

Home Secretary speech to Police Federation conference

May 18 2011

Check against delivery:

Thank you Paul.

Let me be clear. Not all of you will like some of the decisions I have taken. And not all of you will like what I have to say.

But it's not my job to duck the difficult decisions and to tell you what you want to hear.

It's my job to tell it like it is, to take the difficult decisions that are needed to get the police through these tough times, and to put policing on a sustainable footing for future generations.

British Policing

In Britain we have the finest police officers in the world.

Our police don't strut around with hand guns and dark glasses.

You don't stand back behind barricades.

You treat the public with respect. You get out into the community. You treat people fairly and you presume they're innocent until proven guilty. You go unarmed into dangerous situations. You put yourselves in harm's way to keep us safe.

And for that, every single person in this country owes you an enormous debt of gratitude.

Defending the Police

After the recent protests in London, I went to Parliament and praised the actions of the police officers who kept the rule of law on our capital's streets.

It's easy to sit round with friends or, dare I say it, in the House of Commons, and criticise the police. But those people aren't the ones confronting violent thugs armed with bottles, stones, flares and petrol bombs.

The police officers who put themselves on the line to keep the streets of London safe did a magnificent job under the most extreme provocation.

They didn't retreat behind barricades and fire tear gas. They held the line, face-to-face with those who would do them harm.

That's the British way of policing - and it's the right way of policing.

Policing by consent.

Policing of the public, by police who are the public.

Policing built on the rock solid foundations of the office of constable.

So let there be no doubt - we do have the best police in the world.

Need for Savings

But let me get to the point, to the thing you're all talking about.

I know how worried you are about the cuts. I know how angry some of you are. I know the difficulties that spending cuts will mean.

But let's remember why we've got to do this.

We have just been through the gravest financial crisis since the Second World War.

We now face the biggest budget deficit in our peacetime history.

We have a deficit higher than Portugal - and they've had to go cap in hand to the EU for a bailout. We have a deficit higher than Greece - and they've had to go cap in hand to the EU for a bailout.

Their experience shows that the risks of not dealing with the deficit are not imaginary. They are very real.

Our strong and decisive action is taking Britain out of the danger zone.

Some say there is an alternative. We could ignore the deficit. Delay the cuts. Put off the inevitable.

But that would just mean more and more interest would be built up, meaning deeper cuts in the long term. It would mean more cuts to policing and more job losses.

Even the politicians who claim they oppose what we're doing, admit that they would cut £7 for every £8 that we are cutting this year.

We are currently spending £120 million every single day just on paying the interest on the debt that the last government racked up. That's more than we spend each day on policing, the courts, prisons and the probation service combined. It's more than we spend on schools or on defence.

And the longer we delay, the more the interest racks up.

So let's stop pretending that any country can avoid balancing the books - no country and no organisation can afford to run such a high deficit for such a length of time.

This isn't revenge, it's a rescue mission to bring the economy back from the brink and to make sure the police come through not just intact but better equipped for the future.

Efficiency and Savings

So that's why we had to act. Now, let me turn to how we are doing it.

A lot of numbers have been talked about, but let's consider the actual amount that police force budgets are likely to fall by. In four years time, if all areas increased the local precept in line with independent estimates, then forces will have on average 6 per cent less cash than they do now.

That is a reduction that is challenging, but manageable.

Across a range of areas - from back office and middle office efficiency, to procurement and IT, to frontline availability - we are working to make savings so that we can protect police officer jobs.

Many forces are rising to the challenge.

In Suffolk and Norfolk they are creating a shared service platform for their back office support functions - saving around £10 million per year.

And in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire they have run continuous improvement programmes - led by constables and sergeants - which have cut the time taken to resolve crime from around 50 days, down to just 5.

These examples show that it can be done - we can deliver savings while protecting, even improving, the frontline.

And I want to address something else you often say Paul - that we are somehow singling out the police for cuts. This is simply not true.

A huge number of private sector workers have already faced job cuts, redundancy, significantly reduced pay, longer working hours and higher pensions contributions.

Many other workers right across the public sector are facing a two year pay freeze.

And many other workers right across the public sector are facing higher pension contributions to put their pensions on a sustainable footing.

But I know that doesn't make things any easier. So let me address your concerns.

In his report on public sector pensions, Lord Hutton acknowledged that the demands placed on officers are unique, and that the police pension age - the age at which you can retire and draw a pension - should reflect this.

So I can announce today that I have agreed with the Chancellor that your pension age should be considered separately from most of the rest of the public sector. Your pay and conditions should be considered in the round, and we will consult on any changes to your pensions through the Police Negotiating Board.

Winsor Review

Last year, I said accrued pension rights would be protected - and we've kept that commitment.

In fact, when it was recognised that police officers should get bigger lump sums when they retired, we made this change immediately. That meant retiring officers could start getting more money in their pockets straight away. We didn't delay, we didn't argue - we did what was right.

Last year, I told you that we would honour the remainder of the three-year pay deal - and we have, because it was the right thing to do. That means that basic police pay is now 2.55% higher than this time last year.

But I also said we would review pay and conditions to make them fair to you and fair to the taxpayer - and that's what we're doing.

We are taking out costs, we are cutting bureaucracy, we are working with Chiefs to focus on savings in the back office.

We are doing everything we can to protect frontline jobs and to minimise the effect of the spending reductions on pay.

But the fact remains that changes to pay and conditions have to be part of the package. When 80% of police spending goes on pay, they have to be part of the package.

I am sure that every single person in this room - and indeed members of the public - would prefer us to look at pay and conditions rather than lose thousands of posts.

That's why I commissioned Tom Winsor to review police pay. I asked him not just to find efficiencies and to modernise the system, but also to design a system that recognises and rewards front line service.

I don't want expert officers, who are doing a tremendous job for the public, to feel they have to go into managerial roles to get ahead in their careers. That's not right and it's not fair.

Fairness means a system that values your individual contribution, more than your length of service.

It means a system that rewards people for what they do, for the skills that they have, and for the weight of the job.

That's why Tom Winsor recommended that we should have extra pay for those who have to work unsocial hours - to recognise that many officers work demanding shifts that can affect you and your families.

It's why he recommended a new payment to those with specialist skills.

It's why he recommended introducing a national on-call allowance for all the Federated ranks.

But it's also why he recommended that police officers on mutual aid should be paid for the hours they work and travel, not some arbitrary standard rate.

Tom Winsor's proposals are comprehensive, they're wide-ranging. And they are now being considered by the Police Negotiating Board.

I know there are some things in there that you don't like. But the report contains many proposals that I believe should be welcomed by officers on the frontline.

Because overall, the report recommends that the majority of the savings identified should be ploughed straight back in to your pay.

That would mean rewarding those with specialist skills, those who are working unsocial hours, and those who are on the frontline.

The Deal: One Year On

But I don't want to just manage the cuts. I want to make the police service better - for the public and for you.

You joined the force because you want to serve the public and fight crime. But you don't get to spend enough of your time doing that. So let's change it.

Police officers I speak to wherever I go tell me they hate acting as couriers for the courts service.

They tell me it's not their job to be escorting mildly disruptive patients to hospital.

When I visited St Ann's Police Station in Nottingham in March, I met an officer who said to me that he had been out that morning and had made an arrest. But he had had to come back to the station and spend some hours filling in forms when, to use his words, what he wanted to do was to get back out on the streets.

I couldn't agree more. Your job is fighting crime - and that's what I want you doing.

When I spoke to you here one year ago, I offered you a deal - more freedom to do your work; in exchange for greater accountability to local people.

I have stuck to that deal.

So we've scrapped the Policing Pledge, the confidence target, the PSA targets, the key performance indicators, the Local Area Agreements and all of the other targets that you hated.

I know not every force has implemented these changes, but let me make my position clear - I want you chasing criminals, not chasing targets.

We've given you back discretion over certain charging decisions.

We've scrapped the national requirement for the stop and account form, and cut the reporting requirements for stop and search.

And I've sent the message out loud and clear to Home Office officials and to every organisation across the Criminal Justice System - stop wasting police time.

So HMIC will be reducing the burden of inspection on you and your forces.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission will implement a new approach to handling complaints, which will mean supervising officers dealing with most complaints quickly and informally.

And we've just launched a 'live links' video system between the police station and the court room so you can stay on duty, cut your travel time and cut out wasted effort.

But all of this is just the start.

Last week I announced a series of new reforms that will make a real difference to your day-to-day work. In total they could save well over 2.5 million hours of your time each year.

First, we want to restructure your performance development review process, saving you time and improving the way you are managed, saving you time and improving the way you are managed.

This could cut the time each of you spend on your PDR from 10 to 2 hours.

Second, we are adopting a more sensible way of managing risks to the public.

For example, more efficient call-handling could see more officers dispatched to the genuine priority cases, and could stop you being dispatched to incidents where you're not needed.

Third, we want to simplify crime recording, reducing the amount of data you have to collect.

Fourth, we will reduce the guidance you are given from over 600 pieces to fewer than 100.

Instead of guidance from on high, we will rely on you to use your professional judgement and common sense. You are the professionals, and you know best how to police our country.

Fifth, we will pilot going even further in restoring charging decisions, eventually giving you responsibility for nearly 80% of decisions, including shoplifting cases. And we will look at postal charging to stop you having to bring suspects back to custody to charge them.

Finally, we are considering some difficult and sensitive areas. Domestic violence is one of my key priorities and I am clear that it must be taken seriously.

In recent years the police have made great strides in dealing with these crimes, with expert teams of officers now doing tremendous work.

But some of the processes that have been allowed to grow up actually do not help the most vulnerable.

The unnecessary form filling. The double entering of data.

By ending these wasteful processes we can free officer time to reinvest in safeguarding those who need help.

So we are working on a review of domestic abuse processes. We will then look to pilot proposals in a number of forces. If successful these improved measures will allow more police time to be spent on those most at risk and could potentially save lives.

But my ambitions don't end there. If any of you know of a piece of unnecessary government bureaucracy that we should get rid of then let me know it.

tell me where the red tape is and I will cut it.

And my commitment must be matched by Chief Constables as well.

A great deal of the day to day bureaucracy that you encounter is actually generated by your own forces.

So I want your bosses across the country to follow our lead.

If we've scrapped a form at national level, then there had better be a really good reason for your Chief to keep it at local level. If we've done away with a target nationally, then your Chiefs should stop getting you to chase it locally. If we've got rid of a national regulation, then I don't want Chiefs to bring in a local replacement.

Particularly in these tough times, we need to cut out every possible cost and save every possible minute of wasted time.

I said I'd be a Home Secretary who would get off your back, who would free you to do your job, and who would trust you - and I'm delivering on that promise.

Trusting the Policing Professionals; Trusting the Public

Because that is what this government is all about.

We don't put our trust in performance indicators, targets or regulations.

We put our trust in you. We put our trust in the professionals.

We won't ask you to hit any targets or answer to any back-office bureaucrats. We'll ask you to answer to the public.

And for a public service, in a democracy, that's exactly how it should be.

So for you that means you'll have to hold beat meetings with local residents - I know many of you do that already and find it extremely worthwhile.

And to make those meetings work, for the first time we have given people everywhere access to street-level crime maps so they can really know what is happening in their communities.

For your Chiefs, that accountability will mean being answerable to directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners from May next year.

It is precisely because we are introducing Police and Crime Commissioners that we are able to dismantle all the bureaucracy and rip up all the red-tape.

That's the other side of the deal. No more targets, much less paperwork, real power to you, and real accountability to the people you serve.

Taking the Tough Decisions

A lot of money went into policing over the last ten years. But too much of it went into making simple things very complicated. Creating an industry around performance management and league tables, and a forest of manuals and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Too little money went on increasing visibility, reform and modernising the service; too much of it went on bureaucrats, auditors and checkers.

We have a model of police accountability designed in the 1950s and a model of police pay designed in the 1970s.

Society has moved on.

The way people work has moved on.

And the way police officers operate has moved on.

We need reform to reflect the modern world, modern people's lives and modern policing.

We need to build a 21st century police service, with the office of constable at its heart.

The answer is not a Royal Commission. A Royal Commission is for when the problem is a long way off and you don't know the answer. Well, we need change in policing now.

We have a clear and comprehensive vision for the future of policing. The reforms we are introducing will give you the discretion to fight crime. They'll cut bureaucracy, empower the public, strengthen the fight against organised crime and provide better value for money to the taxpayer.

They are the right reforms at the right time.

It's easy for politicians to stand in front of you and tell you exactly what you want to hear - to tell you that they wouldn't make any changes; that they wouldn't make any cuts; that they agree with everything you say.

Well I'm not that type of politician. I will never just tell you what you want to hear. What I will do is be straight with you.

It would be the easiest thing in the world for me to give up, return to the old ways and put back in all the targets and the red-tape.

It would be the easiest thing in the world for me to ignore Winsor, to back down, to carry on with a system that everyone knows is wrong and needs change.

It would be the easiest thing to do. But it wouldn't be the right thing to do.

I'm not here to tell you there aren't tough times ahead.

I'm here to get the job done.

Because I have a responsibility to the public who elected me to secure the long-term future of the police service.

Conclusion

Policing is an incredibly difficult job, but it's an incredibly important job.

It's a job like no other.

When I think about those officers who died in the line of duty - young officers like Ronan Kerr, who put himself forward to serve the whole community - and officers like:

Constable Ian Swadling,

Detective Sergeant Terry Easterby,

Constable Scott Eastwood-Smith

Constable Gary Grieves

or

Constable Gareth Gallagher - when I think about those brave officers, my sorrow is tinged with pride. Pride that they died doing one of the most honourable and respected jobs there is.

And I feel pride too when I visit forces and I talk to officers up who are so dedicated, so committed, so passionate.

It is these police officers who shield the vulnerable. It is these police officers who bring the guilty to justice. It is these police officers who defend democracy and protect the British way of life.

I know it, and I'm going to make sure the public know it.

I won't be able to give you everything you want, I won't be able to tell you everything you want to hear.

I'll do what's right by the public and what's right by the police.

Less power to the politicians, more power to the public.

Less interference from the bureaucrats, more professional discretion for the police.

Less time chasing targets, more time chasing criminals.

Because you are the finest police officers in the world and I trust you to get the job done.

Thank you.