



Brian Stockham is the chairman of Sussex Police Federation

## Local focus

The most significant issue upsetting our officers in Sussex at the moment concerns ongoing negotiations towards an on call allowance. As with many issues, such as bonus payments, special priority payments and regional allowances, there seems to have been a trend over recent years for each of the 43 forces to do their own thing on various aspects of remuneration. Many wonder whether this has been a deliberate ploy by the government and Official Side of the Police Negotiating Board in an effort to introduce local or regionalised pay and undermine the notion of a settled national pay for constables.

In Sussex we have been negotiating towards an on call allowance for more than six years, we are now on our third chief constable, with many unrealised promises. It is no wonder that our officers have become angrier and more disillusioned as many forces around the country have settled on varying sums per night or quarter. There seems no common standard. National negotiations have led to a stalemate in which it is understood that government wants to talk but has no idea how to approach this.

It has, of course, always been national policy, with which we agree, that there should be no need for officers to be on call and any payment should be punitive to prevent abuses by managers. There should be enough officers on duty at any time to deal with any incident. However, in provincial forces such as ours, we may be recruiting to the allowed levels, but we have a problem with skilled, experienced officers and retention. This situation is likely to worsen as many officers are set to retire and it is experience which is at a premium with officers often on call for extended periods.

We have put pressure on our force command in recent years to reduce the numbers of those on call, which has now happened and is welcome, as four or more experts covering a county seemed excessive. An aggravating feature in recent times is that police staff are being paid an additional 5 percent of their salary to be on call, and police officers receive nothing, which is clearly unfair. This is one area where reducing budgets by using lesser paid staff eventually becomes a false economy, as when

such separate agreements and shift allowances are factored in, police staff cost just the same. This has been proven true in Sussex with the example of crime scene investigation.

There is no doubt that the special status of police officers means that we can always be recalled to duty, and are flexible, the traditional notion of being a copper 24/7 being paramount. Yet this becomes an abuse where our pay and conditions of service are undermined by management abuses perpetrated by those who could not judiciously resource manage their way round a supermarket dash. It is time for a solution.

At the same time, we are facing abuses with managers requesting officers to work 12-hour nights contrary to our Workforce Agreement. Again it is pressure cooker management, seeking to squeeze until the pips squeak, despite all that is known about the health risks. One manager has suggested to me that we need to face the 21st Century reality of policing a 24-hour economy. Our reply is that we should be doing it with 21st Century police officer numbers.