



Home Secretary speech to Police Federation Conference 2012 in Bournemouth

16.05.12.

Fallen Officers

Each May this Police Federation gathers and pays its respects to the police men and women of England and Wales who fell in the year before.

Their loss is indeed the greatest reminder of what we all owe to police officers. Their memory reminds us of what police officers can sacrifice. So let us remember:

PC Ian Swaddling;
PC Scott Eastwood-Smith;
PC Perviz Ahmed;
PC Anthony Wright;
PC Ramin Tolouie;
PC Mark Goodlad;
DC Andrew Stokes;
DC Karen Paterson;
Inspector Preston Gurr;

And of course we also remember PC David Rathband. I had the great privilege of meeting David Rathband. He was a fine and brave police officer. He dedicated his professional life to the service of the public. And, following the cowardly attack on him, he dedicated himself to helping other emergency service personnel injured in the line of duty.

The Blue Lamp Foundation, the charity that David Rathband founded, is a fitting tribute to his life and to his work; and it provides a legacy of which I hope he would be proud.

Riots

Coming together each May also gives us the chance to look back at the events of the last year.

Last summer, we saw the best of Britain, as the country celebrated the Royal Wedding, and the worst of Britain, when we saw rioting on the streets of our towns and cities.

During those riots, police officers braved the bricks, the petrol bombs and even the bullets. Police officers did their duty despite the danger.

I know that many of you sacrificed a great deal. You worked double shifts. You travelled many miles. Your leave was cancelled. Some of you slept on police station floors. And more than 300 of you were injured.

So I pay tribute to every officer who served last summer.

Cuts

There is so much to be proud of in British policing.

But that doesn't mean that everything in policing is perfect. And it doesn't mean that there is no need for reform.

Paul, you've just told us that there is a great deal that you don't like about the Government's policing policies.

But let's be clear: broadly, what we're talking about comes down to money – on pensions, pay and budgets.

Let's remember why we're having to take tough decisions about money.

We have just been through the worst financial crisis in living memory.

We had the largest budget deficit in our peacetime history.

We are still spending £130 million every day just paying the interest on our debts. Not paying off our debts, just paying the interest on the debts. That's more than we spend on the police, the courts, prisons and probation combined.

And we are still spending, each day, more than we earn in tax. That means we have to borrow to make up the shortfall.

So we have taken the difficult but necessary decision to face up to our debts, deal with our deficit, and get our spending under control.

It's been tough. It has led to many difficult decisions. And it has meant that policing has had to take its share of cuts. And for the good of our country, we have to see it through.

The cuts will be challenging, they will involve hard choices, but they are manageable and they are affordable.

I know the Fed often say we're singling out the police. But that simply isn't true.

Prisons and probation are facing cuts just like policing.

The education budget is often cited, but pupil numbers are rising by over 30,000 per year.

You talk about the NHS budget, but health inflation is high and demand is rising.

You often say defence is protected but let's remember we're fighting a war; the MOD is still paying the bills for old contracts; and the forces have already had to make 7,000 soldiers, sailors and RAF personnel redundant.

So let's stop pretending the police are being picked on. Every part of the public sector is having to take its share of the pain.

Winsor

I've always been clear with you that the police will have to make their share of the cuts.

And although there is a great deal we can do through things like greater efficiency, shared procurement and force collaboration, I've always been clear that pay will have to form part of the savings. When three quarters of police spending is on pay, we have no other choice. The only alternative is more police job losses.

That's why - across the whole public sector - we've had to freeze pay for two years.

It's why we've said pay rises should average 1 per cent after that.

And it's also why we're having to reform police pay and conditions.

But the Winsor reforms are about more than just making savings.

The police pay system was designed over 30 years ago, in the 1970s and it is now hopelessly out of date.

The current system rewards time spent in the job. It doesn't properly reward the hardest working officers, the talented constables, the skilled sergeants, the real crime fighters.

We need a police pay system that encourages frontline service; that values specialist skills; respects the office of constable and recognises the demands placed on you and your families.

In the longer term, Winsor has proposed regular fitness testing; new entry requirements so forces can hire the most talented recruits; shorter pay scales so the best can progress quickly; and direct entry so experienced individuals

can bring skills and experience into the senior ranks from outside. These are reforms that hard working police officers should welcome.

Winsor noted that there are other professions – notably soldiers and prison officers – who earn considerably less than police officers, who don't earn overtime, who can be made redundant and yet still do not have the right to strike.

I know that many Fed members don't like the Winsor Report – change is never easy, especially when it involves pay. But these reforms are in the long-term interests of policing, and that is something everybody in this hall cares about.

I know, too, that many Fed reps are talking about the right to strike. But I must be clear with you: the right to strike is not on the table. Keeping our communities safe is simply too important.

I know I'm a Home Secretary who hasn't been able to bring the Federation lots of good news: times are tough and I've had to take difficult decisions, particularly on pay.

But I've always believed it's important to tell it as it is, not how we'd like it to be.

Two years ago, I told you I'd honour the three-year pay deal we'd inherited, and I did.

Last year, when the Police Arbitration Tribunal considered the Winsor report part one, you urged me to accept the Tribunal's recommendations quickly and in full, and I did.

The Tribunal's decision meant that the youngest officers would be protected from the increment freeze, officers would still receive time and a third for casual overtime, and a new £50 overnight allowance would be introduced for officers on mutual aid away from home.

That wasn't the package I proposed, but I didn't argue, I considered it carefully, and I honoured the Tribunal's decision.

So let's be clear about what the Winsor proposals actually mean: total savings of less than two per cent of the police officer pay bill; skills, hard-work and frontline officers rewarded; a new unsocial hours allowance; faster progression through the pay scales; and every single penny of savings ploughed back into policing.

You will remain the best paid of all the emergency services - and that is what you deserve to be.

Police Pensions

On pensions, as well as on pay, I have always been clear with you that we will have to take difficult decisions.

People are living longer and payouts for public service pensions are costing taxpayers more and more.

That would be unsustainable even without the deficit we have.

So, again, we took the difficult, the unpopular, but the necessary decision to reform pensions for all public service workers.

We have now put forward a package for police pensions that is considerably better than pensions in the private sector and that compares very favourably with pensions in the public service.

Like workers across the public service, it does mean that we are asking you to pay more for your future pension.

But you will still receive a guaranteed pension which is index-linked and inflation-protected.

The pension you have built up will be protected, as I've already promised.

In future, you will be able to continue to build up your benefits more quickly than most other public servants.

I've already said that we will protect the pensions of officers within ten years of pension age. I'm consulting the Federation and others in the Police Negotiating Board on how to make these changes work in the best interests of officers.

Every officer aged 45 or over will see no change to their pension whatsoever. And there will be no change for any officer aged 40 or over and less than ten years from full pension who is in the old scheme. Protected officers in that scheme will also continue to receive the double accrual rate you were expecting after 20 years' service. That is better protection than has been offered for any other public servants' pension scheme - including fire-fighters.

And, recognising the unique demands you face, I fought hard to have your pension age considered separately from other public servants. So your pension age will remain significantly lower than for other public servants – 60 for police officers, as opposed to 65 rising to 68 for most other public sector workers.

Police officers make an incredible contribution to our society. It is right that you should receive a competitive and attractive pension package and it is right that your pension age should be lower. But because police officers work for fewer years and have more generous pension arrangements than almost any other public servants, that means the taxpayer contributes more to your pension than most others, and it means you have to contribute more too.

Improving Policing

So, yes, we have to take difficult decisions, but that doesn't mean we can't change policing for the better and help you to do your job.

So yes we're setting up a Police Professional Body - led by a police officer and designed for police officers - to ensure you get the highest quality training and to further enhance your skills.

We're introducing a National Crime Agency to get a better grip on serious crime, defend our borders, tackle economic and cyber crime, and protect children and vulnerable people.

We're bringing in new Police and Crime Commissioners to give the public the policing they want. And that, I believe, is the kind of policing you want. Less direction from the bureaucrats in Whitehall; more from the people in the street. Less time in the station, more on the beat. Less form filling, more crime fighting.

And we're going to help police officers who've served the public and have been injured. So I will give half a million pounds of Home Office funding to St. Andrews Police Treatment Centre in North Yorkshire to improve their facilities. I have also offered funding to the Police Rehabilitation Centre at Flint House in Oxfordshire.

Both of these tremendous centres provide intensive rehabilitation, physiotherapy and convalescent care for sick and injured officers, helping thousands get back to health and back to duty every year.

This funding will help them provide the very best facilities to give sick and injured officers the chance to return to the job they love.

Reducing Bureaucracy

I spend a lot of time talking to police officers who love their job. But those officers tell me they still do too much paperwork and not enough police work.

The officers who make an arrest but then have to spend the rest of the day filling out forms.

The officers who have to escort mental health patients to hospital and wait there for hours.

The officers who have to go to Court, wait around to be called and then hear the case has been adjourned.

We need to put this right.

Each and every one of you joined the force to serve the public. I know you want to spend more time crime fighting and less time form writing. I know you

want to be trusted more and told what to do less. I know you want more discretion to do what your professional judgement tells you is right.

We've already made changes that, if fully implemented in every force, could save up to 4.5 million police hours every year. That's the equivalent of getting over 2,100 police officers back on the streets.

Now, I know the pace of change in some forces still isn't as quick as you or I would like, and we still need senior officers to do more. But I'm sticking to the deal I offered you when I first spoke here two years ago: less paperwork in exchange for more public accountability. Fewer targets, rules and regulations; greater freedom, discretion and trust.

Some forces are really rising to the challenge. Two weeks ago I was in Hampshire where I met officers who are using new 'Toughbooks' to do their paperwork while they're out in their response vehicles. Documents are stored electronically, which means there's no need to fill in multiple forms or waste time photocopying as cases go through the criminal justice system. Hampshire officers told me they can stay out on patrol for longer, spending less time in the station and more time on the streets keeping people safe.

But officers in all forces should now have started to see the impact of our reforms in their day-to-day work.

This year, most of you should have had a simpler, quicker and more focused performance and development review.

You should all now be following more common sense health and safety guidance.

For most of you, the stop and account form should be a thing of the past.

Some of you will be involved in the pilots aimed at freeing up your time to help vulnerable victims of domestic violence and missing persons.

You might have used the new video links system so you don't have to waste time waiting at court.

Many of you have had the chance to use your discretion on charging decisions, and we are currently exploring how we can extend that to include shoplifting.

And you should also by now be using electronic systems to manage cases with the CPS, rather than all the photocopying, typing and taking papers to court.

But I want us to keep going further. We've already legislated to allow police officers to make the decision to offer a conditional caution. This means, for the first time, you will be able to decide to impose conditions on an offender to get them to change their behaviour.

And now I want to do more. The police can already prosecute – without the Crown Prosecution Service - simple traffic offences, like speeding, driving without insurance, or failing to produce a driving licence.

But at the moment, not all forces are making the most of that freedom. And if a defendant doesn't enter a plea or doesn't turn up in court, you have to hand over all the paperwork and evidence that you've built up to the Crown Prosecution Service. All your hard work is duplicated, all your decisions are reviewed and you have to wait for another court date, which can take months.

That is a system that works in nobody's interest. Wasting police time is supposed to be a criminal offence – but it's what's happening every single day.

So I want to give the police responsibility for prosecuting more of these cases.

I have agreed with your forces that they will make full use of your existing powers across the whole country.

And today I can announce that I will extend your freedom to prosecute cases, starting with traffic offences where the defendant doesn't enter a plea or doesn't turn up in court.

Together, these changes should allow the police to prosecute up to half a million cases every year. That's around half of all cases currently heard in Magistrates courts.

And I don't want to stop there. So I can also announce that, as part of wider criminal justice reform, the Government will allow the police to prosecute a wider range of low-level offences. I will announce the details of how we will introduce this change and what offences it will apply to by the end of the summer.

Less bureaucracy, greater police discretion, faster justice.

I also want to help you by dealing with the problems that cause crime in the first place.

That's why, for example, we're going to deal with the binge drinking that fuels around fifty per cent of all violent crime. You shouldn't have to spend your Friday and Saturday evenings dealing with drunken jobs. By making sure alcohol can only be sold at a sensible price, and by giving local agencies the power to tackle problem pubs and off-licences, we can cut crime and reduce your workload.

We're also getting other agencies to do more to prevent young people getting caught up in drugs.

And we're going to finally sort out the enormous amount of police time spent on dealing with mental health patients.

Just last week the custody sergeant in my local police station in Maidenhead told me of the problems she faced in dealing with mentally ill people.

A police station shouldn't be the section 136 "place of safety" for mentally ill people, tying up police resources, stopping you locking up criminals. And you shouldn't have to escort mildly disruptive patients to hospital, wasting your time when you could be on the streets.

So I have secured the Health Secretary's commitment to divert more mentally ill offenders away from the criminal justice system. That will include introducing mental health liaison and diversion services at every police station that needs them.

And we have also agreed to consider the transfer of commissioning of all police health services to the NHS as soon as possible. That means health professionals will look after mentally ill offenders and victims, not the police – because that is their job, not yours.

I don't want police officers doing other people's jobs - the police are crime-fighters and that is the job I want them doing.

And on that subject, let me say something else: it is because the police are crime-fighters that we will never privatise policing.

Police forces already use the private sector to make your jobs easier - they can bring in expertise and new technology to support you; they can provide staff for control rooms and custody centres, freeing warranted officers for frontline roles.

But the crime fighters will remain police officers, patrolling will not be privatised and policing will remain a public service, accountable to the people and carried out by consent.

It will only ever be police officers who make arrests; it will only ever be police officers who lead investigations; and it will only ever be police officers who direct policing operations.

The office of constable is the bedrock of British policing. And that is something that we will never change.

Conclusion

But policing does need change.

I know that change can be difficult, unsettling, sometimes even painful.

But it's my job to tell it like it is, not how we'd like it to be.

It's my job to do what's right for policing and right for the country.

And it's my job to reform policing so it is fit to face the future.

Less paper-work; more police-work.

More power for the public; less power for the bureaucrats.

And freeing the finest police officers in the world to fight crime.

That is my vision for policing; and that is what I am determined to deliver.

Thank you.