

# Keynote speech by Jan Berry, Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales, to the Home Secretary

Wednesday 16th May, 2007

[Check against delivery]

Jan Berry, Chairman of the Police Federation, said:

Home Secretary, currently Home Secretary.  
Welcome.

Every year we take this opportunity to celebrate our brave officer nominations.

I'm proud to be able to call every one of the nominees in the video a colleague.

PC Richard Gray's brutal murder, only 10 days ago, serves as a tragic reminder – if ever one was needed – of the shocking regularity with which police officers pay the ultimate price for their heroism.

Ricky was much liked:

A decorated officer.  
Devoted to his duty.  
And an absolute credit to the service.

We will never forget him, nor will we forget that the streets are safer because of people like him, and the 140,000 colleagues he left behind.

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Home Secretary, may I thank you once again for coming to what is your second and final conference, and for agreeing to answer questions.

We always encourage politicians to answer police officers' questions.

I should point out, any mention of cash or honours here today will be strictly about our cash, and our honour.

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They tell me the view is better from the backbenches, so I'm sure you will have plenty of time to reflect on decisions you have – and critically haven't – made over the course of what's been a very busy year.

Despite all the challenges we have faced, police officers have done what they always do.

They've given it 110 percent.

The reaction to the terrible murders in Ipswich was a first class example of forces sharing skills, knowledge, equipment and experience.

Although somewhat obscured by other decisions you've made, I would like to recognise your composure following this years' various terrorist operations.

It may only be a footnote in the story of the Forest Gate raids, but the fact is you understood the complexity of the situation and you didn't jump to any snap conclusions – unlike some of your predecessors.

You also understand the need for the wider rollout of Taser so given the press this morning we trust this is one issue we won't have to raise with your successor.

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For years we've policed using common-sense.  
This is now under serious threat.

As a result of Government diktats the service has been reduced to a bureaucratic, target-chasing, points-obsessed arm of Whitehall; debasing what was once a sensible police service.

There is no better example of the control-freakery that is eroding common-sense: than Penalty Notices for Disorder.

When PNDs were first mooted, we acknowledged that used properly, they could bring some benefits.

But we were also absolutely adamant that PNDs, could never and would never, deliver a faster, more effective justice system on their own.

A child who threw buns at a bus?

A man who threw water over his girlfriend?

And a man caught in possession of an egg ... 'with intent to throw.'

These are hardly weapons of mass destruction!

All these cases should have been dealt with by a quiet word and good old-fashioned common sense.

As we heard yesterday from Sergeant Sam Roberts, it is madness that an officer gets 30 points if he or she issues a penalty notice but only 20 for charging, and pursuing the case through the courts.

Sam told us about an officer who arrested someone for shoplifting.

But rather than chase points and rather than follow what officers are pressured to do, the officer investigated further.

It turned out that the offender had over two and a half thousand TICs; his home an Aladdin's cave of stolen property, not to mention a lucrative business selling it online.

How can we have a system that discourages police officers from investigating crimes properly; *from doing what they know and believe is right*, and encourages them to take short-cuts and issue PNDs like confetti?

Discretion has been at the heart of British policing since the days of Sir Robert Peel.

It is the very essence of policing by consent; of OUR relationship with the public and their relationship with US.

The most astonishing thing is that these principles of policing by consent were born in Britain.

Right now, as I speak, there are literally hundreds of British police officers serving overseas – in Romania, Jordan, Jamaica – training forces to replicate our ethos and our values.

But at the very same time, government ministers and Chief Officers are collaborating in their destruction.

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Last year I described how the police reform programme was like a juggernaut careering downhill, out of control.

We appealed for you to take the wheel and apply the brakes.

You must have misheard our instructions.

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Not only did you fail to apply the brakes, you are jumping out of the cab, handing the wheel over to a new driver – and probably one with a dodgy licence.

But there's actually nothing funny about that.

We will have to live with the consequences.

The Police service is being dismantled, piece by piece, eroding the Office of Constable in the process.

My greatest fear is that when the failed experiment is over, and you're busy writing your memoirs, it'll be impossible to put the service back together again.

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What we need is some honesty about police reform.

Chief Officers are trying to pull the wool over the politicians' and the public's eyes with flawed policies.

They're telling you, Home Secretary, that it's more effective to have a mixture of sworn and unsworn, skilled and unskilled staff.

But most of these people only do one job.

They are like one club golfers.

Meanwhile those of us with a broader range of skills are starved of the resources to do the job the public expect from us.

As a result, our flexibility and our resilience is reduced.

The chiefs call it modernisation.

We call it fragmentation.

The result is that the Government is presiding over the systematic deskilling of the entire police service.

It's time for the chiefs to stand up for what is right for a politically independent and impartial professional police service, best enshrined in the Office of Constable.

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And there's another plank of the modernisation platform that is still failing.

You will have noticed that Community Support Officers are helping with the security here today.

We've never doubted their commitment.

But the Government has repeatedly assured us that CSOs would support – not supplant – police officers.

I'm afraid we don't believe you.

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What is clear is that CSO numbers have gone up and police numbers have gone down.

And why?

Because you can't afford both.

To add insult to injury, your announcement in December will lead to yet fewer police officers on the streets.

The Crime Fighting Fund rules once protected police officer numbers. But now you've scrapped it, and the thin blue line is getting even thinner.

Predictably, it's not just us and the law-abiding public that understand the difference real police officers make.

Yobs and criminals see right through CSOs, too..

We've even had police officers dressing up in CSO uniforms in order to stop yobs stop taking the Mickey – if I'm allowed to say that.

The yobs goad CSOs because they know they have no powers.

They know that without a police officer around they're untouchable.

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When it comes to choosing between Community Support Officers and Police Officers, I know which I would choose – somebody with the training, skills and experience to exercise their discretion, whether that be through the power of persuasion or the power arrest.

The only person who can do both is a fully-sworn, attested police officer. They are the best value for money.

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Sadly it's not just workforce modernisation that's in a mess.

Amalgamations may be on the Home Office backburner, but the replacement – collaborative arrangements – are already raising all sorts of questions.

Where is the accountability?  
What are the governance arrangements?  
Where will the buck stop if a joint operation goes wrong?

The principle of collaborative arrangements is right.  
But these issues must be sorted out before – not after – the changes.

The split of the Home Office is yet another distraction.  
And it could end up as a messy divorce with no one talking to each other.

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The limited "review" to be conducted by Sir Ronnie Flannigan, will merely accelerate plans to de-skill the police service.

And before you accuse me of exaggerating, this isn't the first time Ministers have ignored warnings from frontline officers.

In the 80s, we championed the need for better safety equipment;

In the 90s, we stressed the need for a visible police presence;

In the new Millennium, we warned of the growing level two policing gap.

All deeply unfashionable at the time.  
All accepted wisdom today.

But there remains an urgent need for a comprehensive, independent, and politically impartial examination of policing.

That's why we have repeatedly called for a Royal Commission.

We're not just asking for the sake of it.

We need it to examine the function of the police service – a hard-headed look not a vague vision.

We need it to define the role of a constable.

We need it to take a holistic look at how we best tackle all forms of crime, from anti-social behaviour to counter-terrorism.

And we need to look at the funding.

Well today I'm asking you Once Again for a Royal Commission.

And if the answer is 'no', the Federation will look to conduct our own.

It would be independent.  
It would take evidence.

And it would consult the public we serve.

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Home Secretary, I would like to touch on a subject that's as much about honour as it is about cash: police pay.

Last year, only 11 days into your new position, you assured us that you were not going to decide on pay and conditions lightly.

We understood that you had joined a Home Office that was attempting to undermine PNB and our long-standing indexation agreement.

In November, when the Police Arbitration Tribunal found in our favour, you immediately ratified their finding.

So far, so good.

But having ratified the PAT's finding you launched headlong into your own review.

A review where:

You chose the terms and conditions.

You chose the timetable.

And you chose a Labour Party stalwart to conduct it.

Don't try and kid us and pretend it's independent.

It may have seemed like astute politics but its been a masterclass in how to undermine the morale of 140,000 police officers.

No wonder trust, the father of confidence and goodwill, was gone long before Booth made your – I mean his – recommendations.

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According to Booth, police pay should no longer be linked to private sector salaries, but instead to an index of 10 hand-picked public sector pay deals already frozen by Gordon Brown.

That's scandalous.

For years our pay has been linked to private sector salaries, but the very second private sector pay overtakes public sector pay, Booth argues that we should be forced to switch pay indexes.

In effect, Booth picked a figure first and then selected a formula to reach it.

How is this consistent with a Government policy that states it will not impose the same award on every group?

And it get's worse.

Booth's pot of money would be distributed in a divisive way, just like SPPs,

How you can even contemplate doing this before we have an effective accreditation and qualification framework and a PDR system that police officers have faith in.

The argument that police pay must be reduced in order to meet the Government's inflation target of 2 percent is utterly fatuous.

The Bank of England states increases in earnings of 4.5 percent are consistent with meeting that inflation target.

So who should we believe?

The independent Bank of England or a Government department that someone once said isn't fit for purpose?

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You will no doubt say, "I can't talk about negotiations here, they are for the PNB and for the PNB alone".

Well if you believe so strongly in the sanctity of fair negotiations why, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, did you not only direct PNB to discuss Booth's recommendations, you instructed them to agree to Booth's recommendations?

That was totally contrary to the spirit and constitution of the PNB.

What's more you are still trying to use the PNB to re-engineer the police service rather than take up our offer of a proper, wide-ranging review of policing.

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Home Secretary, the prospect of police picket lines is something I never thought was imaginable, let alone possible.

We take our duties seriously and responsibly.

We put ourselves in the line of fire;

We give our time willingly;

And we're never off duty.

All we are asking for is a fair reward.

But start treating officers like public sector workers, and don't be surprised if 140,000 police officers start demanding the same industrial rights that others enjoy.

Personally I believe it would be a tragedy for policing if police officers were ever forced to go on strike.

So let me reassure you.

It's the last thing police officers want.

But push them any further, and the last thing they want might just become their only option.

## **Conclusion**

Only last week Tony Blair said that human capital is “the nation's greatest asset”.

I think police officers are the police service's greatest asset.

So why is it officers feel as if they're being treated like anything but assets?

Demoralised, disillusioned, depressed.

That's how an officer, new to the service, described how they felt to me.

Demoralised at their lack of discretion and having to chase targets not criminals.

Disillusioned at the farce that is police reform.

And depressed at the prospect of yet another looming pay battle.

This is a sad by-product of the Government's record on policing.

Multiply that frustration by 140,000 and the Government and chief officers face a massive challenge.

So we have some words of advice.

Gordon Brown may not be in number ten quite yet, but he is already saying that he will “listen” and that he will “learn”.

So enough of the promises and platitudes; enough of the annual conference echo.

The Government and ACPO have got to start listening and inject a healthy dose of that one commodity that has been so lacking: honesty.

We are all proud to be police officers.

but the police service and the public deserve so much better.

We'll leave the politics to the politicians.

But leave the policing to us.

**[Ends]**