



Simon Reed is Vice chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales

## Missed opportunity?

We are just weeks away from the government publishing their Green Paper on Policing, making this a golden opportunity to review what is working in policing and what is not.

Unfortunately, it seems as if the Green Paper is likely to be nothing more than a pat on the back for a government floundering in the opinion polls. And we already know from the Home Secretary that much of the Green Paper will be based on Sir Ronnie Flanagan's Review of Policing.

Last year when the government announced that Sir Ronnie Flanagan would lead on a review of policing we wondered if this would be the truly independent and holistic review the Police Federation has been demanding for the last nine years.

Sir Ronnie was tasked by the government to look at specific areas of policing, but strangely, areas where they were already making changes.

So was the intention for Sir Ronnie to merely give the government an appraisal of their own policies and direction? It would seem so.

That said, it did give the opportunity to raise many of the concerns the Police Federation has about targets, sanction detections, bureaucracy and resilience.

Also, to voice our disgust at the destruction of police officer discretion which, inevitably, comes with the government's systemic erosion of the independent Office of Constable. But the reason for such an office is as valid now as it was in 1829. The choice is between an independent office holder, with powers from the crown and answerable to the law or a state controlled employer, answerable to a politician. I know which I'd rather have. But what is extremely worrying about Sir Ronnie's analysis are elements of the report that imply a reduction of police officer numbers and call for the roll out of the Workforce Modernisation programme before the demonstration sites have been properly assessed. Whilst Sir Ronnie talks of less sworn police officers he offers no solution to tackle the diminishing resilience the

service will have if we continue down that route.

The government should not be tying the service's hands, ring fencing money purely for PCSOs and forcing senior officers to make life and death decisions about the resilience and service they can provide to their local communities. That's blackmail.

The truth is Flanagan's review is a missed opportunity and nothing more than a pulling together of work that's already in progress anyway.

What we really need a debate on is the role of police, what is expected of us and who else should be accredited to use some police powers.

Above all, we all have a responsibility to fight to preserve the independent Office of Constable. Because, to coin a phrase, 'when they're gone – they're gone'.