

Happy New Year?

 I know the New Year is traditionally a time when many people reflect on the excesses of the festive period and opt to shed a few pounds, but the initial findings of a Police Federation report on 24/7 policing featuring exclusively in this month's magazine, suggest the Home Office has been actively shedding the pounds of the beat for some considerable time.

The report, which focussed on seven forces across the country, paints a bleak picture of police officers nearing breaking point with ever increasing and often unmanageable workload. This is coupled with escalating bureaucracy and many BCU departments setting their own targets on top of those already dictated by the Home Office. A good sport for the senior officers monitoring the additional targets perhaps, but not for the officers on the front line who are already struggling to deliver a basic standard of protection and detection out on the streets.

These findings come at a crucial time with more change and uncertainty planned for the service throughout the next few years.

And I'm afraid they don't bode well for seeing an improvement to the areas identified in the report; in fact the changes are likely to further jeopardise improvements to the 24/7 response in the near future as there will be less money available for training and resources.



Editorial by Metin Enver, Editor of Police magazine


The amalgamation of forces over the coming months and years has been the subject of much speculation, not least because there seems to have been no business case prepared to show that the changes will not only bring about a better public service deliv-

ery but can also be done at little or no extra cost. The frightening reality, according to the Association of Police Authorities, is that the planned mergers will cost anything between £500-£600 million; a small price for a country already exceeding its international overdraft.

So where will forces get the extra money needed to fund the structural changes. Well, according to sources the Home Office's answer is simple – borrow. Of course, why did such a simple solution seem to pass me by? It makes absolute sense – Police Authorities will need to borrow more money, the cost will undoubtedly be passed on to the council taxpayer through the police precept and we end up with the situation where the public are paying more for the same or less of a service than they had in the first place. That should really enhance police relations with the community.

And with strained budgets what is likely to give? I wouldn't envisage police officer numbers remaining at their record high, which may suit the Association

of Chief Police Officers plans for a mixed police economy of warranted and non-warranted officers being given powers when required, but it will certainly mean many BCUs will struggle to implement the Prime Minister's vision of effective neighbourhood policing teams over the next two years.

The saddest part is that the finding in the Federation report should trigger a positive response from chief officers and Government alike to make appropriate moves to tackle the issues raised and improve the 24/7 response the public receive. But I fear that the strained budgets the amalgamations and other changes will force on Police Authorities will mean that the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. But just like Scrooge waking up and realising he's not yet missed Christmas day, the Government too can do something about it. Do what's right for better policing in this county and not just for an election timetable – slow down the rate and pace of changes to the service so we can all ensure we're doing what's right and best for the public. 

In Focus



Interview with Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation, on issues raised over the last year and challenges facing the service in the future. Mrs Berry speaks to Syreeta Lund, Deputy Editor of Police magazine on neighbourhood policing, extending Federation membership and proposals for a 'super cop'. Pages 12 and 13.



As an evaluation of the trials in seven forces is due to report initial findings of work-based assessments, an alternative to Ospre Part II, Helen Gilbert focuses on Thames Valley Police. Pages 23 and 25.



Home Secretary Charles Clarke sends a New Year message to officers and gives an insight into his vision of the police service, with neighbourhood policing teams at the heart but a mixture of staff including PCSOs, volunteers and the security industry. Page 9