



Star Wars

Big deal?

As a probationer back in 1991, I was always slightly puzzled by the role of my inspectors. They were always prompt for duty, working 8am to 4pm and 4pm until midnight but once there, they became almost invisible to us, save only to be seen when there was a complaint to be dealt with. Now I know that this may be a harsh reflection on those individuals and the work that they did, but that was how it appeared to me as a probationer.

In 1994 the salary agreement for the inspecting ranks was introduced and even today raises mixed feelings among colleagues. The agreement bought out the casual overtime of the inspecting ranks, in effect moving them from an hourly rate to a salary and leaving them with just a day in lieu for public holiday and rest day working and with no definition of a working week.

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I am sure that there will have been winners and losers when this was agreed back in 1994, but the lure of an additional £3,000 in pensionable pay as recompense for the overtime was strong and was accepted. This doesn't mean that at that time it was a bad deal, it's just that the intervening 18 years have changed the service considerably and with it the role in the inspecting ranks.

Currently we see inspecting ranks leading teams and areas which in recent history were the preserve of the superintending rank; all forces, because of the spending review, have physically restructured

their force in some way. I know that one force was considering offering 50 percent of an inspector's time to a local authority to manage the authority's staff, in return for 50 percent of the inspector's pay bill; unfortunately that had not removed 50 percent of the officer's policing roles to accommodate this idea. We regularly see detective inspectors and detective chief inspectors as the senior investigator in serious and major crime, and chief inspectors are now commanding 'districts' that were once command units in their own right.

I recently spoke to a colleague who had day-to-day management responsibility for a new large custody suite. In order to discharge this function it meant starting work at 5am to meet with the night duty team and then remaining on duty to at least 4pm so that that they could meet their responsibilities with the day and late turn teams as well. As a 'one off' this 11-hour shift may be reluctantly acceptable to an individual, but for it to happen regularly would clearly be an abuse of the individual by senior force management where the role and its demands do not appear to have been properly evaluated.

The role of the inspector on a police support unit is one which a majority of forces sought to recompense during the August riots with a bonus payment, but the officers who remained in force and worked equally long hours have received little or nothing from their forces. By paying nothing extra those officers were working for less than the hourly minimum wage; is it any wonder that officers are starting to question how much they are valued by the organisation?

The working conditions of all ranks have changed since 1994; I believe that our desire and professionalism to provide an excellent service are unchanged, but the balance of work has shifted considerably towards the inspecting ranks and the challenge is to meet that demand with reducing numbers. I suppose that the question is not whether the 1994 agreement was a success but rather, is it still relevant and in the current climate could we get a better deal?

Ian Truman, Inspectors' Central Committee

Why the title Star Wars? The badge of rank for inspecting ranks are the Bath Stars and this could be one of the biggest fights we will ever have. May the force be with you!