

Flexible working put in too difficult box

The police service does not always recognise when it is failing to give officers a work/life balance and also lacks a definition of what the term actually means, according to a company examining the issue.

Dr Sue Woolfenden, director of Strategic Direction Ltd, has been working with forces over six years looking at staffing issues and schedules in relation to work/life balance in the police.

She told delegates at the Police Federation's policewomen's eve of conference meeting last month that there is no universal definition of what the term work/life balance means, even between staff associations.

Dr Woolfenden, who used to work as a chief inspector in Merseyside Police, said a work/life balance is about 'creating a protective work culture in which the tensions between work and other parts of people's lives are minimised'.

But she added: "The service is finding it quite difficult to achieve this. It doesn't always recognise when it is failing to do that."

Dr Woolfenden also added that some managers put flexible working in the 'too difficult box' as it could require extra work.

Patricia Kirk, chairperson of the policewomen's eve of conference, said that some forces have the attitude that 'this is how we have always done it' and so are reluctant to change.

She added that it is not just about the hours officers work, but also about being comfortable just asking for a day off without being made to feel guilty.

Dr Woolfenden added: "If the Federation, ACPO and the Superintendents' Association can come up with a definition of work/life balance it would make my job a lot easier."

Breastfeeding police officers need to 'get a room'

Every police force should provide a 'nursing room' for police officers who are working mothers, says a female police leader.

Sue Snape, the constables' reserve representative for the West Midlands Police Federation, addressed the Police Federation's policewomen's eve of conference in Blackpool last month.

Mrs Snape said: "Every OCU (operational command unit) should have nursing rooms for working mothers returning from maternity leave."

She suggested a nursing room so that women still trying to breastfeed their babies could express milk in a private area and also that menopausal women would have an area where they could rest.

The conference heard how the main reason both male and female officers got in touch with her was in relation to problems trying to organise flexible working when they had young families.

"Men are just as much victims of [issues] with flexible working as female colleagues are," she told delegates.

As a police officer in West Midlands Police, Mrs Snape also negotiated a flexible working pattern for 13 members of staff, making sure requests went direct to the HR department, rather than through sergeants and inspectors, who would sometimes block the requests without properly looking at how it could practically be done.

The officer, who is also a trained football referee, said that when she began her work as a female police representative she was initially introduced to fellow colleagues as a 'maternity representative' but that things had moved on.

She told delegates that women representatives were not 'there to fight injustice where it did not exist' but it was just about 'being treated equally and with some consideration as colleagues'.

Dr Sue Woolfenden: advocates flexible working

Call for nursing rooms for working mothers

Photography: Andrew Carruth



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