

Service drops as police officers abstracted

Police officers in Merseyside feel 'mistreated' and less able to deliver their role because of competing priorities and abstractions.

Of 954 officers polled in a Merseyside Police Federation Abstraction Survey, more than half said they were less able to carry out their role compared to 12 months ago.

Reasons included pressure of priorities, increases in abstractions, lack of officers and a target-driven culture.

In particular, 65 percent of officers said that abstractions had a major impact on their personal ability to perform their role.

The findings, presented by Ian Leyland, secretary of Merseyside Federation, at the Police Federation's annual conference also revealed that morale had dropped even further over the past 12 months.

Officers often had ten rest days outstanding but could not get them back, Mr Leyland said. He added that officers rarely got 35 days notice of shift changes.

He said: "Our members are battle weary. They are tired and mistreated and too much is expected from too few. "The number of rest days cancelled and duty changes at short notice are enormous. Police officers now report that it is now becoming almost impossible for officers and their families to plan any sort of normal family activity."

During the conference a staggering 87 percent of polled delegates described the level of service provided to the public as poor.

Mr Leyland added: "The thin blue line is at breaking point and the service to the public is suffering as a result. An urgent and independent review of policing is essential."

Human trafficking not just 'immigration issue'

Officers are being urged to treat human trafficking as core police business - not just another immigration crime.

The recommendation was made by Grahame Maxwell, chief constable of North Yorkshire Police and ACPO lead on human trafficking.

Speaking at the Police Federation's annual conference, Mr Maxwell said a victim may be a foreign national, may be from outside the European Union, may not have documents and their immigration status may appear 'dubious'.

But he stressed that trafficking should not be treated as an immigration issue. Instead, it is often the root of serious and organised criminal activity, he said. He added: "The crimes... are all being committed right now in the heart of our communities, they go unreported, they are not seen. It is for us to root them out, to identify the premises, to visit them, to build the relationships outside policing that give us the capacity to do so. We can't allow this to happen under our noses."

Delegates heard how women were being lured to the UK under false pretences and then sold on and sexually exploited.

According to Mr Maxwell, who last year ran Operation Pentameter, an exercise to scope the problem in the UK, the highest price uncovered for a person trafficked was £8,000 for a 15-year-old virgin. The lowest was £500 for a 39-year-old woman.

He also urged officers to think carefully about the care that should be given and said they should not be surprised if victims refuse to cooperate at first as 'gaining trust can be a lengthy process'.

However, he said gaining trust was crucial to laying the foundation for a successful prosecution and perhaps the recovery of more victims.

Ian Leyland: officers are 'battle weary'



Photography: Andrew Carruth

Grahame Maxwell: human trafficking often linked to organised crime



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