

## POLICE COMMISSIONERS

**Above the law**

**S**INCE their election in 2012, Britain's 41 police and crime commissioners (PCC) have appointed an army of subordinates – and quite a few friends as well.

Each PCC may select one deputy, with most opting for a chum from the same political party. The law says other jobs in the PCC's team are "politically restricted" – but there are ways around this.

For Surrey's PCC Kevin Hurley to appoint sitting Kingston upon Thames Lib Dem councillor Shiraz Mirza as assistant commissioner, the solution was to incorporate one-man company, Surrey Partnership Ltd, with Mirza as sole shareholder and director. Hurley contracts Surrey Partnership Ltd to be the £39,000 assistant commissioner, not Mirza himself (although his biography on the Kingston Lib Dems' website describes him as such).

The PCC's agreement with Surrey Partnership Ltd specifies that it is "a contract for the provision of services and not a contract of employment" – but names Mirza as "the individual" doing the work, in the PCC's office, using PCC-provided office equipment. The PCC's auditors questioned this arrangement in March but were reassured that Mirza is "a non-financial management consultant who provides his services to clients through Surrey Partnership Ltd". Surrey Partnership Ltd works for the PCC 20 days per month, leaving little time for other clients.

The Commons public accounts committee describes personal service companies as "a practice which generates suspicions of complicity in tax avoidance and which fails to meet the standards expected of public officials" (*Eyes passim*). Hurley defended against such suspicions on Twitter by, er, confirming that it was actually a ruse to duck the law: "[Mirza] is a councillor so is politically restricted and cannot be PCC employee. Hence a consultant."

He's not the only one. David Jamieson, West

Midlands PCC and a former Labour councillor, appointed Labour councillor Judy Foster as his assistant, under an agreement reading: "The applicant must acknowledge that there is no contract of employment with the PCC."

The Association of Policing and Crime Chief Executives (APACE) has written confidential guidance to help out, containing what is described as a "straightforward vehicle" for dodging the staff impartiality requirement: draft contractual clauses designed to show that someone is a contractor rather than an employee, "even if their terms are otherwise similar to that of PCC staff".

The guidance warns: "If this were to be seen as a device to circumvent the proper principles of governance enshrined by parliament in the legislation, this would be subject to a challenge by way of judicial review". Er, quite.

**Head in sand?**

**G**EORGE HAMILTON, chief constable of Northern Ireland, has been complaining that budget cuts will put the public at risk. But there is one way he could keep more officers on the streets: stop sending them to Middle Eastern countries with dodgy human rights records.

A Freedom of Information request has revealed that one of Hamilton's chief superintendents spent two days at the Qatar Police College earlier this year. A couple more headed out later, apparently to help with the "management of events like the 2022 World Cup" – which is at the centre of claims of corruption and has attracted widespread condemnation for the abuse of migrants workers building the facilities.

Two Northern Ireland officers also spent a week with police in Oman at the start of 2015, in what looks like a cosy up to Sultan Qaboos's regime. Oman's police chief, Inspector General Hassan Al Shereqi, paid a reciprocal visit to Belfast in March. He was inspecting a "public order training programme" that the Northern Ireland Knacker is delivering to the Omani Ministry of Interior – which of course heavily restricts the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

during the summer holidays. Unsurprisingly, staff left in droves, and an inspection in October 2012 found

**Funder bolt**

— POUND £2.5m a year would have to be