

Photography: Andrew Carruth



Cindy Barnett: concern at growing use of PNDs

News in focus!

Sanction detections erode discretion

The majority of police officers believe they are losing their ability to use discretion for minor crimes and are instead pushed to criminalise 'kids building a tree house'.

Nearly all delegates present at the Federation's annual conference in Blackpool, 93 percent, voted that they believe their ability to use discretion has been removed or significantly reduced and that this was mostly down to sanction detection targets.

Simon Reed, chairman of the Federation's legislation sub-committee, said that only a few years ago officers could use their discretion to give words of advice for minor offences.

Mr Reed said that even a children's fight can now be recorded as an 'affray' to help to boost a force's detection rates.

He also gave the example of a child who had taken £700 in sponsor money for Comic Relief and instead of this meriting one crime it ended up being recorded as 542 separate crimes.

He added that different forms of 'quick justice' such as penalty notices for disorder were criminalising young people and that they created problems because around half were never even paid and there was no database recording who has been given one.

Cindy Barnett, chairman of the Magistrates' Association, expressed concerns that sentences should be properly handed down in courts, not on the streets.

She added: "The thing that worries us the most is the number of disposals is growing. The range of offences for which disposals can be used is [also] growing."

Ch Supt John Turton, from North Wales Police, proposed an 'enforcement continuum' which would provide a sliding scale of how to deal with offences, from an informal warning to a penalty notice or arrest, to try to bring back an element of discretion for police officers.

Modernisation pilots set to fail

Constables hit out at workforce modernisation pilots saying they are set to flounder and are not likely to be funded.

Julie Nesbit, chairman of the Federation's constables' central committee, told officers at the Federation's annual conference in Blackpool that the pilots, a key part of the government's blueprint for shake-up in policing, are likely to fail before they even begin.

She said the National Policing Improvement Agency, set up by the government to look at the effectiveness and efficiency of the police service, has already said they would be reviewing the sites for the modernisation pilots.

Ms Nesbit said: "Having already suffered disparate ad-hoc modernisation projects, we thought ACPO had finally got their act together with the establishment of workforce modernisation pilot sites. These were being nationally coordinated and evaluated.

"It now seems that with the inception of the National Police Improvement Agency, it doesn't seem to think we need improving."