

# Blurred vision

The government's vision for the future of policing is set out in their green paper, but what will it mean for rank and file officers and does it go far enough to tackle targets, bureaucracy and an overstretched service?

The green paper, *From the neighbourhood to national: policing our communities together*, published in July, sets out the blueprint for policing and promises to 'cut red tape, give the police more freedom to get on with the job of reducing crime, combined with new measures to increase public confidence in the police and give the public a greater say about how their communities are policed'.

Dave Pellatt, deputy secretary of the Inspectors' Central Committee was tasked to coordinate the national Federation response on the paper and says it misses out on a lot of key issues for officers.

He believes the government's vision, although acknowledging response officers 'are probably the officers

that most of us will come into contact with' virtually ignores this area of policing, instead focusing on neighbourhood policing teams.

As far back as December 2006 *Police* magazine ran an article entitled *Going, going, gone* in relation to the crisis facing response teams being over stretched and understaffed as the focus shifted onto neighbourhood policing teams. The report was based on the Federation's, *24/7 Response Policing in the Modern Organisation – Views from the Frontline*. In January this year the Federation also published a report on *Losing the Detectives – A View from the Frontline*, which also revealed that the numbers of CID officers were plummeting. Mr Pellatt says the Federation

Illustration: Russ Tudor



does not believe the issue is being dealt with and none of the questions posed to respondents in the green paper tackled the issue.

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“Officers want to do a good job but the focus on neighbourhood policing in the green paper highlights the lack of consideration given to response policing and CID which deal with the hard end of policing when things do go wrong.”

He adds that neighbourhood policing is like ‘dredging through a swamp’ trying to sort problems out, where response and CID would be the ones ‘wrestling the alligators.’

In the Federation response to the green paper this is made clear and Mr Pellatt adds that if the trend continues and the government fails to take account of the key role provided by both response and CID to tackling and detecting often serious crime the force could be headed for crisis point.

He says: “We will look at an ever diminishing workforce with an increased workload and that would be a crisis situation. In the case of 24/7 response teams and CID, they are being eroded.”

The Federation also reiterates a number of key concerns over targets, performance monitoring, workforce mix, police community support officers, bureaucracy, directly elected police authorities and leadership in the service.

At the Federation’s annual conference officers highlighted the drive for detections to hit government targets with one force citing the incident of children throwing buns at a bus being given a penalty notice because it counted as sanction detection. More complex cases to investigate crimes were falling by the wayside as they also only counted as a single sanction detection.

The Federation states in the response document that they want to see performance monitoring to focus on ‘quality, rather than quantity’, adding that ‘removing the pressure on officers to achieve numerical targets will also help ensure that officers can focus on those matters which are causing the community greatest concern.’

Although the government’s blueprint for the future of policing talks about the Office of Constable being ‘at the heart’ of the service, Mr Pellatt says there is scant mention of it throughout the document. Another issue which leads on from the independent Office of Constable is that of elected police authorities which, the Federation believe could leave the service open to political interference.

“We are very much opposed to this in view of any political interference in policing. We are not swayed by political objectives and always susceptible to those who are elected.

Chief officers should be personnel managers who understand the business in great detail and do their job for the community rather than for any political ends.”

One of the questions posed in the document talks about the ‘core role’ of PCSOs and asks ‘do PCSOs have the right powers to enable them to do their job?’. But the Federation argues that although PCSOs can make a useful contribution, they cannot match the flexibility and reassurance of the bobby on the beat. They also request clarification on what PCSOs can and can’t do, calling for a standardisation of powers across the country.

As Mr Pellatt states: “Chief officers still have a menu of options, some chiefs extend them and some don’t, so we would like to see some consistency, how do they fit into the service overall?”

Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, has already highlighted the issues many officers have with bureaucracy and frustration that they cannot use their discretion.

Plans outlined in the paper include scrapping the stop and account form, which requires officers to fill out details such as name, date of birth and address, taking an average of 25 minutes to fill out.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced the proposals will ‘cut red tape and top-down targets’ and although the Federation has welcomed any cuts in paperwork and targets they still believe proposals need to go further and officers be given more discretion.

**A vision for policing?**

The policing green paper sets out the government’s vision for the future of policing, proposals include:

- A new policing pledge setting out what local people can expect from their local police team - with clear national standards, including the amount of time spent on the beat, easy ways to contact your local Neighbourhood Policing Team and clear response times to all calls and incidents.
- A stronger voice for local people - regular information on crime, including crime maps and action being taken to tackle it and regular local meetings to discuss priorities backed by new directly elected Crime and Policing Representatives.
- Setting only one top-down numerical target for the police service to increase public confidence in the police and other agencies to reduce crime.

For the full Federation response to the green paper click on:

[http://www.polfed.org/FINAL\\_PFEW\\_Response\\_to\\_Green\\_Paper\\_101008.pdf](http://www.polfed.org/FINAL_PFEW_Response_to_Green_Paper_101008.pdf)