

The most appropriate way I can start today is by saluting the memory of Paul McKeever, who led the Police Federation until just before he died suddenly and sadly in January.

Everyone here knows that Paul and I did not agree on everything – and he sometimes enjoyed a good joke at my expense – but I always respected his skills as a negotiator and valued his decency, honesty and sincerity as a police officer and as a man and I was honoured to take part in his memorial service.

I'd like also to welcome your new chairman Steve Williams, and I do look forward to working with him in future. I know Steve has initiated an independent, root and branch review of the Fed's purpose and structure, and I think everyone involved in policing is looking forward with interest to seeing the outcome of that work.

Life should mean life for anybody who murders a police officer

Being a police officer is a tough, dangerous job. Those of us who work behind desks should never forget that you face the possibility of an encounter with lethal danger every day. You know it the moment you leave the station to do your job.

There is no more poignant reminder of the public service performed by police officers than the roll call of those who lost their lives over the last twelve months.

I would like to pay tribute to:

- Police Constable Ian Dibell
- Detective Constable Adele Cashman
- Police Constable Nicola Hughes
- Police Constable Fiona Bone
- Police Constable Andrew Brama
- Police Constable Bruce Stevenson
- Police Constable Steven Rawson
- Sergeant Ian Harman
- Special Constable Scott Bennett

All of whom lost their lives serving the public.

When Nicola Hughes and Fiona Bone were murdered last year, I went up to Manchester to meet their colleagues. I was struck by their dignified response to the horrific killings, and their determination to bring not just the perpetrator to justice, but to confront the world of organised crime that corrodes too many of our communities.

The murder of a police officer is a particularly appalling crime. To attack and kill a police officer is to attack the fundamental basis of our society.

We ask police officers to keep us safe by confronting and stopping violent criminals for us. We ask you to take the risks so that we don't have to. And sometimes you are targeted by criminals because of what you represent.

That is why I can announce today that, subject to consultation with the Sentencing Council, the Government will change the law so that the starting point for anybody who kills a police officer should be a life sentence without parole.

We are clear: life should mean life for anyone convicted of murdering a police officer.

Let's be proud that police reform is working and crime is falling

The last twelve months have seen some spectacular examples of effective policing. And I want to thank you all for ensuring that the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympic and Paralympic Games went so smoothly.

This was not just the result of policing in London, but throughout the whole of Britain. All of you made considerable sacrifices, not only to guarantee the safety of the competitors and the spectators – but also to ensure that there was no crime wave in the rest of the country when the emphasis of law enforcement was on the capital.

Both events showed that we have in Britain the best police officers in the world.

You deserve recognition, too, for your part in the remarkable fall in crime that has taken place since the mid-1990s. Since the election – and the beginning of police budget cuts – recorded crime has fallen by more than ten per cent. And for those who query that statistic: it is verified by the Crime Survey for England and Wales – which shows crime at its lowest level for thirty years.

The scale of the debt crisis we inherited from Labour means we have had to take very difficult decisions on public spending, including on police spending. I know you haven't liked it, I know it's caused pain, and I know there are fewer police officers than there were three years ago. But the experts, including, it has to be said, the Police Federation – who confidently predicted that cuts would mean a decimated frontline, rises in crime, "Christmas for criminals" – have all been proven wrong.

That they have been proven wrong is partly down to the reforms we have implemented – difficult reforms like changes to pay and conditions. It's partly down to the leadership of your chief constables. But of course, it's also down to you, the men and women who keep our streets safe from criminals.

Trusting the professional judgement of the police: increasing the number of police-led prosecutions

I know that many of you think our police reforms are a byword for cuts. But while the cuts make reform all the more important, the changes we are making are driven by a desire to make the police even better. In particular, I want to make it easier for you to get on with your work. That's why I've ended the culture of central control and said I trust officers to use their professional discretion.

I have got rid of Labour's plethora of targets and the whole structure of detailed managerial supervision that former Home Secretaries used to monitor and control what you do. I've extended the number of cases in which you can make charging decisions. I've reduced the reporting requirements for stop and search. Abolished the stop and account form altogether.

And started to allow the police to prosecute some cases in court rather than handing everything over to the CPS.

But while I've given up that central control, I know the impact hasn't been felt by officers in every force. I know that some forces have retained the old bureaucracy. I know many middle managers can't manage without the targets. And I know that dilapidated IT still wastes too much of your time.

So I would like you – the Fed leadership, delegates here today, and officers around the country – to tell me where this is happening and I will help you.

One senior police officer said recently that “trust is good. But supervision is better”. This is exactly the wrong way round. Trust is much, much better than supervision.

Because I trust you, I want to increase the number of police-led prosecutions, so that you can deal with a whole range of offences where people plead guilty. In the last year we've given you the power to prosecute new offences, from drunk and disorderly to criminal damage. In total, up to 241,000 further cases have been brought within scope for the police to lead prosecutions. That means you can process each case at least seven days faster by not having to hand it over to the CPS.

I know that dealing with the CPS on minor offences wastes a great deal of your time, and I know how frustrating that can be.

That's why I can announce today that I will increase the scope of police-led prosecutions to include shoplifting of goods worth £200 or less. That means up to another 50,000 prosecutions being led by the police – cases that will be dealt with faster and more effectively.

Last week, we introduced legislation in Parliament that will make this happen. It will reduce the amount of time you have to spend waiting for CPS lawyers, end the duplication of paperwork and put you back in charge of these cases.

I hope you will see that these changes are just the latest in a process that gives the police a greater role in routine prosecutions, and in time I would like to go further still.

Let me say it again: the principle underlying my reforms is that I trust you to do a good job.

The College of Policing has been established to help you do an even better one.

I know that there were initially some doubts from the Fed about the College, but I am delighted that you are now fully behind the College's goal of setting professional standards and helping officers to follow them. From the start, the Fed has been involved in the creation of the College and I hope you will continue to shape its future.

For those people who haven't yet fully realised the significance of the College, I want to spell it out: the days of a police profession defined and limited by hierarchy and rank are over. For the first time, you will be at the heart of an institution that will determine the future of policing.

So I'm trusting you to get policing right. I am not going to hand down directives or targets to you, insisting you do this or that. I want you to catch criminals and cut crime. How you do it is up to you. You are going to set the standards for your profession.

Making sure the public have confidence in the police

Policing is by consent in this country. We the people consent to the powers that the police are granted over us because we trust you to use those powers with fairness. You don't all routinely carry guns. You don't swagger around intimidating people. You are part of the local community. And that is why you are trusted by the public.

I want to preserve and increase that trust.

Trust is a very precious commodity. It is also very fragile. A few isolated instances of police malpractice, of corruption or of incompetence, can have a drastic effect on it. Historical cases such as Hillsborough have done immense damage. So too has the kind of behaviour that came out in course of the Leveson Inquiry. And it's right that we should get to the bottom of the notorious murder of Daniel Morgan, which is why we've set up the independent panel I announced last Friday.

The Inspectors' Report 'Without Fear or Favour' demonstrated to everyone that corruption is not endemic in the British police. But that report was also unequivocal: we cannot tolerate the tiny minority who do not live up to the standards the public is entitled to expect.

I am sure everyone in this hall agrees. But if we're to stamp out isolated cases of corruption and malpractice, we need clear mechanisms in place to check that high standards are maintained. That is what my 'integrity agenda' amounts to.

No one here needs to be afraid of it. The College of Policing will publish a new code of ethics to be distributed to officers of all ranks. It will create a single set of professional standards on which officers will be tested throughout their careers – but I don't think it's likely to contain anything a decent officer won't already know.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission will be responsible for dealing with all serious and sensitive allegations against the police. The College of Policing will publish a national register of officers who have been dismissed for misconduct, or would have been dismissed had they not resigned or retired. Disciplinary hearings against officers who resign or retire will be pursued to their conclusion – and anyone found guilty will be added to that register, just to make sure that they do not reappear working for another police force.

The public have zero tolerance for police malpractice. I have zero tolerance for police malpractice. And I believe that every decent police officer in this country has zero tolerance for police malpractice.

Malpractice is not, however, just about the obvious things, such as corruption or negligence. It is also about the things that a small number of officers do that end up making sections of the public think that officers don't care about them, or put their own interests first.

I know that the vast majority of you are dedicated public servants of the best kind. But when a police officer sues a member of the public because they slipped on private property – that is

simply not the sort of attitude police officers should exhibit. I want to work with the Federation to make sure police officers don't make frivolous claims.

Not least because it would be quite wrong if people become reluctant to call the police for fear of being sued.

It is the responsibility of every officer to treat everybody with respect and give the public confidence that the police do not grant special favours or status to anyone. That you do your jobs without fear or favour.

We can change the rules, and we can improve oversight of police conduct, but there is a duty on all of you to confront any behaviour that doesn't reflect those high standards. Enormous strides have been made over the last twenty years, but it's time to consign what remains of the old canteen culture to history.

I trust you to treat the public fairly – and the overwhelming majority of you do. But I can't take your reputation for honesty, decency and fairness for granted – and neither can you.

Freeing up the police to cut crime

Trusting you underlies another of my reforms: freeing up your time so you can do the job you signed up to do, which is catching criminals.

I know that's what you want to do. And I also know that many things get in the way of your doing it.

But I know that if those obstacles were removed, you would spend more time going after the thugs and bullies, the drug pushers and the muggers, and all the other criminals who wreck our communities.

Removing those obstacles is not just a matter of reducing unnecessary and burdensome bureaucracy – although that certainly counts for a great deal. If the measures we have put in place to reduce bureaucracy are implemented properly, then it will mean as many as 4.5 million currently wasted hours of police time would be saved.

But I know that they haven't always been implemented properly. I know that the improvements haven't been passed on by chief constables in every force.

I can only reiterate: let me know when you think your bosses are loading you with unnecessary paperwork and I will help.

Organisational changes can make a very significant difference.

Here's a specific instance of this: suspects do not have to be charged at a police station, with all the bureaucracy involved in having a police officer, and sometimes two, deal with charging a single offender in person.

Instead, suspects can be charged by post – and a number of forces have started doing precisely that. They have found that it saves around two hours of police officer time per suspect, adding up to approximately 300,000 officer hours saved over the course of a year.

Body-worn cameras can help improve the collection of evidence. Five police forces – Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Sussex, Thames Valley and Avon and Somerset – are already routinely using them. Evidence from Scotland suggests that evidence from body-worn cameras can increase the number of early guilty pleas to the extent that ninety per cent of suspects confronted by that evidence plead guilty early. They can also help by eliminating vexatious complaints from known troublemakers – something I know causes a lot of unnecessary stress and wastes too much police time.

But many of the obstacles to you doing your job of catching criminals are things such as waiting around for witnesses who do not turn up, or for court hearings that are delayed, or travelling back to the station to get papers or retrieve information from police computers that are incompatible with those at court.

I share your frustration about that. I know it is hampering your ability to do your jobs – and I want to help you do something about it.

One thing that should change that situation is the introduction of toughbooks and police smartphones, because they can put much of the information officers need in their hands immediately.

You won't need to go back to the station to take witness statements: you'll be able to take them on the spot. The witness will be able to sign the statement electronically. They will receive a reference number which they can use to track the process of the investigation at any time.

Changes like this are naturally going to require some significant improvements to the existing police IT systems. We're all aware of the problems at the moment: overlapping systems that aren't compatible with each other, and which crash when they are most needed.

Fixing all those problems is going to take time, but we've made a start by establishing the Police ICT Company, backing forces- like Hampshire and Thames Valley- that invest in the right technology, and supporting police commissioners- like Sir Graham Bright- who want to work across several forces to buy better kit.

Saving police time, caring for vulnerable people: mental health

One of the biggest blocks to police officers dedicating their working hours to catching criminals can't be solved by technology, however: it is the amount of police time taken up dealing with people with mental health problems.

Police officers have many skills, but they are not in a position to be psychiatrists diagnosing and treating mental illness – nor are you meant to be social workers or ambulance drivers. You are thrust into that role because when members of the public have concerns for an individual's safety, they do not know who to call for help –except the police. But police officers are not doctors, and it is quite wrong that in more than a third of cases where mentally ill people are detained for their own safety, the place of safety is not a hospital but a police cell.

HMIC estimate that about two per cent of police time is spent dealing with people with mental health problems. But a survey commissioned by Matthew Ellis, the Staffordshire

Police and Crime Commissioner, put the estimate at somewhere between 15 to 25 per cent of police time. If that's true across the country, it's the equivalent of around 26,000 officers. Of course some of these people will have been arrested for an offence but others will simply have come into contact with the police. And it isn't just a question of police resources. As Lord Adebowale's report published last week makes clear, the status quo isn't good enough for mentally ill people themselves.

This is quite clearly unacceptable, but the problem can only be fully resolved when there are full and effective mental health services and fully-staffed mental health centres.

Damian Green, the Policing Minister, and I have been working with Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, and I'm very grateful for the support from the Department of Health and NHS England. I want to tell you what we plan to do.

First, the Health Secretary and I have agreed that it is not acceptable for any local area to lack a health-based place of safety. We will therefore undertake an urgent assessment of the availability of current places of safety. The Health Secretary and I will receive the conclusions of this work in the next two months, and I expect its findings to be acted upon quickly.

Second, we have agreed that the Care Quality Commission – the organisation responsible for regulating the performance of health providers – will undertake a rigorous inspection of the quality of all places of safety over the course of the year.

Third, where we know already there are gaps, we will act as quickly as possible to fill them. In North Yorkshire, for example, there isn't a single health-based place of safety, and that simply isn't acceptable. A new health-based place of safety will therefore open in Scarborough by October, with two more centres opening within this financial year. In the meantime, the NHS is exploring interim options to ensure that police stations do not remain the default destination.

Fourth, police officers should not have to step in to act as ambulance drivers for mentally-ill people. The provision of ambulance services for these emergency cases will be reviewed by the NHS this year.

Fifth, I want to build on the best work police officers and health professionals are doing together on the ground. In Leicestershire, Cleveland and Scarborough, police are running street triage services, where mental health nursing staff accompany officers to incidents which look likely to result in a detention under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act.

Initial results are showing better outcomes for vulnerable people, quicker solutions for police officers and reductions in the use of Section 136. So I want to see the scheme rolled out across the country. I have therefore agreed that there will be additional money this year to set up four new street triage pilots, in areas identified by the police.

I believe all these proposals will make a real difference to police officers on the ground. But ultimately, police officers need the assurance that vulnerable people with mental health problems will be dealt with by health and social care services, not the police. This year, Department of Health will lead a review of the operation of section 136 of the Mental Health

Act to ensure that the legislative framework supports getting the right support for people at the right time.

Let's be proud that crime is falling and work together to make British policing even better

I want to work with the Federation to get things like mental health right, not just for the patients we're talking about, but for the NHS and the police too. I believe things are better – indeed the outcomes are better for both the police and the public – when we work together.

While I've been Home Secretary, I haven't often been able to come here with good news. I haven't often been able to tell you what you have wanted to hear. But that isn't what I'm here to do.

I know that the anxiety about job losses, pay and conditions and your pensions haven't gone away. But we now have more certainty than we have had in the last couple of years. The pay reforms are being implemented and the pension settlement is agreed.

I know that change is hard, reform can be painful, and given the state of the public finances the policing budget will be very difficult for many years to come. But we are coming through. Yes, we've had to cut spending. But thanks to our tough decisions, strong leadership from chief constables, and you – the best police officers in the world – crime is still falling.

Let's be proud of that achievement, let's work together, and let's make British police even better still.