

## Officers' health hit by canteen and gym closures

The closure of force canteens and gyms can have a negative impact on officers' wellbeing, according to new research by the Health and Safety Executive.

In their in depth report of the management of sickness absence in seven police forces, the HSE found that canteens had been shut down due to lack of space and gyms had been closed because forces feared litigation from injuries sustained.

However, the report found the lack of canteens had a negative impact on the availability and quality of food for both officers and staff. It also said gyms are vital for officers to keep physically and mentally fit.

"Both canteens and gyms were seen as places where officers and staff could relax and reduce their stress levels," the report found.

Jan Berry, national chairman of Police Federation said "It's atrocious that gyms are being removed from police stations and headquarters. Chief Officers should be assisting police officers to keep fit, particularly when working 24/7 shifts means it's nigh on impossible to make full use of a gym outside. For many, the gym at the station is the only opportunity they have to work out." The HSE report also found that work was perceived to be a contributory factor to both short and long-term sickness.

"This occurred where individuals felt they were under pressure due to the lack of resources or bureaucratic demands, especially when this was against a background of organisational change."

"Those affected felt that they just had to take time off or did so to register a protest about their situation or management decisions," said the report.

Under funding was often a problem leading to slow or inadequate responses and creating barriers to staff returning to work, according to the report.

## Female issues need to be debated more

A female firearms officer has revealed she left her unit because she was menopausal and could not trust herself to act rationally in her role.

The officer was taking part in a debate on women's health issues at a recent federation Reserve Seat conference in Hinckley in Leicestershire.

Other female officers said they find it difficult to go and speak to younger female or male line managers about issues like the menopause. Delegates at the conference called for a forum to be set up on the federation's intranet site to help raise awareness of women's issues amongst federation officials.

Reserve Seat constable, Amanda Holland voiced concerns over the lack of resources and information available to officers about issues such as premenstrual tension, but especially the female menopause.

"For instance I would like to know how different forces reconcile issues and deal with situations when female officers are not physically able to work," said PC Holland.

Sue Kelly, chairman of Essex Police Federation, was among those who agreed that more information on the federation's intranet would be a welcomed development.

She highlighted that a greater understanding of what women go through especially during the menopause would eliminate many of the "brick walls women find themselves up against".

"A discussion forum would also allow access to male officers and provide an insight into the physical and psychological strains women face during the menopause," she added.

Women going through the menopause can exhibit a number of side effects including a gradual loss of bone mass, or osteoporosis, which leads to a greater risk of fractures, particularly hip fractures, according to BUPA.

Shut down: Canteen closures affect officers' health

In the dark: Female issues need to be highlighted

