



Mark Botham is chairman of the North Yorkshire Police Federation

## Making it all add up

Last month we held our annual open meeting which is an opportunity for our members to hear from not only the chairman of their local federation, but also from their chief constable as well as the local police authority chair.

While police officers are well used to having their own performance measured, the annual general open meeting is our opportunity for us to take a look over the previous 12 months at the force's performance. It's usually a lively meeting and this year was no exception.

Falling officer numbers are very high on our agenda as it is for many forces. For the past two years at the meeting I have raised this as an issue. Our figures show that the federated ranks have fallen by 5% or the equivalent of 83 officers compared to this time last year. This has considerable implications for those left behind. The last time we reduced officer numbers so drastically, by 2001/02, our assault figures were approaching 50% in one year. Home Office figures show that from September 2005 to September 2007, police officer numbers rose by 2%, from 1591 to 1623, a fact we are supposed to be grateful for. However, PCSO numbers rose by 118% from 85 to 186. Why does that matter? Well, in those same two years, the number of times firearms were authorised rose by 97% from 183 incidents to 362. We are further dismayed that the chief revealed at this year's meeting that numbers may fall by a further 100 next year and the force now tells us that we will not be recruiting any more police officers until 2009.

I simply don't understand how the force can reconcile these figures with officer safety. The truth is we need the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

Integral to police numbers is, of course, a robust attendance management system. We know that while sickness absence levels continue to fall for police officers, police staff sickness levels remain a cause for concern for the force. But we need to look closer at the figures as our research shows that 70% of rank and file officers either

have or would consider using annual leave to cover up sickness.

That cannot be in anyone's interests, but it is perhaps understandable when a member of the force has been delivering seminars on attendance procedures with advertising literature containing phrases such as 'getting malingering cops back to work or out'. Officers must be treated fairly, in line with national policy and with the dignity they deserve.

Whether the force listens to our concerns remains to be seen. One thing is certain, we'll be back next year to find out what exactly has changed.