

Federation research finds officers on response teams are near to breaking point

Exclusive by Syreeta Lund

Officers working on response teams are under immense pressure with as many as three quarters of shift strength being abstracted and probationers bolstering numbers, according to Federation focus groups.

Initial findings from the groups reveal a grim picture for 24/7 response officers around the country with dwindling levels of officers, low morale and bureaucracy blighting their jobs.

Seven forces, of varied size reflecting both urban and rural areas, took part in the study, *A view from the Beat - 24/7 Response Policing in the Modern Police organisation*, to try to get an accurate reflection of forces across the country.

Alan Gordon, vice-chairman of the Federation, warned that officers on 24/7 response teams are at breaking point.

'The demands on these response teams is huge and yet officers are being taken off to chase Government targets. All that this means is that those left behind face an even tougher time, their morale is hit and they are also battling with the burden of bureaucracy.'

'The initial research indicates that probationers are making up the majority of these response teams, which cannot be right and is placing them under intense pressure.'

Each of the forces that took part in the survey were asked to provide two groups of eight to ten officers currently working on a 24/7 response team.

Examples of comments made by officers, who remain anonymous in the research, describe work on the teams as: highly pressurised, stressful, under-

resourced, carrying low status, under scrutiny, providing a service to every other unit on demand.

One PC told the focus group: 'There's a lot of stress on young officers, I have had a few resigning from the job because they are having to juggle everything, they can't take the amount of responsibility that's put on them.'

A sergeant involved in one of the response teams describes how it has got to the point where even experienced officers have had enough.

'They get to the point where they are burnt out. We've got an officer on our team, a good, experienced, well-balanced officer. He's thinking of leaving the job because he can't cope any more and if he goes it will be a major loss to the shift.'



Officers are under pressure from bureaucracy as they chase targets

Many of the officers interviewed, who often speak to the public face to face, say they are being dogged by targets and bureaucracy.

One sergeant summed it up when he said: 'I'm passionate about the job but the politics and the bureaucracy get me down.'

● See feature on pages 20, 21 and 22.



Feeling the pinch in the New Year?

Police in Dorset are taking a break from the traditional message of a 'happy New Year' and instead telling car criminals to wave goodbye to their New Year celebrations.

The force has been targeting those who commit car crime over the Christmas and New Year period and have stepped up their campaign with a series of posters.

One of the posters offers an open invitation to criminals to spend their

holidays with officers in the Dorset area.

Operation Wave has already seen 682 car criminals targeted in Bournemouth over the last two years.

Det Insp John Gately, who is heading the operation, said they traditionally see a rise in such crime during the festive and New Year period.

He added in a jolly seasonal fashion: 'Our message is: 'Commit vehicle crime and you can wave goodbye to your Christmas and New Year.'

