

Home Secretary's speech to Conference 23 May 2018

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

This conference has quite a reputation.
A reputation for giving speakers a difficult ride.
For asking questions nobody wants to answer.
For having the toughest crowd of any speech in the political calendar.
At least that's what the Prime Minister told me!
Most Home Secretaries get a bit more run-up time before standing on this stage.
They have time to prepare themselves, cement their views, hone their points and to maybe think of a few jokes.
I haven't had that luxury.
I'm still in my first full month in the job.
So there's a lot for me to learn.
I know that you might be sceptical about what I'm going to say today.
You've seen Home Secretaries come and go –
I think I'm the 40th since the Federation was founded 99 years ago.
They've come from parties and from every point on the political spectrum.
But one thing we've all had in common is that not one of us has ever served as a police officer...
Not one.
And I've been told I'm the first Home Secretary with a police officer in my immediate family.
I can't blame you if you're sitting there thinking to yourself –
"this guy might talk a good game, but he's just another politician."

And I'm sure some of you, right now, are thinking that there's no way I understand policing.
The work you do, the difference you make, the challenges you face.
That I just don't – and won't – get it.
But that's where you're wrong.
My family grew up on a road in Bristol described by one national newspaper as "Britain's most dangerous street".
A journalist referred to it as - a "lawless hellhole where murder, rape, shootings, drug pushing, prostitution, knifings and violent robbery are commonplace".
But to us, it was just home.
All my parents wanted for me and my brothers was for their boys to do well –
to work hard and to play by the rules.
But I've got a confession.
When I was younger, I was in a gang.
A gang of two.
It involved me and my brother.
I was eleven, he was nine.
We were called The Crime Stoppers.
Our mission: find crime and stop it.
Our equipment: two knackered old bikes and two walkie-talkies.
And a passion to fight crime on Britain's most dangerous street.

Years later, that brother is still a crime stopper, only this time, for real – as a Chief Superintendent –

having started as a PC some 25 years ago.

Over the years, I've heard what he has to say about policing.

I know the tricky situations he's been in.

He's been hospitalised more times than I know from being assaulted on duty.

I remember him missing Christmas one year after having his jaw dislocated.

I've seen the impact the job has on family life.

And as you would expect from a brother, he doesn't shield me from the truth.

Long before I was a politician, he took me out on a ride-along in the back of his police car in Bristol city centre.

I thought it would be an interesting insight into his job.

But I wasn't prepared for the abuse he and his colleague received:

Teenagers giving them the middle finger, swearing and spitting.

And worst of all, as his car approached the lights and slowed...

...one teenager leaned over and yelled at my brother –

“You Paki bastard”.

That was the first time it really hit me just how hard and horrible it can be being a police officer.

I asked my brother why the police spent so much time in that neighbourhood given that they clearly weren't welcome.

And you know what he said?

“It's where we're needed most”.

It's where we're needed most.

Only five words...

...but five words that summed up for me everything that makes our police officers so special.

That spirit, that sense of duty and vocation, is what drives you in all you do.

From physically taking on violent criminals, to breaking bad news to bereaved families.

You are there.

From handling tragedies like Grenfell, to providing security and peace of mind at celebrations like the Royal Wedding.

You are there.

And there is no greater testament to the bravery and honour of the police than the roll call of those who have fallen in the line of duty in the past year.

We are deeply indebted to these officers who made the ultimate sacrifice serving the public..

... and we must take this moment to remember them and the families they have left behind.

So, I would like to pay tribute to PC James Dixon and PC David Fields.

And PC Steven Jenkins who fell ill whilst on duty and passed away.

This week, we also remember the extraordinary acts of police bravery in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena terrorist attack a year ago.

We remember those officers who ran in to help and protect the many innocent people who found themselves caught up in the attack.

We remember DC Elaine McIver who lost her life in the attack whilst off-duty.

And we must also remember those officers who got to London Bridge in eight minutes.
Saving countless lives.

I am also hugely grateful to Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey...

...one of the first at the scene in Salisbury who put himself at great risk helping others.

Every single day, you make the brave decision to pull on your uniform and go out to work....

... not knowing what you'll have to deal with on your shift.

People call policing a 'job like no other,' but you simply call it 'the job'.

For me, this world of policing may be new - but this is my fifth job in Government.

And in every role I have seen the importance of the police.

As Culture Secretary, I saw how much harder the job has become because of the rise of new technologies like social media.

As Business Secretary, I knew that a strong police force creates a safe and fair environment for our economy to prosper –

from defending property rights to tackling fraud.

As Communities Secretary, I saw first-hand how you work in some of the most challenging places, where the underlying problems are not of your making.

And in my life before politics, I saw many places in the world where the public suffered from the absence of a truly professional police force.

I saw how bad things get when the police are ineffective, corrupt, or serving political interests.

That's why I see the police as one of the institutions we can be - and are - most proud of in this country.

But I'm not arrogant enough to turn up here after three weeks in the job and tell you how to do yours.

What I will say is that I am listening and I get it.

I get that there's increased demand.

Yes – traditional crime is over a third lower than it was in 2010 - a credit to your hard work.

But more crimes – like hate crimes and sexual offences – are being reported than ever before.

There's also been a recent increase in serious violent crimes – including homicides, knife and gun crime.

I am absolutely determined to put an end to the appalling violence that is terminating young lives far too soon.

The threat from terrorism has also escalated and evolved.

And crime is increasingly taking place online.

The internet has emboldened criminals to break the law in the most horrifying of ways...

... with platforms that enable dangerous crimes and appalling abuse.

Since becoming Home Secretary, I've spoken to frontline officers about your experiences of crime and policing.

You've told me you're feeling stretched, overburdened and not sufficiently rewarded.

I know it's frustrating when your days off get cancelled – often at short notice.

And I know your work can take its toll on your mental and physical health.

And you deserve to be respected and valued, but all too often what you get is abuse.

So let me say this.

I want you to have the resources you need.

Since 2010, we have prioritised strengthening the economy and this involves making some difficult funding decisions.

All of us have played a part in bringing down the deficit.
So we must all continue to live within our means...
..I recognise that we need to prioritise public investment in policing.
We're giving PCCs the flexibility to increase council tax contributions to policing.
This has helped deliver a £460m increase in total police funding this year.
We're now investing over £1bn more in policing than we did three years ago, including money raised through council tax.
But we need to think more about the long term funding of the police.
So, my pledge to you is this:
I will prioritise police funding in the Spending Review next year.
But this isn't all about money.
You have a job like no other.
You never know what you're going to be faced with.
It might be a murder scene, a child abuse investigation or a serious car accident.
And it's not surprising that dealing with all that takes its toll on you.
We need to protect the protectors.
The Government has already pledged £7.5m for a new national police welfare service – a first step in the right direction.
But together, I want us to totally transform the welfare provision for officers.
When you're out in public trying to do your duty, you should be protected.
That's why I'm backing the Assaults on Emergency Workers Bill...
...which will include tougher penalties for those who attack police officers and other emergency service workers.
That's why I'm also supporting changes to the rules on police pursuits.
To make it clear that a criminal is responsible for their decision to drive recklessly, not the police.
That's why I'm making sure you have the right kit and the right technology to do your jobs effectively.
It makes no sense that while many of you update your mobiles every couple of years, at work you use technology dating back to the 1990s.
That's why we've recently improved fingerprint technology...
... which will allow officers across the country to use smart phones to identify people faster and more easily than ever before.
That's why I also support the roll out of body worn cameras..
...which not only capture evidence first hand but has also made people think twice about assaulting you.
And I fully support those officers who want better protective equipment like spit and bite guards.
It's ridiculous that you can't restrain those who physically abuse you.
If you don't feel you're getting the tools you need, I want to know about it.
It's perfectly reasonable that you should want to protect yourself from harm when you're out on the beat.
That's why tasers are also an important tactical option for officers dealing with the most serious and violent criminals.
But you don't just need kit – you need powers.
And to help you tackle violent crime,

I will be bringing forward new laws which will make it harder than ever before to buy and possess guns, knives and acid.

And as Home Secretary, I will continue to look at what other powers you need to do your jobs more effectively.

That means looking at Stop and Search.

Some of you don't feel comfortable using it.

And that's not how it should be.

I have confidence in your professional judgement.

So let me be clear,

I support the use of Stop and Search.

You have to do your job and that means protecting everyone.

Evidence shows that if you're black, you're more likely to be a homicide victim than any other ethnic group.

If Stop and Search can mean saving lives from the communities most affected, then that has to be right.

I am new to the job.

I don't claim to be a policing expert or to have all the answers.

That's why, as much as possible, I want to hear from you.

I want to hear about your experiences working in frontline policing.

No doubt you'll tell me about them as I meet more forces over the coming months.

And I know that Nick Hurd the Policing Minister has already spoken to all 43 forces.

I'll also be setting up a more formal Frontline Review to get your feedback about what you really think.

Your ideas and responses will inform what happens next in policing.

Because I understand that no-one knows more about policing than you do.

But I also know that the public demand – and quite rightly expect – a high standard of support from their local police.

And ultimately, I want to reach a place where every member of the public is served by a force which is at least rated 'good'.

But currently, nearly a third of forces aren't.

And there is a big gap in efficiency between the top and the bottom.

So I want standards to be raised and to be more consistent.

I want any bad behaviour to be rooted out.

I want victims to get better treatment.

I want to see more collaboration and sharing best practice – at whatever level makes the most sense.

And I want the Federation to lead by example.

Showing greater transparency in the publishing of accounts and expenses, and continuing to show leadership on implementing reforms.

And I don't want any of you to believe that some changes belong in the "too hard to fix" box.

I want you to be bold and ambitious and to change the bits which don't work – or put pressure on your bosses to make it happen.

It's often said that British policing is the envy of the world.

Everyone in this room wants to keep it that way.

Let's reset the relationship between the Government and the police.

I will give you the tools, the powers and the back-up that you need to get the job done.

For those of you who stand on the frontline, be in no doubt, I will be standing with you.
Thank you.