

# A New Year message from the Home Secretary

 It's a year since I was appointed Home Secretary and the past 12 months have proved immensely busy and testing for both myself and for Police Federation members. I was very pleased to be given the chance to address your annual conference in Blackpool last May and look forward to catching up with many of you again in 2006.

It's been a privilege over the past year to have met so many serving police officers up and down the country and to witness at first hand your invaluable contribution to making our communities safer. Thanks to your hard work with partner organisations and the public, we have seen both crime and the fear of crime continue to fall and the number of crimes detected and successfully prosecuted increase. This is a tremendous achievement for which you all deserve great credit.

You have responded with supreme professionalism and dedication to the unprecedented challenges that the police service faced in 2006. The magnificent way the police, together with colleagues from the other emergency services, handled the aftermath of the London bombings and the subsequent police investigations is perhaps the most vivid example. First class policing operations also ensured a series of major public and state events, including royal weddings, showpiece sporting and entertainment occasions and summits held as part of the UK's EU and G8 Presidencies, all passed off peacefully. Your painstaking and dogged pursuit of justice also led to a series of high profile convictions for serious crimes, which will hopefully improve the pub-



**Home Secretary outlines some of his plans for the service**

lic's confidence in our criminal justice system.

The recent tragic death of PC Sharon Beshenivsky in Bradford, served as a painful reminder, should one be needed, of the dangers our policemen and women are often asked to put themselves in to protect the public. The most precious resource of the Police Service is the men and women who serve in it and, naturally, I have asked myself how we can avoid repeat tragedies in future.

Mercifully, the shooting of a police officer remains a rare and shocking event in our country. Nevertheless, it's my duty to ensure that the police have the right equipment to deal with such incidents and I'm determined to do just that. That said, I remain unconvinced that arming all officers would make them safer. Indeed, evidence from other countries suggests that it only encourages more criminals to arm themselves.

As I've said, the police service faced huge challenges in

2005 and there is no doubt that 2006 will be just as demanding.

We are introducing neighbourhood policing across the country. By 2008 each neighbourhood, covering the size of a couple of local council wards, will have a dedicated policing team. Every resident will know the name of their local officer and will have their phone number and e-mail. Officers will be a regular sight on the neighbourhood's streets. The police and community will be working together to tackle crime.

However, if neighbourhood policing is to succeed, the police must be fully integrated with other community safety services - they cannot and should not be expected to do everything on their own.

I do not want to be prescriptive about how these teams will look; numbers, staffing mix, skills and powers will need to be appropriate to the needs of the neighbourhood, and determined by those who know the neighbourhood best. But I fully expect

that these teams will be led by police officers, and could include special constables, community support officers, volunteers, neighbourhood wardens, the security industry and others too. We all need to take responsibility for dealing with crime and community safety issues together.

Some difficult decisions will be needed in the reform of our current 43 force structure. This exercise is not - as our critics would try and claim - about reducing total numbers of police officers or police staff. The Government remains committed to maintaining police numbers at their current record levels but I am convinced that if we are to provide both effective neighbourhood policing and deal with serious cross-regional crime we must work together to change the policing landscape.

This is a difficult debate. No final decisions have been made and we will continue to work closely with forces and police authorities on this key issue in the New Year. However, I firmly believe the final outcome will bring about a police service fit to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

As Home Secretary, I have always been impressed by the professionalism and dedication of our serving police officers; every day you are on our streets helping the public and the way you meet the many challenges you face is an inspiration to us all.

I have no doubt that you are more than ready to meet these challenges. It is a pleasure to wish the members of Police Federation a happy New Year. **See interview with Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation on pages 12 and 13.**

