



Paul McKeever, Chairman's Speech to PFEW Conference - 16 May 2012 – EMBARGOED UNTIL 11.00AM

16.05.12.

Introduction

'Home Secretary - only a matter of weeks ago I attended the memorial service for PC David Rathband.

A brave and heroic police officer who, whatever way some may like to dress it up, was effectively killed by Raoul Moat.

At that memorial service I heard an address by a man who knew David better than I did. That man was Colin Washington. Colin told the congregation that David had acted as his liaison officer when his wife and daughter tragically died in a road traffic collision.

Mr Washington told how David showed immense compassion and consideration and demonstrated at the highest level, all the qualities that the British police are renowned for. Yet we see that those values are not being given the weighting that they should within your preferred model of British policing. Your model is less focused on technical and human skills and based on academia.

We are against the establishment of a professional body that sets the service on a course based wholly on academia at the expense of practical skills. We have seen other parts of the public sector, such as nursing, move away from technical skills and the core values of that profession appear to have been diminished. The Prime Minister himself has alluded to this.

Home Secretary – do not make the same mistake with policing. It is the type of person we recruit, the training and support we provide, the values we hold and appropriate remuneration and conditions of service that makes a profession.

We never lose sight of the fact that we are ordinary people doing an extraordinary job. Our core values are compassion, empathy, discretion, bravery and the ability to work autonomously.

We do not need a professional body; it completely misunderstands what it means to hold the independent Office of Constable. I pose the question - if it wasn't for the demise of the NPIA and the desire to remove ACPO, would we be facing complete flux through the reorganisation of training etc, through the creation of this unnecessary body, which is consuming so much of everybody's time.

Before I move on I would like to say, Home Secretary, both you and the Prime Minister have said many fine words about the British police service being the best in the world and how much admire and respect police officers. However, actions do speak louder than words.

Let us compare and contrast what is happening in England and Wales with that of our colleagues in Scotland. Recently, Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Justice Secretary Minister said he would introduce legislation that would require those who assault police to pay a financial penalty that would benefit officers by being paid directly to their police treatment centre in Scotland, a centre, like the two English equivalents, that is almost entirely funded out of police officers pockets.

Home Secretary - I call on you to follow the Scottish lead. Not only do our Scottish colleagues have the support of their government, they have no Winsor, they have no professional body and no loss in police officers – but what they do have had is a fall in crime.

BAD DEAL FOR EVERY-ONE

Bad for Officers

'Home Secretary - this is a bad deal for everyone.

Winsor 1 - Winsor 2 - it is bad for police officers already facing effectively a 4-year pay freeze with inflation increasing.

We are being expected to pay more to our pensions; more than the public sector - that is grossly unfair.

On top of what others are facing, we have Winsor 1 and Winsor 2 taking hundreds of thousands of pounds from officers' pockets. In addition, the cuts mean that officers are also less safe as we see the number of police officers decline month by month.

I remember as a young officer what it's like to lay awake at night worrying about paying the bills. Home Secretary, we know there are few in the Cabinet who have ever had to worry about paying their bills. But when demand of police officers that many lose 25-30% of their spending power, imagine the pressure, stress, anxiety and trauma you imposing on them.

You cannot expect officers, those who understood the fiscal situation and accepted that some cuts were necessary, to take an unfair share of the cuts and just sit there and be content with their lot.

We understand you have been ably assisted and led into this by ACPO. But Home Secretary, you should know by now, if you want to speak to politicians, speak to ACPO. If you want to speak to the voice of the service, then speak to us.

Bad for the Service

'But this is a bad deal for the police service. We have less resilience; fewer warranted officers, a weakened front-line and a radically altered model of British policing. You are on the precipice of destroying a police service that is admired and replicated throughout the world.

Home Secretary, we are seeing proposals, things being put in place without infrastructure, that will fundamentally change the dynamics of policing. In November we have the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners. On the face of it this may sound a new, innovative idea, but in reality, what will it give us? Undoubtedly, it will be same old, same old.

You have chosen to introduce politics into policing.

Whilst it is not our place to determine how we are held to account, we have real concerns about PCC's. What controls will be on them? Will they be mandated to buy services from the Professional Body or Newco - no one can answer these questions. Will chaos ensue and we see the emergence of a postcode lottery for policing?

There will be unintended consequences especially when you look what is happening elsewhere. Great swathes of the police service are being privatized – do the public want this?

How far do you intend to go with this Home Secretary? People are concerned about non-independent, shareholder-driven policing.

'Lastly, within this changing dynamic is the changing face of the Office of Constable - the most serious change of all.

If you were to look at us from a business point of view, what would be our biggest strength? Trust, independence, fairness, integrity, compassion, understanding - it is an Office the public respect and understand - communities identify with constables.

Why you have adopted the Winsor proposals, such as severance. You need to think about this very carefully – you are meddling with the very bedrock of British policing. And you meddle, not at your peril, but at peril of public safety.

This is a slippery slope that you are leading policing down Home Secretary.

Why you are doing this is something we cannot comprehend. It shifts the balance from police officers being Officers of the Crown to being employees. It is for that reason, that many are calling for the question to be asked whether we should be seeking full employment rights for them.

This is your choice. It is not too late to review your position – think again Home Secretary.

Bad for the Public

‘But, importantly, this is also a bad deal for the public.

The only thing you get with 20% less budget is less – less crime fighting, less resilience, less public safety, less police officer safety.

Then again, I may be wrong. Home Secretary – you may have a point – you do get more. More crime; more disorder; more anti-social behaviour; more disaffection and a lot more demoralisation.

Getting it wrong

‘Home Secretary, we have offered you help and assistance from the first time you appeared here just shortly after your appointment in 2010. We tried to warn you about areas of real concern. We warned you about the potential for riots and even showed you a film to the tune of ‘I predict a riot’. We were accused of scaremongering. But you only have to look at what happened last summer.

In London alone 16,000 police officers were needed to restore order. It is darkly poetic that this is the exact same number of police officers HMIC predict we will lose over four years. The resilience of the service is going. We saw the worst riots in our country’s history. 5 dead, many homeless and thousands of businesses damaged and destroyed. In London alone 250 police officers were injured. Our image abroad was damaged - how much overseas investment has been lost?

And for the record Home Secretary - it was not the re-emergence of a few senior politicians from holidays abroad that stopped the riots; it was tens of thousands of police officers across the country that stopped the riots by putting their lives and their livelihoods on the line for their communities. Home Secretary, quite simply, you were wrong.

In relation to the front line – we have already lost 5216 officers from the front line. The frontline, we were assured would be protected and preserved from the massive budget cuts we are facing.

Home Secretary, do you know that in Wales alone, they are losing the equivalent of one whole police force. Dylan Thomas, one of the country’s great wordsmiths, would have to rewrite his classic work ‘Under Milk Wood’,

because broad beamed Constable Attila Rees would be no more, because the men and women like PC Rees across the country are going.

You were wrong when you said the frontline would not be affected; the front line is being affected.

You predicted that crime would not be affected when we predicted it would be 'Christmas for criminals'. We have only just finished the first year of cuts and we see at best, crime plateauing, but some recession-based crime is on the rise. Are we on the cusp?

You and your Cabinet colleagues said you had no choice when you made such severe budget cuts, but you do. We see tens of billions of pounds appearing from where - to prop up other countries' economies while, for the lack of a farthing, the British police service is crumbling.

Why the rush?

'Home Secretary, before I say what I am about to say, I should make clear to you - I have nothing against bankers. In fact, some of my best friends are bankers; indeed, my daughter's partner is a banker too.

During the riots in August last year, when police officers were risking their lives, government said that the riots meant the cuts/reforms had to be rushed through even more quickly.

Yet compare and contrast this with what was said about banking reform, where the root cause of our problems in policing originates. Is there the same imperative to rush pell mell into change failed systems?

No, with banking your Government said that reforms must progress slowly, so as to ensure it is done correctly and to prevent failure, while we have to face ever faster cuts and reforms so that we can face failure?

We do not understand this. Especially as we told you when you first addressed our conference that we understood the fiscal dilemma you faced and were willing to do what we could to help. You'll recall I quoted Alexander Pope and said a little learning can be a dangerous thing.

Home Secretary, it would appear you like to live dangerously.

So, a successful system of policing, respected and highly regarded around the world has to face reckless change which will damage the service and the communities we serve, while the cause of our problems is allowed to escape the ravages of change. Extraordinary Home Secretary, quite extraordinary.

Conclusion

'Home Secretary, we warned you about the riots and you said we were scaremongering.

We warned you that a 20% budget cut would damage the front line and were told we were wrong.

We are warning you that you are racing towards a train crash that could destroy the effectiveness of policing in this country and harm the safety of the public.

Home Secretary - take breath.

Stop now, and review what you're doing or you will be found guilty of destroying the finest police service in the world.'

END