



Dave Hughes, chairman, sergeants' branch board, Dorset Police Federation

## Jack of all trades or master of some

The outgoing Chief Constables of Merseyside and Essex, Bernard Hogan-Howe and Roger Baker, hit the headlines with their views on all victims of crime receiving a visit from a police officer. This received support from our chairman, Paul McKeever, and from many others around the country.

The harsh reality is that although this is a commendable aspiration, the thin blue line is now sadly very much a dotted blue line and the service that we provide is being stretched further on an ever decreasing budget.

Events on the international and domestic front in recent years have meant that more resources are being put into the fight against terror, level two crime and protective services. Inevitably this leaves fewer officers to deal with the remaining 90 percent of core policing. The net result is that by aspiring to take on everything and more we are not always delivering where it matters.

I look around at other public services and see all too often the results of cuts made. The NHS, with fantastic advances in medicine combined with an increase in longevity has led to the postcode lottery where patients are denied treatment on cost grounds. On a daily basis I see police officers carrying out functions of other agencies because social services, local councils or the health service have made cuts limiting what they provide.

Still we try to do our best to help out despite having fewer front-line staff and an increase in service calls. I could move off into another debate at this point as to why this is happening but will confine it to the view that the other agencies allow this to happen because they know that often we cannot or will not say "no".

I think that it is possible to give all victims of crime the full service but other areas should be looked at with a common sense approach and decisions made that will free up officers.

For example, take the 12 year old of previous good

character who gets caught stealing a chocolate bar from a shop. There was a time when they would be taken home and spoken to in front of the parents. It was 'cleared-up' as a street warning and counted as detected. Nowadays statements have to be taken, the child has to be interviewed, and then a "restorative justice" conference takes place. The end result is almost identical but with the additional bureaucratic burden of several hours of work.

With regard to doing the work of other agencies, conferences with our partners need to take place which set out clear service level agreements and perhaps even consideration should be given to setting up a process so the agencies that fail to meet their obligations can receive a financial penalty.

Whatever road the service takes we can be sure of one thing. We can try to do everything and accept that we will not do those things well or we can shed certain tasks and become the master of what remains.