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New Year resolution?

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Last month the stark reality of a Police Federation warning to the government was realised. A community support officer (CSO) from Greater Manchester Police was seriously injured after being stabbed in the neck whilst assisting bailiffs with an eviction.

Fortunately the CSO fought through two bouts of emergency surgery to survive this incident, but the outcome could have been very different and his family and colleagues could have been facing a devastating Christmas.

Now, I know historically the Police Federation has not always been the CSOs friend, but in the last few years there has been an acceptance that they have a role to play in the policing family. What the Federation remain opposed to is their use in any other activity beyond an eyes and ears role, working with sworn officers as part of neighbourhood policing teams.

This tragic injury has brought to the forefront of all our minds just how diverse and varied the training, equipment and deployment of CSOs is across the 43 forces in England and Wales. And with the government announcement last month that the crime fighting fund is to be scrapped we lose the last bit of protection from chief officers hungry for more CSOs at the expense of sworn officers.

So, the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. And what's the likely outcome; CSOs will be given more powers, equipment and training?

Well, it may be true that the government are ensuring that new legislation allows them to increase powers for CSOs at the drop of a hat, but as for more safety equipment and training, well that's highly unlikely. Regrettably, despite Federation pressure some forces are still failing to realise the importance of proper investment in suitable safety equipment and sufficient training. I mean, how many custody sergeants have had prisoners brought in with handcuffs placed on incorrectly? And how many new recruits have had to tell custody sergeants that we don't place the prisoner in that position any more when leaving a cell? Until the government accept they cannot reform the service on the back of a fag packet and make a resolution to examine the future of policing in the whole, 2007 promises to be anything but a happy new year.