



John Giblin, Chairman of the Sergeants' Central Committee

Our pivotal role is under attack

Federation views

At a meeting of the Sergeants' Branch Board Chairs and Secretaries in March, we tried to capture the five key issues affecting sergeants. Our straw poll showed that custody and reducing staff levels remained the most pressing problems for sergeants across England and Wales. This was followed by concerns over training, which was either not fit for purpose, or absent altogether. Other concerns centred on the widening of the sergeant's job description as well as the erosion of regulations.

These are legitimate concerns. Our rank is under threat as never before. Each successive document, policy or framework seems to strike at the very heart of the sergeant's role, making it increasingly unlikely it will emerge from these troubled times unscathed.

Take the *Productivity Framework* published last year. It revealed HMIC would conduct a major inspection of forces in 2010, based around three core themes: leading, organising and developing the workforce. It emphasised the role of 'supervisors' (including non-sergeants) in managing and assessing officers' performance and development. The supervisor's role included overtime authorisation and accountability, resource allocation, quality of service, ideas and initiatives, professional judgement, performance and personal responsibility.

The list is extensive, and will lead to more responsibility falling on the shoulders of sergeants and with it greater accountability. That sergeants will be held to account for their use of overtime is worrying indeed. That sergeants and non-warranted equivalents are shown together as supervisors is a threat to the sergeant rank in the future.

This document was followed by the *Police Value for Money* report, which recommends ways in which forces can give more for less in tough economic times. It stresses that forces will need to meet the twin challenges of increased financial pressures and continued expectation from the public, while balancing budgets and sustaining delivery, particularly from April 2011.

As a result, issues surrounding deployment, shift

patterns, overtime costs and workforce mix are very much under the microscope and will yet again impact upon the sergeant rank. Mention is also made of a reduction in the number of gatekeepers. I hope this is not yet another move to civilianise the role of the custody sergeant via the back door?

Sergeants are the guardians of excellence in terms of service delivery as well as the gatekeepers of the custody process. They are key to the future of policing. Those tasked with determining that future would do well to remember that.

When the current government came to office in May it announced a range of financial cuts for all police forces. In October's spending review the Home Office will have to find savings of 25 percent in its budget.

The Home Secretary has confirmed this year's pay award, the last in the three-year pay deal, will be honoured. She has also indicated a wider review of pay and conditions, with overtime in particular expected to come under attack.

The government has also undertaken a review of all public sector pensions. An interim report will be published in September with the final recommendations due next March. Unlike pay and conditions, pensions are not negotiable and any changes can be imposed.

Rest assured, the Sergeants' Central Committee will fight 'tooth and nail' in these difficult and challenging times to ensure that the rights and entitlements of all sergeants, who are pivotal to service delivery, are not disadvantaged in any way.