

Pay cut prompts possible strike u-turn

More than three quarters of constables voted to revisit the right for police officers to strike in the wake of government moves to cut police pay.

Out of around 200 delegates at the Federation's constables' central committee conference, 77.6 percent voted in favour of looking at bringing back the right to strike.

The government is currently aiming to hit a target of two percent pay rises for public sector workers, below the level of inflation. Police officers pay currently takes into account their unique status, such as the fact that they do not have the right to strike.

Ian Pointon, chairman of Kent Police Federation, asked a panel of experts as to whether they believed an officer's unique status should ensure their pay does not fall below this level.

Delegates were then asked if they would want to revisit the right the strike and 153 delegates voted to look again at industrial action.

Julie Nesbit, chairman of the Federation's constables' central committee, said that officers are beginning to think, 'if you are not going to do this for us then should we stand by the right to strike'.

One officer stood up and said: "If politicians actually gave us a fair pay rise then this issue about striking is no longer an issue. It is a show of the depth of feeling that we have been bullied by the Home Office into an unfair pay deal."

Newsreader Dermot Murnaghan, compere for the session, asked whether Sir Clive Booth, author of the report *Fair Pay for Police*, suggesting changes to police pay, was really independent as he was appointed by the government?

Nick Herbert, shadow police reform minister, said that he believed if the government believe in something, 'they should stand up and say so', rather than commissioning reviews or setting up a committee with a 'pre-ordained' conclusion.

Policing by consent under threat

Community support officers are being used as a cheap alternative to constables and if their powers are extended they would threaten policing by consent in the UK, according to the leader of the constables.

Julie Nesbit, chairman of the Federation's constables' central committee, warned that extending powers, such as the power of arrest, to CSOs would 'undermine' the basic principles of policing by consent.

"The very fabric of our society is built upon the principles that constables are the only members of our communities who can deprive someone of their liberty and, if necessary, use force against any member of our community."

Ms Nesbit added that there was a lack of direction from chief officers and senior executives over what the role of CSOs should be and that indicated 'CSOs are nothing but a cheap alternative'.

A detective constable from North Yorkshire said he felt CSOs were replacing constables through the back door and asked panellists, including Bob Jones, chairman of the Association of Police Authorities (APA), who they believed the public would prefer 'fully trained officers or PCSOs'.

Mr Jones said that CSOs have their place but that they should have a distinct role that compliments police officers, but Ms Nesbit said that she had evidence that CSOs were simply taking over the constable role and creating more work.

She told conference that a colleague based in Leeds said that on one shift there were only three police officers, two in a double-crewed car and one lone officer in another patrol car, but there were 29 CSOs on shift.

"There were three officers running around picking up jobs from 29 CSOs. It's not acceptable."

Julie Nesbit: officers will look at right to strike



Photography: Andrew Carruth

Panellists asked if the public prefer officers or CSOs



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