

Sergeant's Central Committee Chairman's Speech to Conference 2010

Conference,

Good morning to you all and welcome back to Bournemouth.

This year I make no apologies in departing from normal protocol and delivering my address to you after the break, which will prepare the ground and wet the appetite for the forum discussion that will follow, which is aimed at stimulating debate and raising awareness of the threats and possible outcomes for the rank of Sergeant in the future, following the publication of recent important documents. It is the view of the Sergeant's Central Committee, and I know you will all agree, that **Sergeants are Key to the Future of Policing.**

These are difficult and challenging times for the police service and in particular our rank in an era of workforce modernisation, transformation and change, call it what you will, for it means different things to different people. However, it should be emphasised from the start that we are not opposed to change. We fully recognise the continuing and changing character of policing. Such changes may involve the appointment of more non-warranted specialist police staff. And given the unique

powers held by police officers, we also acknowledge that the changing mix of police staff requires careful consideration of existing roles and responsibilities. However, we seek to preserve the social legitimacy of ‘policing by consent’, whereupon any changes to police roles and responsibilities must take into account the need to preserve this historic tested compact between the police and the public we serve. This underpins our opposition to the total civilianisation of custody suites.

Since Sheehy in 1993, policing has been subjected to increasing ‘value for money’ and performance management. The effect of this has been a significant de-layering of police ranks and a persistent worsening of rank ratios. Sergeants in particular have had to take on greater responsibilities, as tasks have ‘trickled down’ through the ranks. In fact all officers have had their roles enlarged and their responsibilities increased, but the buck stops with the Sergeant.

We continue to support the principle of the ‘omnicompetent’ police officer who possesses generalist policing skills. The core generic role of constable is the organisational spine around which policing is conducted. Effective policing requires generic skills and direct experience in the constable rank.

It cannot be over stated that any change initiatives designed to increase the degree of role specialisation and/or role differentiation will inevitably lead to a less flexible and less efficient deployment of resources than at present. The very nature of policing is that officers take on the needs of the moment, whatever they are.

The successful delivery of operational policing is fundamentally dependent upon the effective management of a blend of both generic and specialist roles. Organisationally, this is accomplished through the rank structure. The critical factor which differentiates ranks and roles is the level of authority and responsibility carried by each rank. In our view the generic roles of the different ranks are as follows:

- The Constable rank carries responsibility for the immediate operational delivery of policing.
- The Sergeant rank has a dual function: they are the first line managers and the frontline supervisors of operational policing.
- The Inspector ranks carry overall responsibility for the coordination and delivery of operational policing.

Recent years have seen an ongoing debate about the continued usefulness of the existing rank/role structure. In our view, given the de-layering that has taken place since 1993, the effective delivery of policing cannot be achieved without first line and middle management exercised by Sergeants and Inspectors.

Last year in my address to you, I told you, as though you needed telling, that the role of the Sergeant as the linchpin of the police service is critical, fundamental, pivotal, key, as leaders of people and guardians of excellence in service delivery and in maintaining national standards. Nothing's changed since then, but those in power and with influence in shaping the future of policing need to be reminded of that. There are problems in policing at this time and properly selected, trained and equipped Sergeants are the solution to many of them.

So, what's been happening since our last conference and why the concern for our rank? Well, you've only got to read the Policing White Paper, Productivity Framework, Police Value for Money and Insight Programme documents to see what the future holds. It doesn't look good!

In December the Government published a White Paper on policing. Key amongst the range of

measures announced in it where proposals for forces to cut back their overtime budgets. A target of saving at least £100 million per annum has been set across all 43 forces, delivering savings of at least £545 million by 2014. A former Home Secretary suggested that this can be done by revising rotas and shift patterns.

As a nation we face the huge challenge of tackling the £180 billion budget deficit and everyone is feeling the strain, particularly those on the frontline, and there's a lot more pain to come. We are all in the same boat and spending should be curtailed where it makes sense, but not to the detriment of the public and the police service as a whole, particularly the frontline. It is paramount that any cuts to the policing budget do not compromise public safety. The public deserve and expect a flexible and resilient 24/7 service from fully warranted police officer teams that are led by Sergeants, whether that response is uniform, CID or traffic.

Where overtime is concerned, we have a job to do and for that job to be done well. We do not do overtime out of choice but through necessity in our duty and obligation to the public in upholding the law. We cannot just simply turn our backs on what is expected of us. The nature of policing is such

that officers incur overtime and we as supervisors are held accountable for that.

In the same month we saw the publication of the Productivity Framework. It informs us that HMIC is to conduct a major inspection in 2010 to assess the progress of forces on the recommendations made within it. The rationale for the document is the current financial climate, where the emphasis on value for money is increasing. Forces must prove their commitment to enhancing productivity and ensure that optimum resources are directed to the frontline. These will need to be used economically and effectively with the focus being on workforce effectiveness to deliver outcomes that matter to the public.

The framework is constructed around three core themes: leading, organising and developing the workforce. It is a model for benchmarking performance. Leadership terminology is used throughout the framework with Sergeants and, worryingly, 'other' first line managers being classified as supervisors.

The framework places emphasis on the role of supervisors in managing and assessing the performance and development of individual officers. It also highlights their role in terms of overtime authorisation and accountability, resource

allocation, quality of service, ideas and initiatives, workloads, professional judgement, performance and personal responsibility.

It is quite obvious that the framework will lead to more responsibility falling on the shoulders of Sergeants and with it greater accountability in this downwards de-layering process. That Sergeants will be held to account for their use of overtime is worrying indeed. The workforce size, mix and profile are a concern and potential threat to the rank of Sergeant as we know it. Value for money considerations are highlighted throughout the document as are skills and career paths required to deliver a level of service. That Sergeants and non-warranted equivalents are shown together as supervisors is an ominous indication of things to come and a threat to the Sergeant rank in the future.

This was closely followed by the Police Value for Money report, and makes recommendations on how forces can give more for less in tough economic times. It stresses over the coming years that forces will need to meet the twin challenges of increased financial pressures and continued expectation from the public, and to meet these challenges they must balance budgets and sustain delivery, particularly from April 2011.

It is likely that a fundamental examination of structures and processes will be needed to transform their delivery. Forces must increase productivity at the frontline in order to deliver more for the same and savings in back office functions by getting enough for less. In achieving both these aims HMIC will have a central role to play. This is a major reason why many forces are carrying out a fundamental transformation in the way they are structured to deliver.

Therefore, issues surrounding deployment, shift patterns, overtime costs and workforce mix are very much under the microscope and will impact upon the Sergeant rank, as the supervisors of service delivery to the public at the sharp end. It's all about savings in order to balance budgets and improve value for money. Mention is made of a reduction in the number of gatekeepers but this is not elaborated upon. I hope this is not yet another move to civilianise the role of the Custody Sergeant via the back door?

I now want to draw your attention to the hugely controversial 'insight programme' discussion document produced on behalf of ACPO and the NPIA that came to our attention in February. The purpose of this document is to provide an outline of the work the NPIA is doing in relation to delivering a 10 year workforce plan for the police service and,

based on that outline, present some scenarios and pose some questions that are designed to provoke discussion around certain issues. The stated outcomes of this work are to improve future workforce planning and improve employment frameworks.

Nothing is sacrosanct and everything is up for grabs. The Office of Constable; numbers of warranted officers; leadership ratios; quality of training; professional discretion; increased role for Sergeants in terms of efficiency; overhauling Police Regulations; Staff Associations; contract of employment for police officers; rank structure; and direct entry to the office of constable for PCSO's. I know you will all agree this is really frightening stuff that could change the police service that we love and cherish beyond all recognition, and why, to save money, as plain and simple as that. A tradition of excellence and public service built up over 180 years and respected the world over counts for nothing. Oh, what sad times we live in!

Controversial it is and stamped on every page in red letters are the words 'NOT POLICY', whilst at the top of the first page in even bigger red letters is: 'FOR DISCUSSION'. Below this in red bold is the following statement: 'It does not represent policy (draft or approved) of ACPO, APA, Home

Office, HMIC or NPIA'. Conference, come on, who are they trying to kid.

In addition to the eight scenario headings contained within the document there follows below each one a list of 'Provocation' questions to provoke discussion around associated issues. Never has a header for such questions been more aptly named. It certainly provoked me and no doubt those of you who have had the opportunity to read it.

For example: 'Can it be conceived that an 'at least as good', or improved service to the public can be delivered by increased numbers of non-warranted staff?' Rough translation: Would more police staff be better than more police officers?

And: 'Is there an increased role for Sergeants to think in terms of efficiency and not just effectiveness?' Rough translation: Should sergeants do more and be more accountable?

Also: 'Are Police Regulations an enabler or an inhibitor and what benefits might be derived from overhauling them?' Rough translation: Police Regulations are a barrier to change, so let's get rid of them?

You'll love this one: 'Could efficiencies and flexibilities be derived from governing the

relationship between a police officer and their Chief Constable through a contract of employment rather than Statutory Instrument? Rough Translation: ‘Lets make it easier to sack police officers?’

And finally: ‘What are the opportunities attached to rationalising the number of ranks?’ Rough translation: Do we need Sergeants?

You can see why this document is so contentious, and these are just five out of the thirty four questions posed.

On top of this is the suggestion that a 50/50 workforce mix of police officers and police staff is introduced, as in Surrey. Currently the mix is 64.4% police officers and 35.6% police staff, and if all forces mirrored that, this would mean 28,000 less police officers with savings in the region of £400 million. Why the NPIA dare call itself a Policing Improvement Agency when it raises such madness is quite beyond me. To reduce police officer numbers on such a huge scale would damage the resilience of the police service to react as an effective body and have a detrimental impact on the quality of service provided to the public. That begs the question, if this lunacy was to take place, how many of the 28,000 less police officers would be Sergeants?

The document also states that £70 million could be saved by increasing the number of Constables in all forces from 76 to 81%, which it says would result in another 3,500 frontline officers. Ironically, £70 million is the amount the Government wants the police service to reduce its overtime bill by, as outlined in the White Paper. To do this leadership levels would be reduced on a basis of trading in one leader for one Police Constable. Worryingly, it is not clear whether the document is referring solely to Sergeant level leaders or others. This is also a threat to our rank and needs clarifying.

Enough of what others have to say about policing and how it could affect Sergeants, what do you think? At a meeting of the Sergeants Branch Board Chairman and Secretaries held at Chester in March, we tried to capture this through an exercise headed 'Your Issues, Your Meeting', where each of the eight regions were given time to discuss the key issues affecting Sergeants in their region and to list five key issues in order of priority. Each region was then asked to identify their chief priority, which from No. 8 Region through to No.1 were:

- Custody and reducing staff levels
- Reduction in Sergeant numbers
- Little training and when there is, it's not fit for purpose

- Lack of promotion prospects
- Widening and evolving role of the Sergeants job description
- Attack on Regulations and Determinations
- Bureaucracy
- Resilience

We are very grateful for this information and will seek to progress the issues involved with the relevant stakeholders some of whom are here today.

Last year in my conference speech to you all, I highlighted concerns around training for new to role sergeants, the abuse of Acting Sergeants and critical incident training, and called for this to be addressed. Since then an HMIC thematic 'Leading from the Frontline' Steering Group has been established, which we are represented on, but we are very disappointed that Sergeant issues such as these are not being specifically singled out in the forthcoming HMIC workforce inspections. Instead the Productivity Framework and Value for Money reports will form the basis of the inspections and include all ranks and members of staff. It begs the question, is the thematic already confined to history and gathering dust on a shelf after only two years? You may wish to question HMIC about this.

Much of what is now happening in policing has occurred in other public services and is an attempt to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and economy through organisational and structural changes in the name of efficiency gains. Don't be fooled, it's all about saving money and doing more for the same, or less.

Is workforce modernisation working? Well, the National Workforce Modernisation Programme evaluation report, by consultants Deloitte, considered 8 projects across 6 forces, concluding that 4 had met performance objectives and 4 had not. And guess what the concerns expressed were? No surprises there, national resilience, workforce flexibility and, above all, a political will to reduce officer numbers, and that means Sergeants too!

We Sergeants are the 'guardians of excellence' in service delivery and the 'gatekeepers of the custody process' the Key to the Future of Policing, but our rank is under threat as never before.

Conference, enough from me, the floor is yours, bring on the debate!

John Giblin
Chairman SCC
May 2010

