

# Federation defiant over shift proposals

BY MAX BLAIN

OFFICERS in Northumbria Police are 'demoralised' over a force plan to alter their shift patterns, the chairman of the local federation has said.

Russ Watson told *Police Review* that the plan to bring in a variable shift agreement from 1 April next year has angered officers even more than the recent rows with the Government over pay.

A ballot of officers on the proposals to switch to a variable shift agreement found that less than the 80 per cent required by the federation to give its approval were in favour. The federation has to agree before a variable shift pattern can be brought in.

Mr Watson is now calling on Mike Craik, chief constable of the force, not to alter the current system.

But Mr Craik has told officers that unless they accept the variable agreement, standard eight hour shifts would be introduced. The current pattern is a five-week system with 21 days on and 14 days' rest.

Mr Watson said: 'Our shifts are

**ALARMING PLANS:** The federation is resisting changes to shift patterns

not the best but they work. I hope that with further negotiation we can come to a compromise.'

He said one of the main issues with the proposed variable pattern is that chief officers have yet to decide when the shifts would begin and end. He added: 'Officers were asked to vote on early and late shifts and the exact times would be decided afterwards.'

'But early shifts can start anywhere between 7 am and 11 am.

Officers do not have the trust in the chief officers to let them make that decision.'

He added: 'The force continues to demoralise its workforce by a continually changing shift patterns, without taking into full account the impact this has on practitioners' work/life balance.'

Mr Watson warned that officers' home lives would be affected by the change. He said: 'Policing is not all about being public servants, serving

our communities or service delivery, it is a balance of these, together with quality family time and quality rest periods.

'If the correct balance is struck, then we can continue to improve, if not then we take a step back in time.'

Northumbria Police is not the first force to undergo a big change in shift patterns. Officers in Hampshire Constabulary, North Yorkshire Police and West Yorkshire Police have all seen similar patterns introduced.

This week, Mr Craik said: 'Some 58 per cent of neighbourhood and CID officers and 62 per cent of area support group officers voted in favour of the new shift patterns [but] the federation refuses to agree the proposal as the vote was not 80 per cent in favour of the change.'

'In the absence of their agreement, I have no choice but to default to an eight-hour pattern.'

He added: 'This is placing the majority of officers who have voted in favour of the changes in a difficult position and I urge the federation to take this into consideration.'



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