

Criminal justice system could be 'in meltdown'

The Government needs to adopt a hard line approach in the way it deals with criminals if a meltdown in the criminal justice system is to be averted, experts have warned.

Delegates at the Police Federation of England and Wales' annual conference heard how 'watered down solutions' were allowing offenders back on the streets too early and enabling five year sentences to be served in just 17 months.

Addressing the joint central conference, the Federation's then Vice Chairman Alan Gordon explained how an early guilty plea can reduce a five year sentence to just three and a half years.

He said: "A further 50 per cent [immediate] remission as you pass the prison door reduces the actual time that will be served to 21 months. That's without taking into account the time you may have spent on remand.

"If that's not bad enough we now have an early release scheme because of prison overcrowding that can take a further 135 days off. So now we are down to the region of 17 months, not bad for a five year sentence."

Meanwhile, some prisoners are given X-boxes and Sky TV to stop them causing trouble.

Shadow police minister David Ruffley warned it was dangerous to let offenders out early and said it did not give them any incentive to get rehabilitation and improve their lives.

"We will change sentencing so every judge would have to announce a minimum sentence and a maximum sentence. A minimum sentence would have to be served and the difference between the minimum sentence and maximum would have to be earned by keeping off drugs, keeping off criminal activity, and getting some education," Mr Ruffley said.

Radio failures prompt safety concerns

An alarming number of officers have had their personal safety compromised due to Airwave radio failures and an inspector has warned that it will take a 'death' before people sit up and take note.

Of 2,800 officers that responded to a snapshot survey, over 78 per cent reported personal experience of Airwave failure and 68 per cent said their personal safety was compromised.

Just under one fifth of respondents were unsatisfied with their level of initial training and over 90 per cent said they had not received refresher training.

Worryingly, over 80 per cent of respondents were unaware of back up solutions to cover failures.

The Police Federation's health and safety sub committee findings were revealed during an Airwave lunchtime seminar at the Federation conference in Bournemouth.

But Hackney Inspector Tim Love fears someone will have to die before concerns about radio failures are taken seriously.

He added: "I had two officers go into a domestic incident and ended fighting on a 15th floor with a man that had a knife. He [the officer] had to stick his arm out to get a passing satellite. I don't think that's acceptable...

"Airwave isn't fit for purpose," he told the seminar. "It's letting us all down and I don't think things will change until we have that death."

But Richard Earland, NPIA ICT advisor said reports of communication failures were being taken 'seriously'.

Richard Bobbett, Airwave chief executive officer, added efforts were being made to address interference that affects radio based technology.

Alan Gordon: Prisoners should serve full term



Photography: Anderson Photography

Signal failure: Concerns raised over Airwave



Photography: Police Federation

Inspectors concerned over '60 hour week'

Inspectors working more than 60 hours a week say they are worried about the effect it is having on their health, according to a new census conducted by the Inspectors Central Committee of the Police Federation.

The 'Well being at Work' census carried out by Robertson Cooper Ltd found that inspectors working more than 60 hours a week expressed 'strong' concerns about work relationships, work-life balance and overload. They also reported major physical, health and psychological well-being concerns.

Nearly half of inspectors who responded to the survey said they had been off sick, but had opted to take leave instead.

Respondents also raised concerns over the pay imbalance between inspectors and sergeants. Some inspectors said that although sergeants worked fewer hours, they were paid more because of overtime pay.

Nearly a third of inspectors reported workplace bullying and 13% said that they often have their rest days cancelled.

Paul Ginger, Chairman of the Inspectors' Central Committee said, "Over a period of time, the strong levels of commitment are unlikely to be sustainable, if excessive workloads and lack of work-life balance prevail.

"In order to maintain resilience in the long term, it will be important that chief inspectors and inspectors see improvements in their working life and have the necessary support from forces required to help cope more effectively with the pressures they face."

"We hope chief officers will sit up and take notice of the recommendations contained with the report."

55% of inspectors responded to the questionnaire, the results of which can be seen on the Police Federation website.

Senior officer hits out at blame culture

Officers who make honest and genuine mistakes should not be dragged through lengthy, disruptive investigations, the detective superintendent of Sussex Police has claimed.

Vic Marshall, who is currently seconded to the Home Office and a member of the Superintendents' Association Panel of Friends, said officers that make 'human' mistakes should be given the chance to learn and move on, not subject to blame and punishment.

Speaking at a misconduct update session, Mr Marshall cited the case of an officer who was hauled through an 18 month investigation after a 'racy text' meant for his new girlfriend was accidentally sent to his ex-wife's answerphone who then feared she had a stalker.

"It's about making a distinction between misconduct and gross misconduct," he told delegates.

Marshall warned that lengthy investigations can be disruptive and in some cases cause mental health problems such as depression for the officers involved.

He added minor issues should be dealt with on the spot and said managers should be able to pull officers up and say 'that's not good enough, learn from that and don't do it again'.

"We need to move to an environment of learning and improvement rather than blame and punishment. Blame and punishment is disruptive and will only make the situation worse and not benefit policing," he said.

But one delegate warned the system would only work if the 'naïve line managers and gaffers in the workplace' were trained up to recognise this was an option, instead of automatically referring cases on for investigation.

Paul Ginger: Inspectors face excessive workloads



Photography: Anderson Photography

Vic Marshall: Discretion needed in minor misconduct cases



Photography: Anderson Photography

Police 'unprepared' for Olympics

Forces do not believe they are well prepared to police the Olympics, a poll has revealed.

Of 900 delegates surveyed at the Police Federation Conference, more than half felt they were 'not well advanced' in making arrangements for the 2012 games.

Clive Chamberlain, Chairman of Dorset Police Federation voiced concern about the lack of information on funding and policing arrangements.

Dorset has been designated one of the primary venues, but Chamberlain joked the county would be patrolled by two PCSOs on jet-skis unless more information was made available to enable the force to plan.

"Already people have shown interest in working for Olympic planning, but we don't know what's happening," he said.

Tarique Ghaffur, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said 'real certainty' would come at the end of the year when the Home Office expects to publish its Costed Security Programme plan, adding that spend would probably be in the £600 million region.

Meanwhile, a staggering 92 per cent of delegates did not think the Airwave system would cope with the demands of such a major event following issues at G8.

"There is understandably widespread concern that Airwave would struggle to cope with a well-attended village egg and spoon race let alone the 2012 Olympics," then Vice Chairman Alan Gordon said.

But Richard Bobbitte, Airwave chief executive officer said £50 million was being invested in the current network and ways to build capacity were being examined.

Mr Gordon also called for consistent and acceptable levels of accommodation and feeding arrangements for officers.

"We do not want a repeat of the miners' dispute and more recently the G8 Summit that saw different



officers from different forces living in vastly differing standards of accommodation," he said.

"This did nothing to instill harmony and goodwill amongst officers taken away from their families own deployment for weeks at a time."

Olympic facts:

- Around 15,000 police officers will need to be deployed – approximately 10 per cent of the workforce
- In London alone there will be a demand for 10,000 officers and nearly 1,000 authorised firearms officers.

AC Tarique Ghaffur: Olympic security will cost £600m

Richard Bobbitte: Investment in airwave will be increased

