

# Tough talk

**As the police service braces itself for a bumpy ride of reform in the coming year, Syreeta Lund interviews the chairman of the Federation over the future of the service and looks at issues raised over the past year.**

**Do you think the Government has put forward a coherent plan for reforming the police service and what do you think the service should look like in the future?**

The Police Federation recognised several years ago that more and more is being expected of the service with fewer and fewer resources. Demands on policing are greater now than ever before. We have to know who is supposed to be doing what and how and this is not the case at the moment. Until we had a drug problem, we did not have a drug squad. The police always have to respond to social values. The service has to reform to meet new challenges but the question is - are the reforms going to deliver?

**Would you have the same mixture of roles in neighbourhood policing teams, currently it is generally a combination of police officers and PCSOs?**

The plan is to have a police officer, a Special Constable and a PCSO in the future. That idea is still untested. Would that com-

bination deliver greater flexibility? Can it work? Yes, it can work, but does it provide a better policing response and flexibility in the future, I am not convinced by that. That is the experience of officers in some places already. People are being employed to do one role and are not finding it rewarding, they want to do more - but if they are given more in their roles then they need more training and the equipment and then where is the flexibility?

**Do you think funding will continue to be available to maintain the current number of police officers and PCSOs?**

The funding is supposed to be there for 140,000 officers and 25,000 PCSOs but forces are already stopping recruiting police officers. Forces are going to want to use funding to support different areas and I question whether the money will remain for officers and PCSOs.

**Are PCSOs an inevitable part of the police service?**

I think they are inevitably part of the future of the service. Many PCSOs are undertaking the role I undertook when I joined the police. There is a role for them and a lot of police officers who work with PCSOs speak very highly of them. But there has to be clarity of difference between the PCSO and constable role. At the moment there is no clarity. The only people who have provided role clarity are the Federation [who agreed a role profile at their annual conference last year].

In many areas, PCSOs have been allowed to be deployed and used for roles that they should not be. In some areas they are used as additional personnel; they are supposed to

be a very visible presence on the streets so you would not expect them to be working in plain clothes in surveillance roles, but they are. There are people being used in ways they never should be. This is the feedback from both police officers and PCSOs. They [PCSOs] will increasingly become a visible police presence on our streets and it remains to be seen whether they have the necessary skills and training to do that role. I am encouraged that consideration is being given to a standard training programme for PCSOs. Up until now, it has been down to forces to develop their own programmes.

**The Federation is planning to debate extending membership beyond police officers. Do you think the membership is likely to rule this out as an option?**

The role being undertaken by PCSOs today was being undertaken by people we represented five years ago, we represented people doing that job five years ago but those people were fully warranted and had powers of a constable and these officers do not, at this time. If it was right we should represent them five years ago, the same role is being undertaken today, whether sufficient numbers of officers see that, I think time alone will tell. It would take an Act of Parliament to change the restriction on membership and I would not underestimate how difficult that could be to achieve. A working group is looking at this over several months and will bring a report to conference on this. Rather than voting on emotion or an impassioned speech, I think, we have to look at the reality of the situation being faced.

**What do you think are the potential pitfalls of not extending the membership?**

The influence of the Police Federation could be reduced. A lot of members would say we don't have much influence now; but a lot of politicians think we have too much influence. You could potentially have decreasing numbers of fully warranted officers and an increasing number of partially warranted officers who could not be our members. Another downfall would be that increasingly PCSOs and officers are working together and



coming under a different set of rules means it could become more complicated. I believe in a totally integrated and professional police force. Whether you are a telephone operator, a PCSO, a firearms officer, you need to be properly trained and equipped to do the job. You need to make sure you do that by working together.

**Do you think reforms across the rest of the public sector, such as the health service, have set a precedent for the police service?**

One size does not fit all. The health service now has more specialist roles, such as a specific person to take blood or whatever. There is a functions creep. With civilianisation of the police service, the argument was to put police back on the streets but police staff are undertaking operational roles in policing. I fear for some of the implications of that. Constables will not get a grounding in policing – a range of experience that enabled them to be the flexible and resilient officers they currently are. Sworn officers will then not have that foundation of experience. Their experience will be about going to confrontational situations. It can be done that way but I am not convinced this is the right type of service we should have in this country. It seems to be happening without proper debate.

**Should the Serious and Organised Crime Agency [SOCA] be part of the police service?**

I do not agree that SOCA is going to be a separate body from the police service. They are dealing with drug traffickers to human traffickers and organised crime. The lines of communication have to be clear, and that means from those dealing with organised crime speaking to police officers and PCSOs in neighbourhoods. I think separating the organisation will mean that intelligence will not be shared. It has not worked effectively when it has been part of the police service [NCS and NCIS] so I am not convinced it will work when it is not part of the service. Technically we will be far more advanced in the future and yet we are still waiting for an integrated communications package as recommended by the Richard Inquiry.

**Proposals put forward at the Police Negotiating Board include plans for an advanced constable role. Is this a threat to the sergeant rank?**

The way it is being presented at the moment,

it could be perceived as a threat to sergeants. We need far more detail about the difference in the role of the advanced constable in some ways, just as we do between PCSOs and constables. The description [of an advanced constable] at the moment is very 'loose' and could be perceived as one and the same. In other jurisdictions they have constables and senior constables, sergeants and senior sergeants, but there are clear differences between their experience and skills. There is no clarity in what is proposed for England and Wales at the moment. I personally believe it is too early to put to the proposals to the PNB. I do not think the details have been delivered sufficiently for the PNB to put a price on the job either. I think the police service needs to have a debate about these areas. We need to have a debate about the mixed economy. We need to have a proper debate about the ranks and roles in the service. I do not believe you should re-engineer the workforce through pay.

**You are now carrying out another survey on the routine arming of police officers in view of rising gun crime. Do you think the results are likely to be different?**

What is now happening is an increase in gun crime where the resilience in the numbers of firearms officers we have is being stretched in some areas. Even during the review in 2003 [a survey of authorised firearms officers (AFOs)] there were areas where far more AFOs should have been available than there were.

I do not think routine arming of the police will be called for by the majority of police officers. There are some areas where, the risk assessment and level of gun crime in that area is such, that first response police officers probably should be routinely armed. We are talking about some, particularly inner city areas, where guns are carried as an accessory. Generally though, my personal opinion is that I do not think that arming officers would discourage people from carrying firearms.

**The Federation has said on record that you would like to see at least five per cent of officers within forces being trained as authorised firearms officers [AFOs]. Is it useful to set a target for the numbers of AFOs?**

I think you do have to leave it to chief officers but chief officers should be working within an

agreed framework. Whatever you do you have to have resilience in the area of firearms. The numbers should be closer to ten per cent than five per cent.

**What do you think could discourage black minority ethnic officers from joining the Federation?**

A lot of black minority ethnic officers have received excellent support from Federation representatives around the country, but some officers have not received the level of support and advice they expected or believed they warranted. I think that experience has had a disproportionate effect and a negative impact. I also believe that the Federation has been very poor at communicating the successes it has for its members, partly due to the confidential nature of many of the claims and a desire to retain confidentiality for people who already feel like victims of the system. The Federation is becoming much more of a learning organisation than it is given credit for though.

**Do you think there will ever be a black chairman of the Federation?**

Yes. There is absolutely no reason why there should not be a black chairman of the Police Federation. Just as the police service needs to be reflective of the community, so does the Police Federation. I do think too much can be made of role models though, if officers get the service they want to be provided for them then people do not complain about the gender or race of someone doing the job.

**If you could suggest any New Year resolutions for Home Secretary Charles Clarke, what would they be?**

I would like to see clarity around the roles of police staff and warranted officers, a clear definition to work to and who is going to be involved in operational policing as well as protection for the Office of Constable. I would like to see a return to the days when an assault on a police officer was an assault on society. There should be proper sentences for those who assault police officers, and currently, I don't believe there is. To provide an IT system that provides a service with intelligence where it is needed on the front line. We are still a long way from the promised solution following the Richard Inquiry.