

# No Orde-nary world

Speaking of 'potty' police pilots, commonsense policing and the drive not to let the recession 'dumb down' policing, Sir Hugh Orde, president of ACPO, lets us into his world. Syreeta Lund writes



I sense this is likely to be a fairly frank interview when Sir Hugh Orde, president of ACPO, describes the Olympics as being like a big 'sports day', this forms the basis of his style for answering questions, refreshingly straight-talking and I sense a distinct lack of what is informally termed 'ACPO speak' and consists of jargon and answers which virtually always reiterate a fairly banal written policy.

Sir Hugh took up post as president nearly a year ago in April 2009 after spending seven years as chief constable in Northern Ireland, seeing the force through some tough times. His experiences may come in useful in helping forces negotiate their way forward in the recession where some difficult choices will have to be made to keep within budgets.

The policing white paper, launched in December, emphasises the need for savings and I wonder if he thinks this will impact on both officer and CSO numbers.

"The police service has delivered efficiencies, the notion we are not a service prepared to deal with change is completely flawed," he says, in answer to the oft reiterated criticism that the police service does not like change.

The biggest challenge, according to Sir Hugh, is maintaining frontline efficiency and he says chief constables will do what they can to reduce the impact of cuts on the frontline.

But, he adds: "Around 80 to 85 percent of the budget is people, there is potential to lose staff, whether police or CSOs is a debate to be had. The

government has said it will provide funding for CSOs around the workforce mix. We have to be as efficient as we can be in a really tough year."

However, Sir Hugh says keeping sworn officers is key: "People have to remember when push comes to shove, it's the hard edge of policing, you can move police officers around the country and go into extremely dangerous situations, sworn officers with an additional powers mix is critical. We must make sure that nationally we are not vulnerable by losing too many cops. "This is not to say PCSOs are not doing important work. There is some very effective community work which frees cops up but you have to recognise the unique powers of the police; it's not a good idea to dumb policing down with not enough sworn officers to deliver the service we want."

Met commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson recently announced how he would increase capacity through single patrols, rather than officers patrolling in pairs, but it safe for police officers?

"It is subject to circumstances," says Sir Hugh, but he believes it will increase capacity, visibility and contact with the public.

"There is an assumption that two cops are better than one...cops are doing it everyday [single patrolling]...the idea they are not doing it is flawed."

He said that officers in Northern Ireland would patrol by themselves, not in high risk areas, but that if it can be done there it can be done anywhere without compromising officer safety. What happens in situations that escalate where a risk assessment may not



predict what could happen and an officer is put in danger?

"I have huge confidence in people taking the calls [in police call centres]. Two officers don't necessarily mean it's safer."

Sir Hugh is not the type of senior officer to mince his words. He has stood his ground on a number of issues, of late in relation to political interference in policing matters and has publically criticised Conservative Party plans to bring in elected commissioners who would have a direct influence on policing.

"I think the unique strength of British policing is that no one would tell police officers how to police. I am committed to be held to account but

would not tolerate a system where I am told how to police."

He added that many people including chief constables, politicians and the public had said they did not think it was a good idea.

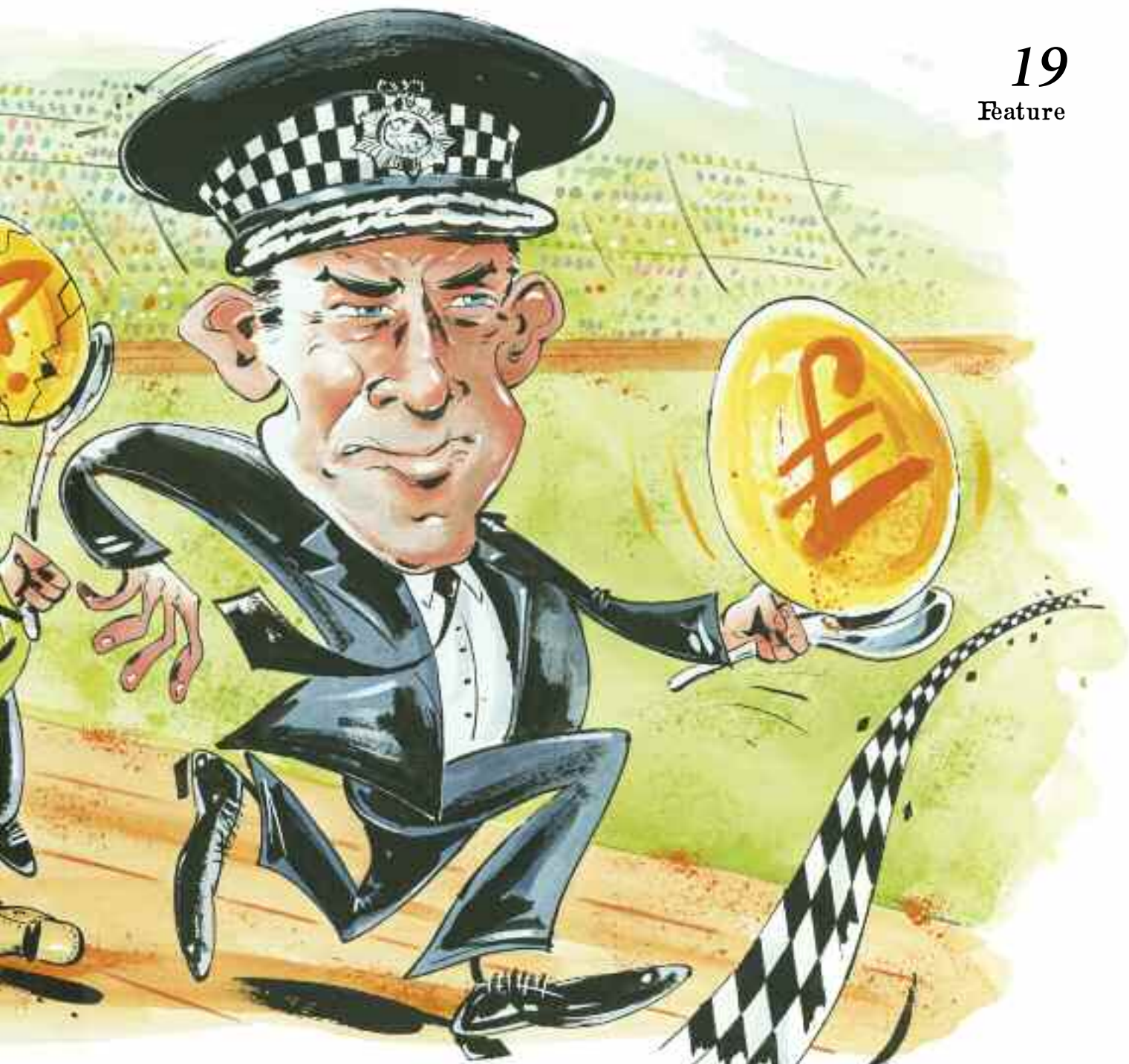
"The manifesto will be the next time we see any detail on some of the stranger ideas that have been floating around, like elected commissioners. There is no real detail, it's not a fully thought through idea."

ACPO as an organisation is an independent body, although it works closely with the government, and aims to lead on the direction and development of the police service as well as providing a strategic response when needed. However, think-tank

Policy Exchange has suggested that there may not be room for both ACPO and the NPIA (National Policing Improvement Agency) arguing some functions could be merged, how does he see the future of ACPO as an organisation?

He says ACPO is a unique organisation and it is 'the professional voice of the service with a priority to keep people safe'.

In the March 2009 edition of *Police* Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, questioned the integrity of an organisation that had an annual turnover of £18 million as a private limited company from various sources including speed cameras and criminal record



checks, when they are supposed to be impartial.

Sir Hugh admits: "I am uncomfortable with the private limited company aspect."

He said this had been done for various reasons including transparency but that 'it does need to move on'.

He goes further and echoes Federation sentiments when he adds that there needs to be a review top to bottom of policing. We need to step back, as they did the 1960s [with a Royal Commission] if we want a sensible debate. He said at the moment policing is being looked at in an ad-hoc way.

Public confidence in the police seems to be a key target for forces but a recent report published by the Home

Office in December on public confidence in the police states that police officers speaking negatively about the service and the criminal justice system (CJS) could impact on public perceptions. Do you think officers bad mouth the police service?

"My experience is that generally people come to work to do an extremely good job. Do officers get frustrated; of course they do. What I found in Northern Ireland is that they get frustrated about things that get in the way of them doing a good job. The bureaucracy system requires them to do things which are not necessary. You always have people who are unhappy but most get on with the job in difficult and dangerous circumstances."

He says the sheer volume of crime that now has to be reported 'flies in the face of commonsense policing'. He added that chief officers needed to support police officers to take sensible risks and empowered decisions. But he said he "did not get the pilot stuff for discretion" as it was already enshrined within the law and to create a pilot was a bit 'potty'.

He adds: "Because of the target culture they are recording everything, absolutely everything and the public just want to be protected, they are not bothered if it's a Section 47 or 42, if they have been thumped, they just want something done about it, not an academic debate."