

Concern over status of SOCA officers who could shout 'police' when carrying firearms

Officers in SOCA could have to tell the public they are police during firearms incidents as many would not be able to understand what 'SOCA officer' means, according to Alan Gordon, vice-chairman of the Federation.

Serious and Organised Crime Agency officers, including those from customs and excise and immigration, will be expected to carry out surveillance as they deal with top level criminals in organised crime and this will sometimes mean carrying firearms for protection.

Currently, police officers are required to shout 'Stop, armed police', but SOCA has decided that their officers will have to use the same words, as 'Stop, I'm a Serious and Organised Crime officer' is a bit of a mouthful and may not be



Bill Hughes: director general of SOCA

understood by most criminals or the public.

However Alan Gordon, vice-chairman of the Federation, said concerns were expressed by officers at a national CID conference recently.

He, added that this again throws into question why police officers going into SOCA cannot retain their status.

He said: 'In order to ensure that people respond to SOCA offi-

cers, it is felt that they ought to shout 'Stop, armed police.'

'But this brings into question the whole concept of SOCA. This highlights the ludicrous situation we have where police officers are transferring to SOCA and will lose their status as a constable. Yet, people who have never been police officers will be given constable status when that's deemed necessary.

'SOCA officers will have the powers of a constable conferred on them; they will carry firearms and will be shouting 'Armed police'. How will a chief constable view SOCA officers who are suggesting they are armed police in a particular force area when they have no control over them?'

The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 will enable Bill

Hughes, director general of the Agency, to be able to give the powers of a constable on an ad-hoc basis to staff when it is required.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation, said that she believes the organisation should be integrated into the existing police structure and be staffed by fully sworn police officers.

A spokesman for SOCA said that the policy is still under development.

'Before a final decision is made consideration will be given to the powers (police) that SOCA will be using at the time and health and safety issues. Full discussions are taking place with the ACPD Police Use of Firearms working group.'



Independent watchdogs should ensure new promotion system for constables and sergeants is 'consistent'

An overarching body should be appointed to ensure a new promotion system for constables and sergeants will be consistent and excludes the 'old boys' network' if it is rolled out across the country.

John Giblin, Federation representative on the Police Promotion Review Board, is currently looking at the work-based assessments (WBA) being trialled in seven forces.

The assessments provide an alternative to the Ospre Part II role play system, which has been criticised by both officers and forces.

The system is currently being assessed by independent evaluator Symbia and initial findings were due to be released last month as *Police* went to press.

But Mr Giblin says that the forces involved started at different times, some in March 2005 and some much later, so it would be difficult to make an accurate assessment of the system at this stage.



Officers assessed while at work

Mr Giblin added: 'We need to have standardisation in place. At the moment some forces are following the guidance more closely than others.'

'In stages one and three candidates are subject to the input of the BCU commander. There could be the old boys network and nepotism so we need internal and external verification, there needs to be an overarching body to look at systems across the board.'

Some forces, such as Thames Valley Police, have already produced positive feedback saying that the scheme has helped address the lack of sergeants, as many officers were put off taking Ospre Part II as they felt it was not 'realistic'.

Bedfordshire, Sussex, Thames Valley, Met, Merseyside, Hertfordshire and Leicestershire Police are all involved in the trials.

Mr Giblin added: 'If we have an efficient and sustainable system in place, this should work. However, it can only be effective if forces are properly resourced and have enough properly trained force assessors.'

'There has to be an efficient and sustainable PDR (personal development record) system. My concern is that it could be rushed forward with a lack of standardisation and consistency.'

● See pages 23 and 25 for a feature on work-based assessments in Thames Valley Police.

IN BRIEF

● Subs increase just inflationary

Federation members will only see a minor increase in subscription fees, by three per cent. From 1 January 2006, fees will go up by just 12 pence from £3.60 to £3.72 per week.

● Increased death benefit

Existing death benefit payable will increase £75 from 1 January 2006, which means that it will rise by three per cent from £2,420 to £2,495.

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