

Women police officers lack proper kit

Female officers are still plagued with issues when it comes to police uniform – uncomfortable and itchy trousers, incorrect sizes and one-piece suits that make it difficult to use the toilet.

Women police officers across the country raised concerns over ill-fitting and uncomfortable police kit and equipment at workshops held by the British Association of Women in Policing (BAWP).

Liz Owsley, coordinator for the BAWP, highlighted concerns over clothing and equipment not being supplied in female sizes, such as the boot covers which form part of the protective kit needed for a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) attack.

“The boot covers do not go down to a size smaller than a size seven. I know quite a few women are around size five and smaller. It’s a problem because the kit used for CBRN has to be tightly fitted for chemicals or anything they may come into contact with.”

The information will contribute to the Gender Agenda document, due to be launched in October, designed to examine the working environment of female officers.

Ms Owsley told *Police*: “We are constantly getting calls from women over issues about uniform. Police uniform trousers, which are usually a wool and polyester mix, are ill-fitting and itchy to wear.”

Julie Nesbit, secretary of the Police Federation’s equality sub-committee, said that female officers also highlighted problems with one-piece suits worn in CBRN situations: “When female officers were called out to the Bradford riots they had a one-piece suit and they did find it difficult to go to the toilet. For starters, the toilet has to be big enough for them to be able to take the whole suit off, obviously male colleagues don’t have that issue.”

Performance reviews are ‘meaningless’

Performance development reviews are the most ‘undervalued and meaningless’ document officers have to complete, according to Alan Gordon, vice-chairman of the Police Federation.

The Federation held a *Training Matters* seminar in Leicester last month to discuss challenges facing the service.

Mr Gordon said that, since PDRs were introduced three years ago to assess performance and training needs, chief officers, with few exceptions, have not been ‘inspirational’ in their leadership, commitment and support for them.

The PDRs are supposed to be carried out by line managers but the Federation revealed at their annual conference in May that around 18 percent of inspectors had ended up completing their own.

Mr Gordon added: “Where PDRs were completed, over two thirds of officers were apparently in no further need of development. That I cannot believe.”

In 2003 when PDRs were first launched the Home Office sent round circular 14 entitled, *The beginning of a new start for the police service*, but Mr Gordon says the service is still waiting for the ‘new start’.

Mr Gordon told the seminar: “Given this weight of evidence, for some to suggest that in future, pay should be linked to PDRs would be laughable were it not so disturbing.”

Female officers: proper clothing and equipment not being supplied.



Photography: Police Federation

Alan Gordon: PDRs do not offer ‘new start’.



Photography: Dobson Agency