

# Police blogger quits as officers come under pressure over unofficial tweets

Inspector Gadget, who wrote anonymously about sometimes farcical police bureaucracy, deletes posts dating back to 2006

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Laptop Cop, another police blogger, reacts to the news that Inspector Gadget has quit

One of the best-known anonymous **police** bloggers and tweeters has ceased writing after seven years of providing a sometimes irreverent officer's eye view of the world of policing – at a time when officers who blog or tweet unofficially are coming under increasing pressure to give up their activities.

Inspector Gadget, whose blog recorded more than 12m hits, unexpectedly tweeted on Monday that he was "going state 11" – off duty – and has since deleted postings dating back to 2006, many of which attacked the sometimes farcical bureaucracy he believes is strangling the police service. The last posting on Gadget's blog before all posts were deleted read: "This jobs is f...d".

Those close to the blogger say he has grown frustrated at the cuts to the police service

and feels he is unable to enact any change through his writing. It is not known whether he has been directly warned off by senior officers in his force but he quits the medium at a time when those officers who are tweeting under pseudonyms say they are being intimidated off social media by their bosses.

In the seven years he was active online Gadget, who has never been publicly identified, has been dismissed by the then police minister Nick Herbert as "silly", and written a memoir. He began his blog after attending a training seminar which he said was "60 mind-numbing minutes of complete nonsense" but his blog site is now unavailable and he is no longer tweeting.

Official police tweeters – those who are accredited by their forces to tweet – number around 1,200, but there are hundreds of officers around the country who tweet unofficially and it is they who are being targeted, according to officers who spoke to the Guardian.

At least two other well-known police tweeters have indicated this week that they are planning to close down their accounts. One told the Guardian he would be investigated for gross misconduct by the professional standards department at his force if he was identified and he did not want to put his family in that situation.

"It's a massive shame," he said. "But I don't want to risk my job over something I think is good thing for the public but others don't."

Gadget earned opprobrium in some quarters for his comments on Alfie Meadows, the London student who underwent brain surgery after being struck apparently by a police baton during the student fees protest of December 2010.

In one post Gadget talked disparagingly of Meadows being hit by "friendly fire" – a block of concrete throw by another protester . Meadows was last week acquitted by a jury at of violent disorder during the protest. The IPCC inquiry into his complaint against the police is near its completion, it is understood.

A second leading police tweeter has also been identified by his force and given words of advice – the lowest form of disciplinary sanction – and told to stop writing under his pseudonym but instead to transfer his skills to helping community teams operate their approved Twitter accounts.

However, some believe the unofficial tweets provide the public with a grassroots view of policing which is good for the service. Mike Pannett, a former officer and now a commentator on policing, said: "There is huge pressure at the moment on anonymous police bloggers to identify themselves. Accounts are being closed down.

"Senior officers want to put a stop to them and there is some effort going into identifying

them. Senior officers want to have control over what's said on social media and those officers who blog anonymously are having to be very, very careful.

"The feedback from the public to these anonymous bloggers is very good. It is a revelation to them what officers deal with every day and what goes on in the police and I think it gives an insight into real policing and is something that should be embraced by the service."

The Association of Chief Police officers recently issued new guidance on the use of social media. The guidance said that while the medium offered many benefits including more effective communication with communities, more informed consultation and local engagement there were risks. These included risks to personal and organisational security or reputations.

The guidance warns officers from using social media from "personal mobile devices" while working and not to make "adverse comment regarding the police force, colleagues or senior managers or the police service in general" via social media.

Officers who tweet anonymously are also being investigated by professional standards departments over whether they have created dissatisfaction with the police service through their posts – which have not been cleared by corporate communications departments. Pannett said those with genuine concerns about the police service, who used social media as a form of whistleblowing, now felt they had nowhere to turn in the wake of a clampdown on police-press relations in the wake of the Leveson inquiry.

"Leveson made it clear that officers don't trust the internal mechanisms in their forces for raising concerns, but he also frightened them from going to a journalist," Pannett said. "They have nowhere to go and social media was an opening for them to raise issues of concern about the cuts to the service and about their worries about what protection to the public they can offer."

Another tactic being employed by forces to deter anonymous bloggers and tweeters, it is understood, is a requirement for officers to identify any social media usernames and in some cases passwords for vetting purposes if they ever apply for transfers internally within their forces. One police tweeter told the Guardian: "If you don't give them the name then you are lying and have committed an offence. If you do they will be able to put pressure on you to close it down, and you certainly won't get the transfer you wanted."

Earlier this month a meeting at the Home Office was called by Gordon Scobie, the Association of Chief Police Officers lead on social media, and Nick Keane, of the College of Policing, to discuss safety when online.

