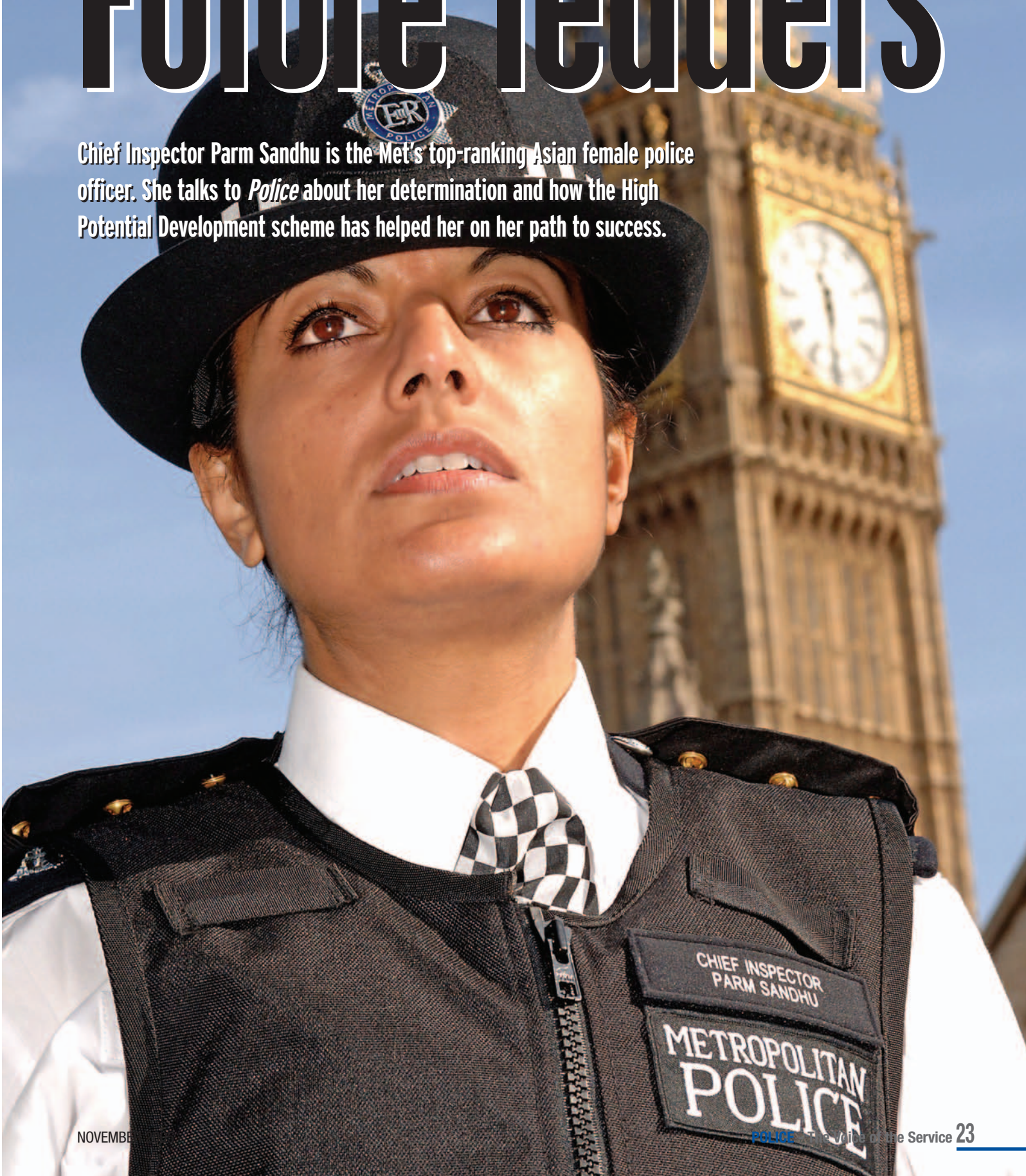



Future leaders

Chief Inspector Parm Sandhu is the Met's top-ranking Asian female police officer. She talks to *Police* about her determination and how the High Potential Development scheme has helped her on her path to success.



 Before Parm Sandhu reached her current rank of chief inspector, a PC had told her she would have to make a choice; her children or her career.

The officer, who has two sons, aged 21 and five, made a choice – she chose both.

'There is more than one way of dealing with a situation. I proved that individual wrong,' she says.

Ch Insp Sandhu comes across as smart and accessible, qualities that appear to have been recognised in the Met.

The officer, who now works out of Charing Cross Police Station, is involved in policing events including film premieres and high-profile VIP events such as The Judges Service at Westminster Abbey.

Ch Insp Sandhu is used to a bit of attention now as she believes she is probably one of the country's highest ranking Asian female officers, 'and that's just at chief inspector,' she adds.

However, you get the impression that the officer is destined for higher things and she is certainly not putting limits on herself.

Paving the way

But Ch Insp Sandhu has not had it easy, she has had some support - the Met provide a mentor to encourage ethnic minority officers to stay in the service - but she has also undergone her own trials and tribulations.

'I have found it very useful having a mentor, there have been times where I have thought I have had enough and was going to leave but the mentor has persuaded me to stay. There was one incident where I called my mentor in the middle of the night, I had hit rock bottom, but they persuaded me to finish my tour of duty.'

In relation to any issues she may have tackled in her police career which relate to her race and gender, she says: 'There weren't many and I think nowadays with younger people joining the job, they are more likely to accept differences as a positive and not a negative.'

She recalls an incident where a victim could not speak English



Parm Sandhu: Policing high-profile events

and the fact that she could use their language helped enormously.

'At the end of the day, I am policing the community and if I have an extra skill that I can offer, then that's positive.

'When people make an [inappropriate] comment now other officers are much more likely to jump up and down and the people who are likely to make a comment are in the minority.'

She feels that there are also cultural factors as to why there is a lack of Asian females in the police service.

Ch Insp Sandhu initially worked as a fraud investigator in the civil service on a national team and she says it felt like natural progression to move into policing.

'One of my friends was a police officer and encouraged me to go into policing and I went to an open day.'

Initially though, Ch Insp Sandhu was not keen to tell her family and kept her initial police training at Hendon a secret. It was only after she had been a police officer for a year that she decided to tell them about her new job.

'My parents were worried I would get hurt, the idea that 6ft men should be doing the job, not women,' something she believes is not just common to her own family but a perception that is also now changing.

And she says in her own family things are different and her mother keeps a big picture of her daughter from when she was promoted in the service.

'She is very proud now and shows people when they come to the house,' she says.

High potential

Ch Insp Sandhu is now on the Higher Potential scheme, set up by the Home Office, to take

potential leaders and prepare them for the senior ranks.

Initially, she applied for the scheme two years ago, but failed to get through the three rigorous stages, which include testing a whole range of abilities from dealing with community issues to writing reports and giving presentations under pressure.

This is now being streamlined to just two stages, but Ch Insp Sandhu believes that in some ways she was fortunate.

'Although I failed, I was given a really good development plan. My bosses were very supportive and as a result of my action plan I was offered three months working at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

Ch Insp Sandhu worked alongside Denis O'Connor, HM Inspector of Constabulary, looking at the police service response to level 2, cross-border crime.

The action plan meant she could spend a few months with different departments in order to gain experience.

The high-flying officer moved on to spend time at the Home Office in the national police diversity team looking at the recommendations made in the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) inquiry report.

She then went back into the Met in the service review team, looking at improving efficiency and effectiveness and cost implications, finishing in January this year.

Ch Insp Sandhu is currently part way through a three-month stint at Charing Cross.

Background

Previously, most of her career had been spent on a 24/7 response team, beginning at Limehouse Police Station in the East End of London, policing a culturally mixed area.

'When I was working on borough I wasn't looking at the wider picture but because of the attachments and secondments it made me better at interview stage and gave me a better understanding of the wider issues being able to take into account other Government departments.'



Policing The Judges Service in Westminster

She says she is very much a ‘people person’ and thoroughly enjoyed her time working at the diversity directorate which gave her access to people from different communities.

But, she adds that she needed more experience in writing reports for senior managers and those outside the organisation.

In September this year, Chf Insp Sandhu, again applied for the High Potential scheme and this time passed all three stages.

‘It’s been really good. The HPS has changed my career; it’s opened several more doors for me.’

Her only criticism is that she would like to see the scheme targeted at under-represented groups: ‘I do not think it is geared at recruiting from under-represented groups; until you actually apply there is no support to get there.

‘So perhaps we are losing a bit of potential there. This could help target individuals and improve the demographic profile in the senior ranks.’

In the last intake for the scheme in September 2005, 55 per cent were female candidates and 18 per cent were from an ethnic minority background.

Over the last year, just under half, 48 per cent of the intake

were female and 12 per cent were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

A spokesman for the Home Office said that they are not just targeting graduates but police officers beginning their training and officers who think they could have the skills needed.

He added: ‘We will support officers to remove artificial barriers, and applications are especially welcome from women and minority ethnic groups, although no preferences in given to any individual.’

Ch Insp Sandhu certainly does not intend to stay still in her career; she has ambitions for the future and is comfortable with the idea of being a role model for others coming through.

‘I am not going to limit myself; I would not say I am aiming for chief superintendent or chief constable. I am quite ambitious and will get there because people are helping and supporting me along the way.’

She hopes that her career path will help to encourage under represented groups to come forward.

‘I think that there will be someone following in my footsteps.’



Key facts on the High Potential scheme for those within the force

- The HP scheme is aimed at providing an opportunity for the most talented and dedicated officers within the police force to accelerate their career development and become the next leaders of the police service.
- The scheme is aimed at encouraging forces to identify talent through force systems already in place such as performance development reviews or officers discussing their future with ACPO leads and force HP scheme contacts.

The selection process

Recently the selection process has changed from a three to a two-stage process to streamline entry onto the scheme.

First stage: A written application form – the questions on this form are based on workplace assessment and competency based scenarios

Second stage: A face-to-face assessment stage at the HPD centre where officers can be expected to be assessed through written tests, interactive exercises and interviews to establish their:

- Problem solving skills;
- Planning and organising skills;
- Communications skills;
- Strategic perspective;
- Openness to change;
- Community and customer focus; and
- Respect for race and diversity.

More information is available at the website:

www.policehighpotential.org.uk

Any officers interested in the scheme should speak to their force HPD contact or call the main HPD office number: 020 7035