


View from the chair

Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation, says the new Metropolitan Police commissioner must stand firm against political interference in operational policing

A portrait of Paul McKeever, a middle-aged man with short brown hair, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a light blue and white striped shirt, and a purple tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a blurred office setting.

“Retaining an independent police service is paramount and we should not be subject to political interference in operational decisions. Politicians of all parties must appreciate and respect that policing can only be fair and impartial when they refrain from meddling in operational processes and political point scoring.”

After a lengthy period of deliberation and media speculation, last month the new commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service was announced. Sir Paul Stephenson, previous deputy commissioner, was formally appointed following an interview with the Home Secretary and the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

It was interesting to note that in Sir Paul's first press conference outside New Scotland Yard he made clear that he is in charge of operational policing, not the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith nor the Mayor of London. Understandably he felt the need to make this very important point from day one following the period of in-fighting between the Home Secretary and the mayor regarding the departure of his predecessor, Sir Ian Blair. Interesting also that Sir Paul made clear that his focus is policing and not personality politics, marking a difference between what was and what will be.

The commissioner of the Metropolitan Police is a job with enormous responsibility at the best of times but Sir Paul acknowledged he has several challenges ahead which impact on the national policing stage and therefore do not just affect officers within London.

That is why it is imperative that Sir Paul ensures politics stays out of policing decisions. Retaining an independent police service is paramount and we should not be subject to political interference in operational decisions. Politicians of all parties must appreciate and respect that policing can only be fair and impartial when they refrain from meddling in operational processes and political point scoring.

The fight against terrorism remains a very real and constant threat. Whilst juggling the softer elements of policing the commissioner must not lose sight that many chief constables will follow the path he lays. Therefore he must ensure that the continued delivery of neighbourhood policing is not to the detriment of response policing; whether that's 24/7 uniformed response or CID. He must also ensure that police officers remain at the heart of policing and that he does not roll over to workforce modernisation plans if they are merely to make savings and do not improve efficiency.

Sir Paul will also have a challenge on his hands to ensure the successful extended rollout of Taser as the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) failed to endorse the Home Secretary's decision last year. As operational officers we all know the real benefit that Taser can bring, not only for our protection but for the protection of the law abiding public as well as suspects we need to apprehend. The mere deployment of Taser often results in a suspect calming down and allows us to manage the situation and effect an arrest safely. I trust the new commissioner will not let politics get in the way of what is right for the protection of his officers and Londoners.

The commissioner has a huge task ahead of him. He has to take the service forward from the tragic shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes; he has to find resolution with the National Black Police Association to ensure that policing is promoted as an attractive career for everyone he has to

juggle his way through the inevitable political battles he will face with national politicians, the London Mayor and the MPA in his fight to do what is right for policing.

Whatever battles Sir Paul faces he must not lose sight that the impact of his office far exceeds the boundaries of the M25; the authority he commands is a national responsibility to improve policing and public protection. As chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales and as a Metropolitan Police sergeant I genuinely wish him well in the months and years to come.



London Mayor Boris Johnson (left) with new Metropolitan police commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson, and Home Secretary Jacqui Smith

Challenges ahead: the roll-out of Taser will be one of the issues the commissioner will need to tackle

