

Paying lip service?

As the political party conference season limbers up once more, *Police* magazine asked officers around the country what messages they would give to politicians about the realities of policing. Tina Orr Munro reports

Greater Manchester PC Geoffrey Hince, the winner of this year's Police Federation's national police bravery award, highlighted a number of areas that politicians need to look closely at, including community support officers.

"We know why CSOs are there, but we need to give them some more powers which would effectively turn them into police officers. At the moment, they are not really doing a lot. They could do a lot more, even if it's taking statements or tackling the minor jobs."

He also believes the current complaints system leaves officers feeling isolated. "We understand the need for it to be an open process, but too often it feels like a case of guilty until proven innocent. Officers are automatically taken off frontline duties when they don't always need to be.

"The cases drag on. We have timescales we have to work to for criminal prosecutions, why can't it be the same for complaints cases? Officers need to be kept informed."

Pay is another issue that is leaving GMP officers feeling demoralised, he says. "Pay needs to be sorted out. The arguments about pay are demoralising. At the awards ceremony, Gordon Brown went on about what a good job we are doing and how it's the hardest job in the world and we should be rewarded and then we hear they want to pay us less. People rely on that September pay rise. It's a bit demoralising."

Moss Side in Manchester has a reputation for gun crime, which is another area that needs to be addressed, says PC Hince.

"We would like to see stronger sentencing including an automatic prison sentence for possession of a firearm. Youths in Moss Side have also begun to wear body armour which gives the perception of violence. There is no reason to wear it and we would like to see it licensed in the same way as handcuffs and CS Spray so that only certain people such as police officers, paramedics and bouncers can wear it," says PC Hince.



He also believes parents should be more accountable for the behaviour of their children, even if it means taking away child benefit. "There should be no reason why any child under 16 should be on the streets after midnight," he adds.

The officer who single-handedly fought off armed robbers when he was off-duty also believes performance indicators and targets are divisive and are driving a wedge between the public and officers.

"Officers have upset decent members of the public as they have had their discretion taken away from them. We have supervisors, if someone isn't doing their job; it is down to them to deal with it."

This year Bournemouth plays host to the Labour party conference. Clive Chamberlain, chairman of the Dorset Police Federation which covers the town, says the uncertainty surrounding pay is the biggest issue affecting police officers in his area.

"For the first time in my history I am getting phone calls from officers who are angry about the pay situation and are demanding that we seriously consider taking some kind of industrial action.



Illustration: Russ Tudor

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Mr Chamberlain says officer numbers continue to be an issue: “People in Dorset want a visible police presence. Politicians should give the public what they want, not what

they think they should have. Politicians will talk about the number of police officers, but the truth is the number of officers is not commensurate with the demand for them which is currently unprecedented. They want us to tackle everything from anti-social behaviour to terrorism, but they are not giving us the people to do the job.”

The Conservative party will be holding their annual conference in Blackpool, Paul Daykin who is the treasurer for Lancashire Police Federation says he would like politicians to stop meddling with the service.

“Stop talking about reforming the police service as if we are some kind of dinosaur organisation. That simply isn’t true, we are constantly under review and reform, but we are streets ahead in terms of quality of service and health and safety. I would like to tell politicians to stop reforming us and let things settle. Even the NHS has recognised that it can’t keep reorganising itself.”

He would also like some politicians to stop talking about anarchy in the streets.

“It doesn’t help and it certainly isn’t true. David Cameron should stop repeating what’s in the Daily Mail. We don’t need this negativity.”