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The First Minister must come clean on how many police officers will be cut to balance the books of the single force, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

It emerged this week that officer numbers are at a nine-year low, with reports that up to a further 1200 could be cut as Police Scotland attempts to address its £30 million black hole.

But while Nicola Sturgeon said she agreed such a reduction would be “unacceptable”, she refused to say by how many the headcount would fall in future.

In Holyrood today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said Police Scotland was under immense financial strain, despite efficiency being one of the reasons the SNP cited for creating the organisation.

Hundreds of charges last year had to be dropped because under-pressure officers couldn't get the paperwork in on time, including allegations of firearms offences, child sex crimes and drug dealing.

However, instead of pledging to support frontline numbers, Ms Sturgeon merely pointed to the situation elsewhere in the UK.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Police officers and the public are rightly worried about the prospect of further cuts to frontline policing.

“That’s why Nicola Sturgeon has to come clean on how many officers face the axe as she attempts to reduce the single force’s deficit.

“Both the justice secretary and the First Minister seem to think reductions in police numbers are fine, yet officers themselves have criticised these claims.

“We were told the creation of a single force would free up resources and provide huge savings, all of which could be invested in the front line.

“Instead, we have a financial black hole with cuts on the way.

"Officers are questioning whether or not they can do their job under these circumstances.

"The least they should expect from this First Minister is honesty about future plans."