



Metin Enver, Editor

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Editorial

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Cutting remarks

Editor: Metin Enver

Deputy Editor: Syreeta Lund

Designer: Lisa Ryszkowska

Contact: 15 Langley Road, Surbiton,
Surrey, KT6 6LP

Tel: 0208 335 1000

Fax: 0208 390 2249

E-mail: slund@jcc.polfed.org

Advertising Agent:

Landmark Services

Contact: Sharon Davies

2 Windmill Street

London

W1T 2HX

TeL: 0207 692 9292

Fax: 0207 692 9393

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Well, they say a week's a long time in politics - a new Home Secretary, two new police ministers and the new ACPO President's induction at the Police Federation Conference are testament to that.

Just a month ago there was an expectation that Charles Clarke, the former Home Secretary, together with Hazel Blears, former police minister, would face a rocky reception from the 1,000 police delegates assembled for the annual Federation conference in Bournemouth. But instead it was the new Home Secretary, John Reid, who was stripped of any honeymoon period by the Federation's national chairman, Jan Berry, as she demanded police pay be protected and that officer numbers be kept at a record high.

Although it was Mrs Berry's announcement of ACPO plans to reduce police officer numbers by 25,000 within five years that sent the media scurrying to file their copy for the morning papers and saw ACPO's Ken Jones making a quiet exit towards the train station, whilst admitting that this was one workforce mix scenario they had looked at.

Having just left the position of Defence Secretary, John Reid is accustomed to avoiding the line of fire, and he managed this successfully by assuring the Federation delegates that he did not wish to cut police officer numbers. His was quickly followed with a statement from Ken Jones, safely back in his London bunker, who also said this was not his preferred outlook for a mix of sworn and non-sworn officers.

And all this at a time when the Federation's membership survey clearly shows the dangers officers face, with over 40 percent saying they have felt their lives have been in serious danger at least once in the last two years whilst on duty.

One week later, at the ACPO conference, both John Reid and Ken Jones again reaffirmed they have no plans to cut police officer numbers. Fine and welcome words indeed; but with police officer recruitment frozen in Greater Manchester and North Wales when numbers of PCSOs are increasing, what we need now is a guarantee from every one of the 43 chief officers in England and Wales that they will maintain police numbers. Otherwise my fear is this could just prove to be another false promise, and one that will put the future safety and wellbeing of the British public at risk.