


# Straight Talk

By Syreeta Lund

 He thinks the national police uniform should be scrapped and is 'bloomin awful' and his pet hate is rude police officers.

Sir Keith Povey, who started his police career as a constable in Sheffield City Police and is set to retire this month as HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, does not mince his words. He is still a straight-talking northerner at heart, with an element of the diplomat - he has probably bitten his tongue a few times during his 42 years - as he moved up through the ranks to take on his current role.

'I have always had those two pet hates; one, scruffy officers and the other is rude police officers. I think it detracts from the image of the British Bobby and both are rectifiable.

'I think the national police uniform should be scrapped; it doesn't do anything for the appearance of police officers. I understand that they need to be able to carry their kit but it's just a personal dislike,' he adds with a smile and an element of relish as he polishes off his cup of coffee at his office in Queen Anne's Gate.

But he says his support for front line officers has never dwindled and adds: 'I think we will always have the Office of Constable, we are recognised internationally as a police service.'

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) advocated a greater mix of police officers and police staff in their report *Modernising the Police Service*. He believes that the roles can



Sir Keith Povey arriving to give evidence to Richard Inquiry

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'co-exist without the Office of Constable being threatened'.

Sir Keith says that community support officers are 'doing a good job in their current role, but that there needs to be clear and absolute distinction between their role and that of a constable'.

During his time at HMIC, Mr Povey has undertaken inspections all over the world, Zimbabwe and most of Western Europe, he also did a three-month stint at the FBI academy in America as a chief inspector.

I ask if the Serious and

Organised Crime Agency, dubbed in the media, as the 'British FBI' is likely to be effective in tackling organised crime.


'The concept of SOCA is totally right to tackle international criminality,' but he sounds a slight note of caution that its effectiveness will depend on 'the personalities involved, there is always potential for the tensions that the FBI have [with local forces].

However, he adds: 'In America there are 40,000 police forces, here there are 43 so we should be able to achieve a harmonious existence.'

As he contemplates his next move, and at 61, he is as passionate about policing as ever, I ask would he join the police service given the choice again today.

'I would. It is a different environment, it is more demanding and challenging out there than when I joined. There are far higher expectations from the public. It is subject to much greater scrutiny and chief officers have civil servants pouring over their performance daily.

'But it's been fabulous for me, my father was a policeman for 30 years and my biggest disappointment is that he did not live to see what I have achieved.'

And Sir Keith is not likely to stop there, although he intends to dedicate more of his time to the gym 'getting rid of all those lurches' and to becoming a good golfer; 'I'm a pretty poor one at the moment' he has already been approached by a security company in  an advisor capacity.