



John Apter, chairman of Hampshire Police Federation

## So what is the frontline?

# Local Focus

As I write this column the government has just announced further cuts to this year's police budgets. My own force of Hampshire will have to take £3 million off an already allocated budget.

I am intrigued as to the numbers being crunched by police authorities across the country, as comments such as 'we will protect the frontline of policing' are ringing out of almost every police headquarters, as well as the Home Office.

What we need to be clear on is, what is the frontline? Is it the uniformed 24/7 officer? There's a debate to be had here. If 24/7 officers are the only ones considered frontline, then what are the remaining police officers going to be labelled as?

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The argument is given more ammunition when I hear across the country that police officers should move out of an office job to get back on 'the frontline'. This undermines some crucial aspects of policing which are carried out behind the scenes but add value to what we do as a service. The Police Federation is the first to accept that police officers shouldn't be doing jobs where their skills as professional, well-trained individuals are not required, but there has to be a sensible balance.

It is right and proper that officers who are working 24/7 in our towns and cities across the country are referred to as frontline. But the detectives who investigate the major crimes, often behind the scenes, are also frontline. The roads policing officers, the neighbourhood team officers, the public protection officers, the control room officers, the firearms teams – I could go on – are all frontline officers who contribute in a variety of areas.

I was heartened recently when my own chief constable,

Alex Marshall, raised this point during a television news interview. He said that frontline officers are not only the uniformed officers that the public see, but that frontline also includes the investigators behind the scenes and the CID officers investigating crimes. His ACPO colleagues would do well to support, and repeat this statement.

In these times of austerity there seems to be competition between some senior officers to remove as many officers as they can from what they see as back office functions, and return them to the frontline. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. Police officers do not need to be walking the high street at 3am to contribute effectively to policing.

We need to have professional, knowledgeable officers in some roles which are behind the scenes.

One of the areas where the police have been measured is public confidence. The public are aware that a vast amount of work by police officers goes on behind closed doors. Do they think any less of these officers? I expect not.

This article is not about the value of police officers compared to police staff. It is about knowing the true value of what you do have. An effective manager will utilise the experience, flexibility and effectiveness of a police officer across a whole range of areas. That may be in a back office, but in an equally vital role.

So what is a frontline officer? It is a flexible, well-trained police officer who has the ability to adapt to whatever they are faced with. This can be in a visible public facing role or, just as importantly, behind the scenes where their skills and instinct contribute to the bigger picture.