

# Theresa May's speech to the Police Federation

19.05.10

Home Secretary Theresa May delivered this speech to the Police Federation on Wednesday 19 May 2010 in Bournemouth. This copy of the text is check against delivery.

There is no greater act of humanity than to put your life on the line to protect others.

And there's no starker or more tragic reminder of the risks you take; and of the courage and dedication that you show every day to keep us safe in our homes and on our streets, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

So I would like to add my tribute, to:

PC Gary Toms  
PC Christopher Dent  
PC Phillip Pratt  
PC Michael Johnson  
Sgt Iain McLay  
PC Bill Barker  
PC Daniel Cooper  
PC Daniel Gibb  
PC Sean McColgan

The word "hero" is used too easily these days.

But these officers died doing the job they love, protecting the public they serve; they are real heroes.

Being Home Secretary is a great privilege. And I do not underestimate the challenges that I am going to face.

There will undoubtedly be difficult times ahead . with an economic crisis that limits our resources and breeds uncertainty . at a time when the challenges of fighting crime are ever expanding in a world of global terrorism.

But my focus is clear: you are the professionals and I want to help you do what you do best.

You do an amazing job  
I know I've got a lot to learn from you - to really understand the challenges you face.

But let me be clear - I know what an amazing job you do.

Every single day, you do extraordinary things.

When others would step aside - it's you who step in.

When people are running away from danger, you are running towards it.

Day in and day out; in fair weather and foul; it's you who maintain the law and order that is so fundamental to our free and civilised society.

This isn't the glamorous fiction portrayed in TV programmes that romanticise the work of detectives, crime scene investigators and SWAT teams.

It's about you, the constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors who are the face of the police service for every man, woman and child in our country, including the millions of tourists who flock here every year.

And it's about the work you do.

Preventing and detecting crime.

Intervening in violent situations.

Responding night and day to the public.

Making it safe to enjoy our great national events - from taking the kids to the football to watching the Queen open Parliament.

Keeping our traffic flowing and our streets and highways safe.

And keeping the peace at public demonstrations.

These are fundamental to our free society - and you make it all possible.

You put up with abuse and worse, but you do so to keep us free and allow us to live and work together in safety on this crowded island.

You do an amazing job - and it's time we gave you all the respect you deserve.

For your courage, your dedication to duty and your sheer hard work - I want to say, thank you.

You do an important job  
As Home Secretary I will never underestimate the importance of the job you do.

Some of the challenges you face are different from before and changing every day.

Fighting serious and organised crime - especially the battle with drug trafficking.

Fighting terrorism - the new and biggest policing challenge of the 21st century.

And you are facing other challenges which have been around for longer but are no less difficult and no less important.

Disorder and anti-social behaviour blight far too many communities and cause misery for far too many people - and you're on the frontline in the fight back.

We all know crime is too high; and we know the damage that the fear of crime is causing in our communities.

As the incidence of crime breeds fear - so our society begins to break down.

How many people walk away from a gang of young people on their street and just assume they're up to no good?

How many parents will keep their children away from the local park because they're worried about them being confronted by drug dealers?

How many elderly couples hesitate before leaving their homes for fear of being mugged?

How many people avoid making eye contact with strangers for fear of how they might react?

What do these things say about our society?

This is not the Britain that we want - and we must fight to change it.

We need to mend our broken society and build instead the Big Society.

In the broken society . too many families break down, children are brought up in households where nobody works, and they go to school with little hope of good grades and a better life.

In the Big Society . we tackle these root causes of poverty and criminality.

In the broken society . we put up with crime and anti-social behaviour because 'that's just the way things are'.

In the Big Society . we say enough is enough and we come together to reclaim our communities for the law-abiding majority.

In the broken society . people live in fear of criminals.

In the Big Society . criminals will live in fear of the people - because there is nowhere for them to hide.

Our communities will stand tall - because we're all in this together.

You can't be expected to do this on your own.

Wide-ranging reform

We need to reform our courts, probation services and prisons. And I know that Ken Clarke, the new Justice Secretary, agrees with me.

That is why Nick Herbert has been appointed as Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice - working not just in the Home Office but in the Ministry of Justice too, looking not just at Criminal Justice System issues but also at issues like rehabilitation to reduce offending.

Paul said about the number of people who have been Home Office ministers. Nick Herbert is somebody who has been in this area for a number of years. He has a commitment to helping you do your job, as I do.

I would also like to welcome James Brokenshire, who was also part of the shadow Home Affairs team.

Somebody once said you need to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. And, for once, he was right. He just didn't really do it.

But we will be tough on the causes of crime.

That's why the new Education Secretary, Michael Gove, will set about the most exciting programme of school reform for a generation ... so our children are given the hope of a better future.

That's why the new Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, will pick up our plans for welfare reform . to get people into work and lift children out of poverty.

And, as Home Secretary, make no mistake: I will be tough on crime.

I know I'm a new Home Secretary. I know that many of you don't know me. And I know that you want to know what sort of Home Secretary I will be.

So let me begin by saying this: I'm not interested in running the police.

If I'd wanted to run the police, I'd have done what you all did and join the police force.

That is not the Home Secretary's job.

That's not something many of my predecessors have understood. They just didn't get it.

They reached for what they thought was the lever but only found a clamp.

Tying you down in more and more red tape.

Issuing central government diktats. .

Inventing more criminal offences.

Undermining your professional responsibility.

Destroying your morale and devaluing your vocation.

They treated you as pen-pushers not police officers.

They imposed standardised national targets without prejudice for the vastly differing needs of local areas - so the police in a seaside town such as Bournemouth are set the same objectives as those in Brixton.

They assessed you against key performance indicators which rewarded you for recording crime not cutting crime.

They failed to tackle the bureaucracy around charging which keeps you off the streets.

They promoted a "one size fits all" Whitehall-knows-best brand of policing that rides roughshod over the experience and professional expertise of local officers.

And what I'm sure was most maddening of all, they spun endless gimmicks and initiatives - marching jobs to cashpoints, night courts, ASBOs for unborn children - that were forgotten about as quickly as they became tomorrow's fish and chip paper.

I won't tell you how to do your job  
I didn't go into politics to run public services.

That's the job of the professionals like you.

So I'm not going to presume to tell you how to do your job . anymore than I would tell a surgeon how to operate - or an engineer how to build a bridge.

Professional policing means policing run by you, the professionals, not us, the politicians.

I believe it's time for a whole new approach.

What that approach is, how it will be delivered and what it means for the job you do is what I now want to focus on.

But before I get into the specifics, it's important I set out the philosophy underpinning our new approach - and indeed, underpinning so many of the changes this new Government will undertake in reforming our public services.

Our starting point is that public services should serve the public - meeting their needs, responding to what they want, answering directly to them.

Of course, in an ideal world, what the public wants from the police is no crime, no violent crime, no homicides, no thefts and no drunken louts.

But that is not the world we live in.

Most of us live in big cities - sharing scarce space with people with diverse backgrounds and diverse interests.

That is the reality of our world. The world in which you have to operate.

That's why we want to change the way the police forces of our country are managed.

We want to replace the big government, bureaucratic accountability that has been grown in recent years.

.where police officers are forced to answer to politicians through a range of inspections, targets, gimmicks and performance indicators.

.with democratic accountability that reflects the fact that not all communities in our country are exactly the same and have the same policing needs.

.where you are accountable to the people you serve.

That way, we can help to build confidence in the system and deliver policing that meets local priorities.

In practice, this means striking a new deal with you, the police service.

I want to give the service back its professional responsibility.

. getting rid of the centralised bureaucracy that wastes money, saps morale and crushes innovation .  
and freeing the men and women of our police forces to do what they are trained to do, want to do and  
the public expects them to do - make our society safer.

But in return for this new freedom, the police service must accept a transfer of power over policing from  
Whitehall to communities.

.by giving local people a real say over how their streets are policed.

Let me take each in turn.

Professional responsibility  
First, professional responsibility.

I'll always remember that police recruitment campaign with people like Lennox Lewis and Simon Weston  
saying how they'd struggle to cope with the pressures of being a police officer.

It ended with them saying: "I couldn't do it. Could you?"

You could. That's why you chose this job.

You do. That's why you still do this job.

Each one of you has taken an incredibly brave decision to put yourself in harm's way to protect the  
public.

I said it was time we gave you the respect you deserve.

That means giving you the responsibility you deserve.

It means trusting you.

Because if government won't trust you, then what kind of message does that send to the public?

So we want to give you back that trust, restore pride in your job and bring some common sense back to  
policing.

How you operate is for you to decide with your leaders - that's what professional responsibility means.

So we will return some charging decisions to the police. Instead of waiting around police stations for a  
charging decision, you the officer will be given the responsibility to decide whether to charge for minor  
offences.

We will also look at untangling the knot of health and safety rules.

At the moment, legislation tilts too far in favour of discouraging officers from intervening.

We want to tip the scale back, while at the same time ensuring your safety.

Dismantling targets

We will also look at dismantling the targets in disguise - the Key Performance Indicators - which set  
national, one-size-fits-all priorities for local forces and instead allow you to pursue the crimes and  
criminals you believe you should.

And I am determined that we will be the government that finally gets to grips with all that paperwork you  
find so frustrating. So we will scrap the 'stop' form in its entirety and reduce the burden of the 'stop and  
search' procedures.

I understand that some of the paperwork is necessary, to provide intelligence, to protect you and protect  
our civil liberties.

But there is far too much.

So in the weeks, months and years ahead I want to work closely with you to reduce the amount of paperwork that comes across your desk. If there is bureaucracy that you think is unnecessary and time wasting then I want to hear about it and stop it.

Let me be absolutely clear: I want the police to be crime fighters not form fillers; out on the streets as much as they think necessary, not behind their desk and chained to a computer.

Perhaps most importantly of all, I want to free you by stopping all the initiatives and gimmicks that emanate from central government.

When policing priorities are dictated by the news-cycle rather than what works, you only get the most superficial, short-term change.

We've got to entrench long-term thinking, working with laws that we've got and the powers that you already have to score the line between right-and-wrong in our neighbourhoods.

This is a question of implementing what exists, not legislating for something new.

And I believe it will mean you can go about your job without worrying about the next edict to come from on-high.

With these changes, we will give you the licence to police.

But you will understand the need for an appropriate system of checks, so this new freedom must come with strings attached.

I can assure you, these will not come in the form of bureaucratic meddling from Whitehall.

Instead, they will come from greater accountability to the public you serve.

You will have read about the changes we propose, you may even be worried about what they mean for you, but these will largely affect your chief constables.

Instead of having them answer to Whitehall, we will make them answer to police individuals with a mandate to set local policing priorities.

That mandate will have been earned through election - and those policing priorities will have been developed with the consent of local people.

This is what we mean by democratic, not bureaucratic, accountability.

.directly involving local people in developing local policing strategies.

.providing a clear and visible link between the police and the public.

.and, of course, giving communities the power to kick people out of office if things go wrong.

Won't politicise police

I know the concerns you have that individuals might result in the politicisation of the police force or, worse still, interfere with your operational independence.

I want to put your mind at rest.

The truth is that constant interference by previous Home Secretaries has caused the real politicisation of policing - and locally-elected individuals are a giant step in the right direction.

And let me make it absolutely clear - elected individuals will in no way undermine your operational independence.

They will not manage their forces and they will recognize that the only way of making a police force effective is by letting the professionals get on with it.

The duty and responsibility of managing a police force will fall squarely on the shoulders of its chief constable - as it always has done.

The job of the elected individual is to ensure the policing needs of their communities are met as effectively as possible .

.bringing communities closer to the police, building confidence in the system and restoring trust.

But quite apart from these high level changes, you will need to accept greater accountability too.

Parents expect to be able to compare standards between schools in their area, patients between the performance local hospitals, and residents should be able to do the same with local police forces.

So we will give the public much more information about crime in their streets, with each neighbourhood having a detailed crime map of the crimes in their area.

And with this information in hand, they will then be allowed to challenge you, and your performance, in local beat meetings every month.

What is happening about the dark alleyway where people keep on getting mugged?

What are you doing about the spate of shoplifting that happens after school?

Why are these crimes happening and what are you going to do about it?

These reforms add up to a massive transfer of power from me, the Home Secretary, to the people.

They will be in charge, and everyone - from commissioners, to chief constables to you on the street - will have to answer to them in a big way.

So, this is the deal

So, this is the deal - more freedom to the police professionals; more power to the people.

And if we do these things, I believe there will be one extra massive benefit.

We all know there are tough times ahead. And I know that you are concerned about police officer numbers and pay.

The country faces the worst budget deficit it has ever had.

So the Government's priority is to cut the budget deficit and get the economy moving again. We need to be honest about what that means for us: the Home Office and the police will have to bear a fair share of the burden.

As part of the coalition agreement, we will have a full review of the remuneration and conditions of service for police officers and staff.

My priority as Home Secretary is to help you to do your job. That means I will do all I can to make sure we maintain a strong police presence on our streets.

And as Nick Herbert told you yesterday, we will honour the remainder of the three-year pay deal negotiated by the last government.

But we're going to have to deliver real value for money. And I can't do this without your help.

A big part of the answer comes from finding the waste and cutting it out.

I know how much the police is already doing through shared procurement - but we're going to need to do more.

The scale of our country's deficit makes the challenge we face very severe indeed. We've all got to pull together to get Britain back in the black.

I will fight to ensure your voice is heard, but like other departments and organisations, we need to make sacrifices too.

But the bigger argument I want to make is this.

If we take on this deal I have outlined today.

Cutting bureaucracy and freeing you to do your job.

.pushing power down and giving people control over policing.

.we'll get new ideas, new ways of doing things, real innovation.

We'll get better results. And we'll save money too.

So yes, there will be tough times ahead, yes the decisions will be difficult.

.but if we come together and embark on this change we'll be able to look after the public, save money and protect the resources that are key for you to do your job.

I believe that under this new coalition government we have a unique opportunity to effect real and lasting change.

With a five year parliament we can get on with the job, without the 'will he, won't he call the election?' sort of uncertainty and distractions we've had for the last three years.

Instead the focus will be on bringing in good, sound legislation that has common sense and better governance at its essence, and not just a good news story.

A constantly changing political landscape isn't good for the country.

I truly believe that this government will bring some much needed stability and focus; allowing us all to get on with making Britain a better, brighter and safer place.

Let me end by saying this.

We could go on as we are.

We could on with the paperwork, the diktats, the bureaucracy.

We could go on with crime too high and public confidence too low.

Or we could do things differently.

If you want to get rid of interference from bureaucrats in Whitehall .

If you want your judgement and discretion back .

If you want to answer to the people you signed up to serve and protect .

. then come with me.

And if you come with me, I will make this promise: I will always back you, I will always support you, I will always fight for you.

That's the deal I am offering today.

It offers radical change - real change. And I hope you accept it. Together we can make sure that British policing remains the envy of the world.