

The numbers of police officers will not be slashed says Home Secretary



Charles Clarke, Home Secretary: Totally committed to office of constable

The Federation called for reassurances from Home Secretary Charles Clarke that he would not replace police officers with community support officers or axe the office of constable.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation, asked the question following fears that forces may not replace officers retiring but instead employ CSOs.

But Mr Clarke promised at the Federation's annual conference: 'I can give a guarantee. All the concerns about CSOs, the fears expressed that we will seek to reduce police officers, we will not do that.'

Mrs Berry also highlighted the concerns about the erosion of the office of constable, which means police officers are accountable to

the Crown, the public, not the Home Secretary.

'Come April next year, officers transferring to SOCA will be employees of the Home Secretary appointed director general. They will not be able to swear allegiance to the Crown.'

But Mr Clarke said he was 'totally committed' to retaining the office of constable and that it would remain at the heart of the service.

'While I am Home Secretary police constables will remain warranted officers of the Crown,' he said, adding that they would have a full range of powers.

He told officers that the Government would increase resources for the police but said they would have to make sure resources would 'strengthen the police family

and the police team'.

Mrs Berry accused the Government of 'legislating by stealth' to change working practices in the service and not consulting with the Federation as had been promised by David Blunkett at conference the previous year.

She said it was 'empty rhetoric' and legislation had been used to push through a number of changes, including civilianising the post of a police custody officer, which they had warned against.

'We saw again last year when the [SOCA] Bill establishing the Serious and Organised Crime Agency contained totally unrelated clauses ushering in civilian custody sergeants, and giving more powers to CSOs.'

The public can experience a 'patchy service' from their local police force

Home Secretary Charles Clarke told officers that while confidence in the police service remains high that the public can experience 'patchy' service.

He told delegates: 'When the service from the police is good, it's very very good but when it's bad, it's sometimes awful.'

Mr Clarke said that the service needed to make better use of technology and 'more than anything' needed officers and staff who were visible and accessible.


He added that the service needed to attract the 'best graduates' and create a culture where women and ethnic minorities were wanted and welcome.



Regional crime squads need to make a come back to tackle cross-border crime



Jan Berry: Bring back crime squads

 A new network of regional crime squads should be set up to tackle the 'gulf' that is likely to appear between national crime-fighting agencies and local forces, according to Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation.


The National Crime Squad is set to be disbanded and SOCA will deal with international crime while local forces will deal with local crime – leaving a gap in who will be responsible for crime crossing force borders, such as drug dealing.

Mrs Berry said: 'Now is the time to establish a new network of regional crime squads working hand-in-hand with forces at a local

level and with SOCA at a national level.'

Some forces have done their best to fill the gap, with the West Midlands Police already setting up The West Midlands Regional Drug Taskforce, but Mrs Berry says 'ad-hoc force collaborations' are not the way to deal with the problem.

'I don't know if the irony is lost on the Government, but as a result of creating SOCA – not organisation will be responsible for tracking football hooligans,' she told officers.

The new crime-fighting agency will come into effect in April next year, only two months before the  World Cup in Germany.

Community support officers could get an extension of police powers

Home Secretary Charles Clarke would not rule out extending further police powers for community support officers.

Broadcaster John Stapleton, who was facilitating the debate for officers, asked if the Home Office planned to increase powers for CSOs.

Mr Clarke said: 'I am not going to say you have a 'no change' situation,' adding that he would have to discuss whether there is an issue where they may need to increase powers.

He told delegates at the Federation's annual conference in Blackpool last month that he had spoken to CSOs, some who had said they would like their powers to be increased.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation, then raised the issue of inadequate training for CSOs, highlighting research carried out by the organisation which was handed to Charles Clarke in January.

'Why in that case did it take a reporter from the *Daily Mirror* to confirm what we have been saying for the past four years?' she asked the Home Secretary.

Mr Clarke said that he had to wait until the general election was over in order to discuss the issue but acknowledged there were issues with training for CSOs which would be looked at.

Brave hearts



Home Secretary Charles Clarke paid tribute to police officers who put their lives on the line in the course of their duty.

He spoke to delegates at the Federation's annual conference in Blackpool last month about the commitment made by police officers to their job. 'Everybody ought to search for the hero inside of them. But that general aspiration is nowhere sharper and clearer than with public servants, particularly police officers as yourselves who have to take risks, sometimes unacceptable risks, in pursuit of that public duty and those Bravery Awards illustrated so very powerfully the commitment that many of your members show at times of great pressure.'