

**The Changing Face of Policing:
A Source of Misunderstanding and Dissatisfaction**

The Changing Face of Policing... the newspapers, both local and national, are using this headline to draw attention to the growing number of PNCOs and PCSOs providing a uniformed presence on the street. This may be the obvious face of change but it doesn't tell the whole story as the pattern is repeated in other areas of policing. Non-sworn staff members are joining officers in making a valuable contribution to the Service, not just in the traditional clerical and support roles, but in other fields where their expertise improves efficiency and productivity. It might be tempting to think that things are going well, but it is important to consider how the integration process of officers and staff is being managed.

I think that there are minimally two major areas of concern. The first relating to the perceived threat to the role of police officer represented by modernisation and 'civilianisation', and the second relating to the issue of governance and management.

It is well known that at least part of our sense of self and our feelings of self-worth derive from what we do and how good we feel about doing it. In the past policing has been described in terms of a vocation, with recruits expected to dedicate their lives to the Service. The culture of the police emphasised an 'us/them' division of the social world, in-group isolation and solidarity and unquestioning loyalty. Officers could be sure that all their colleagues would have been through the same rigorous experiences in training and operations, and could therefore be counted upon to play their part. The new wind that is blowing through the Service requires some adjustment in these expectations.

According to Bob Quick, the Chief Constable of Surrey Police, it costs £330,000 to recruit and train a constable (Unison Police Staff Profile, Winter 2006), and yet the Service is no longer necessarily seen by officers as a job for life, particularly in an economic climate of full employment. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the Service has to work harder to persuade them to stay. Part of this approach is to recognise the need to be more accommodating and accepting of part-time working. In the past, when flexibility was mentioned, it was the officer who had to be prepared to fit in

with the duties and overtime dictated by the Force: indeed the culture of the police expected no less as a demonstration of total commitment. The shift towards part-time working represents a conflict between past and present expectations. As such it is likely to result in a degree of unease or resistance on the part of full-time officers, who might think that their part-time colleagues receive advantageous treatment by being allowed to avoid unsociable hours etc, whilst at the same time being less than fully committed to the job, because they cease to be at the beck and call of the Force.

It is probable that the success of retention of officers through part-time take-up will be calculated according to numbers in the short term, but sustainability will depend upon officers, who now work part-time, continuing to feel validated and valued by their colleagues. This would call for measurement of the extent to which they feel that they are assigned 'real' policing tasks, and have an equitable opportunity to progress their careers within the specialism of their choice.

In addition to the move toward flexibility in working hours there has also been an exponential growth in police staff recruitment. It has been some time now since the Service was expected to produce from its midst officers capable of covering skills in every area of communication, management and administration, but in the past their role was restricted to support, working in the background within boundaries that maintained a sharp degree of differential between them and serving officers. This might have been described as a tandem relationship, with the sworn officers taking the lead. Today the picture has changed somewhat with officers and staff working alongside each other in areas such as custody or investigations, and PCSOs augmenting the police presence on the streets. Both of these advances, whilst necessary and logical, may be perceived by officers as diluting their own position and role, and the adjustment in relationship as staff and officers are integrated requires sensitive handling.

Both HMIC and the CRE have already commented upon the cultural propensity for silo management in the Service. Whilst staff and officers performed discrete tasks with little overlap between the two, such an approach might have been appropriate, but as the boundaries become blurred, CCs and senior management should consider the cultural impact of integration. Differences between officers and staff in terms of

their training, socialisation and employment terms and conditions are likely to lead to differences in their behavioural expectations and interactions with others. For instance, whereas officers display due deference to rank, and are accustomed to an instructional approach, other staff might have difficulties working within these assumptions. Managers, officers and staff should be made aware of differences in expectations with regard to treatment and behavioural expectations, and the risk of increased perceptions of bullying in the workplace. If this does not happen, the potential for misunderstanding and dissatisfaction will not only continue, but is likely to grow.