


Please sir, can we have some more?

 Whist no-one is suggesting that the routine arming of the police could have prevented the tragic and cold-blooded murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky in Bradford last month; it has triggered an important public debate about the available number of authorised firearms officers necessary for the police to call upon for back up at any time.

It is true that over the last decade we have witnessed a decline in the number of trained authorised firearms officers at a time when we have seen an increase in gun crime in England and Wales, even if much of the recorded gun crime involved imitation weapons. Nearly 7,000 firearms officers a decade ago compared to just over 6,000 by last year; it doesn't take an astute politician or criminologist to realise that just cannot be right.

Although the Metropolitan Police has approximately ten per cent of its officers trained to carry firearms - the average national figure is less than five per cent. Now, in newspaper reports following the shooting, Chris Fox, president

of the Association of Chief Police Officers, put the onus on individual chief officers who, he believes, should judge whether their force needs more authorised firearms officers. Fairly, you may say, he claims not all forces need the same number. Well, I see two difficulties with that. Firstly, with no Government target set for increasing national numbers of authorised firearms officers, what pressure is there on chief officers to deliver? Secondly, criminals know no boundaries. If one force is swamped with available firearms officers and a neighbouring force has next to none I could take a pretty good guess where the armed criminal will be heading.


More authorised firearms officers trained and available is urgently needed. As the Police Federation national chairman, Jan Berry made clear, authorised firearms officers are having more and more demands placed upon them and we should move towards ten per cent of the national police strength being trained to carry firearms and not settle at five per cent. This may stem the tide of



Editorial by Metin Enver, Editor of Police magazine

retired chiefs who are wheeled out to appear on 24 hour news channels demanding all police officers be armed, recollecting days gone by and purporting to be experts on the subject of the day.

But it's not all about numbers, and no-one is suggesting that's the total solution. The glamour of gun crime amongst young people must be addressed and the judiciary must send an important message when sentencing people convicted of carrying a firearm, whether it's real or imitation - guns injure and kill, and the sentence must reflect that gravity.

So, with Christmas fast approaching what should we ask of the portly gentleman with rosy cheeks and a white beard? Well, Mr Clarke, with your political will, let us look to increase the number of fully trained authorised firearms officers across all police forces. We're not asking for a fully armed police service, just adequate protection and support available when needed. Remember, when most people are seated around the table later this month tucking into turkey with all the trimmings, there are thousands of men and women patrolling our streets ensuring we have a peaceful Christmas and New Year. They deserve your support and they deserve appropriate protection. 

What do you think?
We would like to hear your views on the issues discussed in this month's magazine.
Write to the letters page at:
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In Focus



The shooting of PC Sharon Beshenivsky has again provoked the debate over arming police officers in Britain. But would arming make officers safer or would it send out the wrong message to the public and provoke even more violence from the criminal fraternity? Tony Judge reports. **Pages 12 and 13.**



Bob Quick, ACPO lead on modernisation and chief constable of Surrey Police, puts forward his ideas for sweeping reforms in the service while John Miskelly, chairman of Surrey Police Federation, warns against sidelining the crucial role of the constable. **Pages 20 and 21.**



Christians are lending a helping hand to keeping the streets of Southend crime-free over Christmas. The Street Pastors scheme will see teams of volunteers taking to streets to offer comfort to late night revellers. **Pages 22 and 23.**