

## Cuts impact on equality and diversity

## Force backtracks on move to protect female officers

Conference 2011

Concerns are being raised that equality and diversity is taking a back seat as diversity units in forces are cut and funding taken away from national organisations.

Officers at a Federation Conference fringe meeting on positive action in forces voiced fears that equality and diversity issues would be hit by funding cuts.

Speaking to police minister Nick Herbert, chairman of the Federation, Paul McKeever questioned how the government could demonstrate it valued equality when groups such as the Gay Police Association, National Black Police Association (NBPA) and British Association of Women in Policing faced funding cuts.

Charles Crichlow, President of the NBPA said that organisations such as his offered help and support to policing, and had thought they were valued, but could not be expected to continue without money. He asked Mr Herbert if he would be expected to pay travel costs from his own pocket after the minister suggested the groups met in London to discuss the issues.

Mr Herbert said: "It is absolutely crucial we do not allow any signal to be sent that we want to take our foot off the pedal [on diversity and equality issues]. I believe it is possible for this kind of work to go on. We need to look at the effectiveness of these organisations."

Adele Kirkwood, Sergeants' Central Committee, raised concerns that a force's approach to positive action was based on whether a chief constable saw equality and diversity as important. Ms Kirkwood said that ACPO are looking to get rid of the business area on equality and diversity and have it instead as a "golden thread" running through everything – a move she criticised as likely to end up as a "piece of straw".

Mr Herbert said: "I think it needs to be across the service and exactly the sort of thing we want to discuss – why is there a different approach across the service."

Devon and Cornwall Police has taken a u-turn on a decision to protect female officers on a surveillance team from being culled under a latest round of cuts.

Senior management have backed down on a decision to use the Equality Act to prevent seven female officers from having to face a selection process which will slash the 34-strong team to just 20 officers.

Sarah Ross, Federation representative for the force, said male officers on the team contacted her over the issue, but added that many female officers in similar situations felt they would be viewed as not being given the role "on their merits" if male colleagues believed they were protected.

Speaking at the Federation's positive action fringe meeting, she questioned how the move would impact on relations within the team. "The force has now backed down but men in the team are now still asking if the female officers being kept on are there because they are female and not because of their merits," she said.

She told *Police* magazine that one male officer had been head-hunted to join the team and had moved his whole family to the area as he had been told he had to commit to three years on the team.

Binder Bansel, senior partner for solicitors Pattinson and Brewer, said the Equality Act was meant to cover promotion and recruitment and was not convinced the actions the force intended to take would have been "entirely lawful".

Nick Herbert said it was still possible for work on equality and diversity issues to continue, despite the funding cuts



A u-turn by Devon and Cornwall Police could affect the relationship between male and female officers

