

Ms May faces a wall of silence by aggrieved officers at Bournemouth

Conference 2011

Home Secretary Theresa May was made to suffer in silence following her speech to the Police Federation conference as thousands of officers face cuts to their pay and conditions.

Paul McKeever, chair of the Police Federation, had just delivered his main conference speech to rapturous applause as he asked if the Home Secretary could 'sleep at night' against a backdrop of falling police numbers putting communities at risk.

His comments followed a question to the Home Secretary via video link from heroic Pc David Rathband, who was shot by the gunman Raoul Moat at point blank range but who still managed to warn colleagues. He asked the Home Secretary if he was not worth his wage of £35,000.

Mr McKeever labelled the way the government has gone about the pay campaign, 20 percent cuts to the police over four years, a two-year pay freeze and a raft of proposals which will erode benefits as "disgraceful", prompting loud applause from the floor.

Ms May said it is not her job to "duck the difficult decisions" and tell officers what they want to hear. But the traditional polite applause that usually follows the Home Secretary's speech was absent, as the room remained stonily silent.

She said: "I know how worried you are about the cuts. I know how angry some of you are. I know the difficulties that spending cuts will mean. But let's remember why we have to do this. We have just been through the gravest financial crisis since the Second World War."

An Ipsos Mori poll found 86 percent of the public are worried about cuts to policing, and

98 percent of officers in a survey carried out by the Federation felt their morale had fallen over the last year.

But Ms May told the audience that changes to pay and conditions had to be "part of the package" to protect frontline jobs rather than losing thousands of posts, and that they valued the work that police officers do.

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"I am sure every single person in this room – and every single member of the public outside it – would prefer us to look at pay and conditions rather than lose thousands of posts."

But Sarah Adams, from Derbyshire police, also attracted applause from delegates as she referred to promises made in the past to ensure officers were treated fairly, asking: "Home Secretary, how can you expect police officers and the communities we serve to ever trust you or this government again?"

And Mr McKeever said: "We shouldn't have to make the choice of jobs or pay. It's unfair for you to have to ask us that question... pay more for our pensions, work longer, get less."

Ms May's speech was met with stony silence



By contrast, delegates warmly applauded points from the floor

