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News

Custody civilianisation plans put on hold

The government is to shelve plans for civilianising the role of custody officers for a year until pilot schemes have undergone a proper evaluation, *Police* magazine can reveal.

Following discussions with the Police Federation, Tony McNulty, police minister, has written to confirm that he believes 'more work is needed' over what the pilots are trying to achieve and whether they are successful or not. Mr McNulty wants to see the issues resolved before signing a commencement order which would allow the pilots to be rolled out across the country and says he would come back to the issue in '12 months' time.

The Police Federation has raised a number of issues over using civilians in a custody role and been holding meetings with government officials to raise their concerns.

John Coppen, Federation lead on custody issues, said that 'common sense has prevailed' in relation to putting the pilots on ice.

He added: "It would be an absolute disaster if the pilots had gone ahead without assessing properly whether they are successful or not. In our view, it is not possible for a civilian coming into the service to have the necessary experience needed for such a key role. That doesn't just happen with the 12 weeks' training they would get."

Custody officers are the gatekeepers to a person's liberty and make the ultimate decision to take someone into custody.

Mr Coppen said that you can have people, including potential terrorists, going through custody suites and it is essential you have experienced police custody officers who know the law, such as PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act), in detail.

At the Police Federation's annual conference in May this year, 96 percent of the 440 officers attending the sergeants' central committee conference voted against civilian staff taking on custody posts.

Custody officers: key to a person's liberty



Photography: Shutterstock Inc.

Youths should be banned from body armour

Teenagers should be banned from wearing body armour as a 'fashion accessory' as they give the impression an area is violent, according to an award-winning officer from Greater Manchester Police.

PC Geoffrey Hince, this year's winner of the Federation's Police Bravery Awards, said he wants to see body armour under licence to prevent it being sold to youngsters.

He told *Police* magazine: "Youths in Moss Side have begun to wear body armour which gives the perception of violence. There is no reason to wear it and we would like to see it licensed in the same way as handcuffs and CS Spray is so that only certain people such as police officers, paramedics and bouncers can wear it."

But Paul Davis, secretary of the Federation's operational policing sub-committee, said he believed that regulation of the sale and use of body armour would be difficult to enforce.

"Regulation isn't the answer. The real issue is that we have to educate these youngsters so they understand that if they are wearing body armour they are potentially putting themselves at far greater risk."

A conference called *Gangs in the UK: What's Working? A National Picture* will be held in Ambleside, Cumbria on November 5 and 6 involving the Metropolitan Police, Brathay Trust and young people and community workers from all over the country. The aim is to share best practice and find workable solutions that can help resolve gang conflict in different towns and cities across the UK.

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Teen gangs have taken to wearing body armour



Photography: Getty Images