

Closed for Business

A year ago, the federation investigated 24/7 policing. This year, it's turned its attentions to the Criminal Investigation Department and its findings are just as alarming. Tina Orr Munro reports.

Unfilled vacancies, severe staff shortages, and untrained officers dealing with serious crimes are just some of the issues facing CID departments across the country, according to the latest federation research. For some the situation is so acute, that, in the words of one detective, his CID office was effectively 'closed for business.'

Detectives from nine forces across the country were interviewed in a series of focus groups as part of research commissioned by the Police Federation. Researchers found that a lack of detectives was a major issue in every force where a focus group was held. One investigator told interviewers: "My team is depleted all the time. We should call our duty slate the visitor's book. If, at any time, I had all six of them in at once I would take a team photo."

Researchers described the reductions in size of CID offices as 'alarming'. Dr Mike Chatterton, who led the research, says his findings 'raise important questions about the quality of service detectives remaining in these offices are able to provide to victims and witnesses'.

"They also raise equally important issues concerning the welfare of those detectives. Their workloads and the long hours they are required to work on a regular basis are a constant source of stress," says Mr Chatterton.

Researchers were told of places where CID offices are closed down for lengthy periods because there are no detectives on duty or the few that are available are working on incidents.

One detective said: "There are no

general office detectives working in the town. At this moment in time the CID office is closed.

"There was a twelve month period where myself and a colleague were the only two left out of an office of 12 – two of us."

In some areas, the staffing situation has become so desperate, as a result of abstractions, that no detective is permitted to transfer out of CID, unless they get promoted.

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Interviewers discovered that coupled with the issue of dwindling numbers of detectives was also a problem of diminishing skills. In one area, a detective revealed just five per cent of his detectives were fully trained.

Another officer said: "To appreciate the real problem you've got to look at experience and skills as well as numbers. What counts as a detective to some people does not fit my definition. In our area, we're said to have something like 53 DCs. In fact, we haven't. We've only got 16 detectives. The rest of them are TDCs (Trainee Detective Constables) and PCs on attachment."

Researchers also found it common for trainee detectives to provide night cover. In one case the officer had been a trainee for just ten days before they found themselves covering a whole OCU on nights.

CID officers said they were frustrated

by forces who insisted on counting uniformed officers on attachment as detectives because it masked the reality of the situation.

Many of the interviewees reported severe difficulties in filling vacancies. One officer said: "We advertised one of the DC's vacancies four months ago, but nobody applied."

The reasons for this were connected with the perceived reduction of the status of the CID, the nature of CID work and the adverse effects of a CID posting on work/life balance, researchers found.

"Attractions of uniform are the 12 hour shift pattern – four days on then four days off and SPPs. So it costs them to transfer to CID. The unfavourable shift pattern puts off women from applying in particular – we regularly have to work 16 hours at a time – and the belief they will be lumbered with all sexual offences is a disincentive," said one detective.

However in a small number of areas, recruitment wasn't a problem with uniformed officers trying to escape 24/7 response policing. But once an officer joins CID, the issue of retaining them rears its head. The quality of applicants also caused concern among some of the interviewees.

One detective summed up the situation, "In years gone by you would have four applicants for every vacancy. So you had people who really wanted to be detectives. Whereas now, you have ten vacancies and, if you're lucky, you have six people applying and really, to be brutally honest, there's not sufficient



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evidence in their applications to warrant giving them the job. But you’re under strength so you take those six who haven’t really got the skills to start off with. They get swamped with a massive workload and pressures from above. They soon realise they don’t want it.”

CID offices are also experiencing a drain of experienced detectives as they are recruited onto specialist squads. One officer talked about ‘hundreds of years’ of detective experience which had evaporated as officers were pulled out of CID and put onto Major Investigation Units and Anti-Terrorist squads.

“We have two whole reliefs - that’s a DS and four DCs – wiped out at the moment through secondments – all abstracted to assist squads with various murder enquiries or major incidents,” one detective commented.

Many of those interviewed felt the demise of CID started ten years ago or more and even suggested it had an air of

conspiracy about it. One officer called it a ‘clear uniform-led stamping on CID’.

All detectives questioned felt senior management teams did not understand or appreciate the investigative process which was why they were content to make the cuts.

One officer revealed: “You’d get a local commander who has absolutely no idea, not a detective bone in his body, coming in with absolute nonsense and we had no-one to take it to because our managers were abstracted.”

The interim findings of the research will be presented in full at the Police Federation’s National Detective Forum this month.