more officers than less, but the previous Labour government borrowed more in the last three years than in the previous three centuries and we've got to put that deficit right."

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