


What is happening to the role of the detective?

Detective representatives from all over England and Wales came together recently to express their concerns about the future of the role at the national CID seminar. Brian Stockham, chairman of Sussex Police Federation and chairman of the national CID practitioners group reports.

 Worrying gaps are beginning to emerge in the detective ranks across forces, according to delegates attending the national CID seminar.

Officers stressed their concerns at the conference, held in Kegworth, over an array of issues affecting the rank from pay and conditions to the pressure on the those in the role and increasing civilianisation.

Alan Gordon, vice-chairman of the Federation, updated delegates on issues being discussed around the negotiating table at the Police Negotiating Board and the Police Advisory Board. Officers strongly expressed the need for enhancing the status of detectives, which they feel has been eroded over the most recent pay and conditions negotiations.

Trevor Pearce, director general of the National Crime Squad, gave an update on SOCA in advance of its start date in April, and offered a view on the future for investigation of criminality at an international level. But delegates said that they felt there was a widening gap between national and international crime and local policing.

These concerns were not eradicated through the session, and it was the strongly held view of officers that the proposals for force amalgamations will not address the aims of the HMIC report, *Closing the Gap*, which talks about tackling criminals who cross force boundaries. Concerns were also addressed that in the future SOCA would become subject of greater political control.



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Mr Pearce assured all present that there would still be a strong desire for prosecution activity but some delegates believe that the easy option of disruption would become the norm, particularly given the reduced number of detectives in their workforce. Mr Pearce said that numbers of police officers wishing to join SOCA are not far short of the desired level for start-up, but there are abiding worries over their employment status and vulnerability to false allegations of misconduct.

One interesting topic leading to dissatisfaction was the continuation of SOCA having a firearms response. Mr Pearce commented that during interventions the team, who would no longer have

police officer status, would still be shouting 'Armed Police' which was felt to be unsatisfactory to most delegates. However it was agreed that the shout of 'Stop SOCA' was unlikely to be effective.

Mark Rowley, assistant chief constable of Surrey Police, involved in piloting the mixed economy approach, a mix of police officers and police staff, prompted heated debate.

Many detectives advanced the view that their status and skills are being undermined by the employment on a cheaper basis of staff members performing a small section of their work.

This was emphasised by a contribution from Met officers discussing their similar project at Bexleyheath. It was readily accepted that such initiatives developed on a local basis nearly always result in short term productivity gains, but after a while weaknesses become more glaring.

For example, in Bexleyheath, staffing is returning to more like a traditional CID office.

Mr Rowley conceded that there had been some problems in Surrey in staffing terms, and there were undoubted justified concerns at the ability to replicate such a process from one Basic Command Unit to a number and then to the whole force, given the multi-skilled and secondary roles which detectives perform.

However, it was agreed that we should be looking at all possible models to enhance our service and provide better results for the public. Within the Surrey

scheme, and linking to potential reforms as regarding advanced constable and detective constable roles, it was acknowledged that the status of experienced officers is being enhanced. Mr Rowley admitted that he would be taking away feedback to examine more closely and define the roles of sergeants and inspectors, having suggested in his own view that he sees no threat in the future to the rank of sergeant, but that this system adds to existing structures.

Mr Andy Kay, head of Investigative Training at the National Specialist Law Enforcement Centre, gave a detailed input on the progress of PIP (Professionalising the Investigative Process). Many Forces have been implementing this programme already and there a good deal of experience on practical issues being faced by detectives across the country

The PIP programme was welcomed because of the introduction of an accreditation process which records and recognises the skills and professional capabilities of officers according to national standards.

But some officers said there will be limited opportunity for re-accreditation for detectives, particularly as most officers are over-worked due to recruitment and retention problems. It was accepted that we should be welcoming the change and supporting its introduction, but at the same time, with the enhanced status, there needs to be reassessment of the conditions of service. 