

Elected commissioners could push political issues on police

Police forces could be at the mercy of 'political' elected police commissioners putting on pressure when they are dealing with high profile cases, warns a senior police leader.

The government's intention to introduce elected police commissioners similar to America met with lively debate at the Police Federation's Conference in Bournemouth.

Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, said: "I have real concerns about this idea [elected police commissioners]. We need to think about what accountability means as a police officer. Police officers should be accountable to the law not to politicians."

Ian Leyland, secretary of Merseyside Police Federation, highlighted concerns over operational independence when it came to issues which were of great concern to the public.

He gave the example that in the case of the murder of Rhys Jones, where the police had to carry out thorough investigations, that a commissioner looking to be re-elected may not simply support the police but could bow to public pressure.

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"There is a real reputation risk in not bringing these people to justice and the public are pushing for a result. A commissioner up for re-election would feel pressure to bring it to a rapid conclusion."

Sir Hugh Orde, president of ACPO, said the main thing was to ensure police operational independence 'did not die in a ditch'.

Police minister Nick Herbert said: "I completely agree in maintaining the operational independence of policing."

However, he said that he believed someone should have 'strategic oversight' in what the police are doing, adding: "You are not going to detach policing from politics because politicians are representatives of the people."

But Ms Chakrabarti spoke of the dangers of electing a commissioner who is attached to extreme parties like the BNP deciding on what kinds of crime should get priority. She told delegates: "Very quickly the line between strategy and operations could blur."

But Mr Herbert insisted they would trust people to make sensible decisions, adding, "If we do not trust people we are in a very bad place."

However Ms Chakrabarti said that people may be happy to elect politicians but when it comes to life and liberty they were much more likely to put their trust in an independent, professional police officer.

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Sir Hugh Orde: must ensure operational independence does not 'die in a ditch'



Ian Leyland: elected commissioners may bow to public pressure

