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Speech to Constables Central Conference

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This is the reality of policing today - The radio traffic on that intro will be all too familiar to everybody in this room.

But what is the future for us?

Minister, distinguished guests, Constables of England and Wales, colleagues, and friends, thank you for joining us here today.

On any given day, Police Constables the length and breadth of the country face situations ranging from the mundane right through to the serious and life-threatening.

That is the job. That is the reality. That is what it means to be a Police Constable.

Every day, we must adapt to any situation, changing demands, and the challenges and dangers inherent for everyone working on the frontline.

This is not a job for the faint of heart. Nor is it a job for the weak of will, the undisciplined or the inefficient.

This job – our job as Constables of England and Wales – is for the strong, the brave, the decisive and the determined.

We should all take pride in this fact, and be assured that we have the right stuff. This is what is needed to serve our communities, and provide the most essential of public services.

We are necessary for society to function normally.

So why does it seem that our Government has lost sight of this fact? In recent years, there has been a gradual attrition to the worth and regard for the Police Service. Successive reports have devalued and undermined our essential role.

Hutton, Neyroud, and especially Winsor have systematically attacked or removed every reward and compensation which recognised the dangers and rigours of the job. Not only this but put in simplest terms the wholesale reduction in police officer numbers puts lives at risk.

In 2003 there were 264 police officers in England and Wales per 100,000 of the population - compared to a European average of 357.

Ten years on, and police officer numbers are being stripped to the bone once again.

By 2015, projections indicate 16,200 police jobs and as many support staff will be cut. This will leave us with the lowest level of police officer numbers since 2001.

Ten years on, and many police colleagues across the rest of Europe are enjoying better working conditions, higher pay and superior equipment and resources.

Ten years on, and there is very little backfill because of a sustained freeze on recruitment for most forces.

The exodus of experience through retirement and redundancy has left major gaps which will inevitably compromise our resilience.

Perhaps the Minister will explain how it is that the policing requirement in this country is so different that we need 30 per cent fewer police officers than our European neighbours?

Previously, the Government might have claimed that the better pay, pensions and conditions of service compensated UK police officers for this huge gap.

But with starting salaries for Police Constables set lower than that of a trainee McDonald's manager, and pensions being slashed, I'm somewhat lost as to what incentive there is for high calibre candidates to join up.

According to the stats, there has never been a problem recruiting for the police. Recruitment and retention far outstrips the private sector, and there are always more applicants than vacancies to join the police service.

That's all well and good on paper. However, the reality is very different – especially in these times of austerity. It may be the case that the demand for jobs outstrips vacancies, but the goal is to get the right candidates for the job.

An apparently secure job with good career progression and decent pay is bound to attract applicants in droves, but quality is far from assured.

The Home Office has translated this supply and demand recruitment issue into a staggeringly short-sighted formula. They

believe that demand for police vacancies means there is no problem attracting people to the police service.

In fact, the numbers suggest to them that the police have it too good. They think it doesn't matter if they cut pay and slash resources - in their book there will always be a queue out the door for vacancies.

Perhaps it hasn't occurred to them that the very reason there are so many applicants is because up 'til Winsor, the job had been appropriately remunerated for some years.

The very reasons we attracted and retained high calibre and graduate recruits were sufficient pay, career prospects, and job security.

Saying that, Winsor himself was less than impressed with the standards of police recruits - even when the going was good. He is on record as saying reading, writing and mathematical skills have fallen 'significantly' since the 1930s. He suggested that the public could be at risk if poor academic skills damage the effectiveness of potentially vital evidence.

According to Winsor, criminal barristers sometimes '*speak in contemptuous terms*' of the '*barely literate*' quality of police evidence, and checking and rewriting poor quality paperwork was increasing the cost and bureaucracy of policing.

Mr Winsor asked:

'Why is the entrance test for a police constable now so low? The educational requirements, why are they so low?'

If this is the case, it certainly answers the Home Office question of why there are so many people applying for so few Police jobs. Mr Winsor goes on to quote a sample entrance test question: *'We looked at the basic questions, one of which is, 'You find a purse in the street, it contains a £5 note, four 20p pieces and five two pence pieces, how much is in the purse?'*

I'll answer that one for him –

- after tax, contributions and deductions the amount in the purse won't be far off the hourly take home pay of a new in post Police Constable.

Although Winsor's recommendations were facile, and served a prescribed Government agenda, he was not without insight on what it takes to be a police officer.

On the issues of the police service attracting so many applicants, he asks:

'It seems to me that public safety is critical and we want the most all-round effective police officers. So I ask again, should it be higher, the entrance standard?'

He concludes that many people who are *'Entirely unsuitable to be police officers'* could pass the academic test, and *'It takes more than a clever person to be a cop, I get that. It takes maturity, judgment, bravery, the ability to deal with people.'*

The contradictions in his observations of what the police service needs, and the solutions he proposes are plain to see.

We want the bright and the brave, and the way he proposes to attract them is to pay them less, and ask them to work more.

I don't know many mature, judicious individuals who would pursue a career in policing in the current climate if they are not paid enough to rent a decent place to live, get a mortgage, or even maintain a comfortable standard of living.

What we will get is a few good years' service through these difficult economic times, before our brightest and best go off elsewhere to earn a decent living, where there are no risks to their safety and where they can comfortably provide for their families. We cannot just pack up our stall and allow this situation to continue. We are wholly committed to serving your needs.

Our team – your elected representatives – will do everything in our power to revitalise an appreciation of the value of the work and role of Police Constables in England and Wales.

Minister – kind words at tough times; plaudits, gratitude and sympathy are welcome but now is the time for action.

Police officers need tangible proof demonstrating the esteem Government says it has for them, and recognition of the uniqueness of the Office of Constable. The often heard phrase of resignation to the seemingly inevitable, 'we are where we are', is simply not good enough.

The excuse that the well has run dry and there is no more money for policing is not good enough. We will stand and be counted. We will stand up for what is right. We will be the sharp edge of change.

There is a widening gulf between the current government's attitude and approach to our police service, and our European neighbours.

Even more emphatic in demonstrating this divide is the example we see across the border in Scotland.

If anything illustrates how much of a disconnect we currently have with our Government, we need only look at what the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill MSP said at the Scottish Police Federation Conference earlier this year:

'I said we would not implement Winsor. And we will not implement Winsor. This Scottish Government will not now – or ever – implement Winsor.'

We only need to look South of the Border to see why. Police Commissioners imposed. Police pay cut. Fast track promotion but police numbers plummeting. A banker or a supermarket manager rather than an experienced officer to do the boss work, and fewer experienced officers to do the hard work. Winsor was wrong. Winsor was insulting. Winsor won't happen here under my tenure or this Government's.

And we won't cut starting salaries, which means a police officer here in Scotland will now earn more than £250,000 more over the course of their career than a colleague in England or Wales. Last week, the PNB agreed a pay rise for officers of one per cent. Police officers are not paid a King's ransom and I'm grateful for your forbearance in recent years.'

Not only will our colleagues across the border be getting £250,000 more over the lifetime of their careers, they will also be getting an extra £50,000 in pension contributions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice then goes on to apologise to them for not being able to do more.

Constables of England and Wales, if there was ever an example of the different priorities this government has in relation to policing to other parts of the UK then this is it.

When there is such a gulf between how they are valued and us, I think our Prime Minister and Home Secretary might want to revisit their understanding of the word 'fair'. They need to start doing what is right.

As Police Constables, we serve and protect the public remembering that we are members of the public too. It seems we also need to become the conscience of Government - reminding them of their responsibility to safeguard the public interest. This includes us. If Police Constables are badly served by the government, it impacts on how we serve the public. Our good is the public good.

The Federation is not broken - as some suggest.

Yes – there have been problems, but by working together we will find a way through.

We have been made to feel very welcome at meetings up and down the country and will do everything possible to assist in any way we can.

You are doing a fantastic job. You should be proud of what you do representing our members' interests.

Now more than ever before we must all stand shoulder to shoulder in taking the fight forward nationally. In doing this we will ensure a clear and coherent message is voiced directly to Government.

I have always maintained that for us to be confident we're doing the right things for the right reasons; we need to be brutally honest with each other.

Our strength comes from the bedrock that everything else is built upon. Solid foundations are built on trust, a valuable commodity which must be earned. Help us and trust us to deliver your message loudly and clearly.

Without your trust, we are broken.

We believe you deserve the best from us, and that by working together we will excel. It is the only way I can see to get our Federation back on track.

As a team – and policing is a team – we rely on each other. Every one of us is important, and when one falls we all falter. When one is in need, we all rally to assist.

There is no 'one' in this job, there is 'everyone'.

We will only succeed through this kind of strength and unity. Strength isn't inflicting your will - but working together for the general good.

You have elected this Committee to lead the Constables and we will do just that – and this goes beyond merely managing welfare and efficiency issues. To manage is to cope, but to lead is to inspire.

With your support; your voice; your strength, we will lead the Federation through necessary reform.

You – the Constables of England and Wales – comprise over 80% of this Police Federation and we must be pivotal in forging our path to brighter future.

We must shape and form the organisation to reflect the needs and requirements of the overwhelming majority of its members.

There must be a process of positive engagement with all of our members.

As your Chairman, I will continue to promote full and active engagement and participation from all Constables from all regions.

Every opinion matters, and every view counts and will be counted. We embrace difference of opinion – it means we are doing our job properly. In an organisation of our size and scope, there will inevitably be different points of view.

These are healthy differences, and we can only find the right hand to play – the winning hand – when everyone's cards are on the table.

I believe in openness and transparency. I believe in inclusiveness, and that we can only truly succeed with honesty and integrity. For this reason, I am invariably on the record and quotable in all of my work on your behalf.

Concerns over the consultation process for the Review led your Committee to feel we had no option but to make a stand - clearly signalling that there will be no decisions about us, without us.

The Review could fundamentally change the structure, remit and culture of the Police Federation at every level.

We know that lasting change in an organization like ours can only come from within.

To do this requires the active participation and buy-in of everyone involved - For any part of the Federation to feel excluded we believe was beyond unacceptable.

As a Joint Central Committee, we must lead by example. We must follow our constitution, standing orders, rules and regulations. If the JCC is not fit for purpose, then we must change. We must evolve.

Evolution, not revolution.

Three weeks ago, we had a meeting in Stoke-on-Trent where we gathered as the Constables from regions throughout England and Wales to discuss our widely publicised organisational deadlock.

After a comprehensive, all-inclusive debate on the matter, we acted on the will of those present. We reinstated payments to the Joint fund for the greater good of the Federation as a whole. Constables decided to encourage engagement with the review, and we listened.

This is how we represent you. This is how we believe the National Federation should represent all members.

The Police Federation is inextricably bound to represent the will of all of its members. It must accurately reflect and promote the views and issues across the tripartite ranks.

The point is that by virtue of our different ranks, we will inevitably have different requirements. Our differences don't mean right or wrong, but where possible we must work together for the benefit of all ranks.

Differences between the ranks boards are unavoidable, but we must ensure each of us is content our members have been heard, and our views are properly considered.

Our stand on the Review issue has led to accusations from some quarters of a separatist agenda for the Constables.

This couldn't be further from the truth.

Our vision is for a strong and united Federation, using our combined strength to enhance our collective bargaining power. In-fighting and internal politics don't help any of us.

I hope that as we step off from this point positivity will follow. Will we agree on everything?

Probably not - but the strongest of friends are those who are true and honest - friends who will, when necessary, constructively challenge decisions and therefore prove the most reliable.

John Lennon once said, 'Being honest may not get you many friends but it'll always get you the right ones'.

Sometimes different ranks have different needs and some would say we were set up to fail, or that we're not fit for purpose. However, it's through finding a consensus agreeable to all of us that actually strengthens our appreciation of each other's position.

It is our independent, individual needs as separate ranks which inform us how to work better together.

Joint working, unity and strength come from mutual respect for one another, where everyone is consulted and rules and regulations are adhered to.

Unity is not about doing as you're told and falling into line.

True unity only comes when everyone is assured of a professional, accountable and inclusive working environment. As Constables, we are at the sharp edge of change.

We are the majority end-users of reform, both to policing and the Police Federation.

Let me clarify this once again for the record: there will be no decisions about us, without us.

Time for Change. With your agreement and support, the Constables have undertaken a process to build upon the document which began in November, which many of you replied to.

As our numbers decline, we recognise that the Police Federation will also have to do more with less.

Working with you, and with your help, we have embarked on an extensive and inclusive process of proactive engagement with our members.

These are our next steps.

The Constables are serious about Comms.

Our messages must be clear, relevant and concise.

We will consult widely, seeking the views of all Constables.

We will be asking what matters to you, and we will publish the findings of this process in a report.

This true reflection of what is important to our members will be provided to the Federation Review panel.

We expect them to fully consider its findings in any recommendations they make.

There are a couple of final points I'd like to address before closing. The Federation Chairman went to Downing Street a few weeks ago to meet with the Prime Minister ahead of Conference.

According to the media reports he was told to be fair to politicians – essentially a warning that the political disconnect from government would continue if the Home Secretary gets a hard time at Conference.

I agree with that to an extent.

However, we must get across to the Home Secretary that we are still very concerned and members are angry about many aspects of Winsor – Reminding Government that they have hardly been fair to the police service.

The Prime Minister also suggested at the meeting that our full time officials should remain operational.

Interesting - However, this really indicates a lack of understanding of what we actually do.

How can we work to prevent abuses of our members if at any time Fed reps can be returned to duty by their Chiefs if they are getting too close to the bone, or considered troublemakers for working on things that are a nuisance for Government?

Fed reps need to be assured that they will not suffer reprisals in assisting a colleague, being a critical friend, or the voice of conscience to a determined Chief Officer.

Any changes to the Federation must never weaken or undermine us.

We exist for the welfare and efficiency of policing. Many of you are heavily relied on to assist Chief Officers and senior management teams in many and varied matters relating to policing.

You are highly regarded and highly valued for what you do. We hope the Prime Minister appreciates what the Federation brings to policing as a whole.

We are not a costly luxury.

We are a vital tool to make sure that Police Forces across England and Wales can continue to operate.

This is more essential than ever at a time when human resources, occupational health and training budgets have been decimated. Some say that policing is a vocation. Many of you will know that the same is true for Federation reps.

I started my speech today by asking, 'What is the future for us?'

2019 will mark the centenary of the Police Federation.

It's so important to learn lessons and reflect on the past but it is vital that we now focus on the future.

In line with the 20/20 Vision theme for Conference, let's find out how those in the community who could be future leaders and decision makers for Policing see things. These might be the Constables in the future of the Frontline.

Let's take a look at what Policing means to them...

- We are the Frontline
- We are at the sharp end of change
- We will never stop fighting for what is right
- Because – We are Police Constables

[Ends]