


Future force

Robert Quick, ACPO lead on workforce modernisation and chief constable of Surrey Police, writes about his plans to reform the service while John Miskelly, chairman of the Surrey Federation, raises some of his concerns over the pace of change.

 The police service is about to embark on an enormous wave of reform. Whilst structure is an important issue, it is equally important to recognise that the police service is in need of reform that goes beyond reorganisation.

To be effective, reform must deliver new ways of delivering services to the public which are better, faster and more cost-effective.

The service has struggled over the past decade to simultaneously deal with huge growth in both the volume and complexity of demands. Demand has increased through new legislative and regulatory requirements placed upon the service by Government, the Courts and other oversight bodies, higher call volumes, rises in anti-social behaviour and increased reporting of previously hidden crimes like racial and domestic violence.

The police service has a workforce that relies heavily on the omni-competent constable. This approach has struggled increasingly to meet the challenges presented by high volume demand on the one hand and complex and high risk demand on the other.

Clearly in the future, as the technical knowledge requirements of policing increase, the service will have to rely on specialists to a greater extent and officers will have to acquire even higher levels of technical knowledge and skills to operate at a greater level of technical precision.



Robert Quick

Despite a greater reliance on specialist officers, there will remain a number of core skills that police officers will require. An analysis of the changing role requirement for constables indicates that future core skills sets may include:

- The responsible use of coercive powers or possibly advanced powers within a human rights and democratic accountability framework.
- High levels of legal, procedural and technical knowledge.
- Intellectual and emotional intelligence skills, including high levels of social literacy, such as being able to communicate effectively with diverse communities.
- Complex problem solving skills.
- Strong values, integrity and a clear moral code.
- Leadership skills.

There are a number of key components of effective workforce modernisation:

A 'Single Mission Service'

A 'single mission' service, which means a unified employment structure for both police officers and police staff, designed to deliver high quality services, security and safety. This transition is required to remove the divisive two-tier employment structure of today and replace it with one that embraces all staff (non-warranted, part warranted and fully warranted) in a more flexible, accessible structure.

The service may also be organised into three broad employment categories:

- Delivery or Service Staff - This would include all constables and all police staff who are involved in service delivery.
- Leadership - All roles responsible for supervision, quality assurance and leadership.
- Technical and Professional staff - This would include administrators, HR, ICT, and Finance professionals.

Productivity and Efficiency

The service currently has some flexibility but is often unproductive. Analysis at modernisation pilot sites reveals evidence to show that highly trained and expensive police officers in the key roles involved in neighbourhood policing, volume crime investigation and response policing, are often required to undertake routine and repetitious tasks for a significant part of their available deployment time. Workforce modernisation will require the service to focus the high skills, training, and powers of police constables on the most pressing problems, demanding incident types and problematic individuals for more of the time.

The modernisation of the police employment structure and working practices means police officers can be used in areas fitting their skills.

A New Employment Paradigm

One only needs to look at the recommendations contained within the Macpherson Report, the Morris Inquiry Report, the Taylor Report and the CRE Investigation into the police service to see that our current employment structure is not delivering much of what is needed. In future we need to identify, recruit, progress and reward officers with advanced skills sets based on their delivery in complex roles, as opposed to the current structure of pay based on years served.

Training Costs

The introduction of a new employment and salary structure which enables faster progression to competitively paid 'advanced' constable roles, other delivery roles and leadership roles, for those who take ownership of their professional development and learning whether pre-career or after starting their career.

Values

The current salary arrangements for police constables means that the Service often has to rely on relatively young and sometimes untested recruits who do not have long or strong track records of employment. This can make it difficult to assess whether they possess the skill sets and values required for the police service.

Therefore with a modern employment structure, which is capable of competing today for the best the labour market has to offer, we can remain judicious in admitting only those we are confident have the right values for policing.

Performance

In addition to values, reform needs to address the issue of performance. We need to produce a culture that assumes performance and rewards excellence. This can only be achieved if pay scales and salaries are modernised and made competitive for the people we need to attract. We also need to be an employer of choice in terms of the career opportunities offered and introduce more efficient ways of dealing expeditiously with poor conduct and under performance.

Professionalisation

The service currently lacks many of the defining features of a profession. A key strategic shift will be the move from modest salaries and high levels of training to one where salaries are competitive and the principle responsibility for learning and development rests with the individual.

An employment structure which offers quick progression to the 'rate for the job' rather than 'time served' progression, and one which offers quick progression to higher levels of responsibility and reward is likely to be more consistent with the development of a truly professional service.

A New Currency

The currency of policing needs to change to eliminate crude assessments of police effectiveness based on the number of police officers in favour of the overall number of staff in direct service delivery.

The focus of primary performance measurement should shift from proxy measures of public approval such as crime rates and detection rates to real measures of public satisfaction, confidence and approval.

New Powers

Workforce modernisation offers the opportunity to modernise police powers to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This introduces the concept of 'advanced' or 'super-warranted' officers whereby our most capable and responsible fully warranted officers (advanced constable grade) have additional enforcement powers.

With new powers, in a world where instant outcomes are revered, the super-warranted officer would have the power to deliver some limited powers of sanction which currently sit with the court.

The ACPO Workforce Modernisation Blueprint

ACPO has developed a blueprint for workforce modernisation. The staff associations and other key stakeholders have been and will continue to be consulted in taking these ideas forward.

View from Surrey Federation

The police service I joined over 28 years ago has dramatically changed. The fact that the police service has adapted is just as well, as society, technology and the opportunity and means to commit crime has clearly changed.

However, there is an old saying about the road to hell being paved with good intentions. Now I am not suggesting that the police service is on the road to hell, but over those 28 years there has been a lot of reform and some of the changes introduced, with the best possible intentions, have done little to improve effectiveness.

Whilst being happy to be involved in the strategic and pragmatic debates, our local stance as a Federation has always revolved around two key principles. Firstly the resulting structure must be resilient and sustainable, and that structure must be centred on the unique status of the Office of Constable.

So what have the trials and projects in Surrey taught us about modernisation?

Our desire has been to ensure that the cornerstone of policing in this country, namely the fact that we police by consent, is not undermined. This consent has been earned and maintained over the decades by police officers being accountable, both on and off duty, and by ensuring they have a human face and are an active part of local communities.

Top of the public agenda has always been the desire to see more Bobbies on the beat and traditionally the public have always met officers in typical day-to-day situations. There is a clear and undeniable danger, if engagement with the public in non confrontational scenarios is reduced by changing working practises or changing deployment strategies in favour of more use of non-sworn staff, that police officers could become increasingly alienated from the public they serve. Perception towards officers would change and the bedrock on which our policing system is based.

To date, in Surrey we seem to have avoided this trap, but it must be noted that the size of the pilot in terms of reassurance policing is limited. I do not suppose for one moment that anyone reading these articles would disagree that policing is a team effort designed to deliver the best possible service and everyone working under the umbrella of the title 'police' has a role to play. The debate around numbers has drawn many comments and observations but perhaps we have all lost sight of the real issue and that is flexibility.

The experience in Surrey, seems to be that whilst changing the mix of staff from almost exclusively sworn officer to a much higher percentage of non-sworn staff can have benefits in some quarters, if the balance goes too far, the improvements are lost. An investigation team with a minimal amount of sworn officers has, by definition, a minimal in house arrest capacity, putting the onus for such a basic function on others. Police officers have traditionally been re-deployable to other roles when planned or short notice abstractions need to be covered, even in these less than omni-competent days. Design a unit without this degree of flexibility and it does not take a genius to realise the problems that are being stored up.

The debate about modernisation is clearly here and needs to be addressed. The complexity of policing, the fact that there is not a bottomless pit of money, and the need to ensure high levels of service must be paramount, issues require full debate. This is especially relevant in light of all the other changes being proposed, after all it is not somewhat difficult to entertain the idea of new remuneration packages when discussions are also taking place in respect of a new employment paradigm and force mergers?