

Political manoeuvres

After a wait of over a decade, Gordon Brown stepped forward to declare to the world's media gathered outside Number 10, 'Now, let the work of change begin'. But how will this potential change impact on the police service? James Winston, political advisor to the Police Federation writes

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has set an ambitious agenda to shake up the public sector. He has declared his first priority to be the NHS, though if we look back to his leadership acceptance speech he states, "I want to meet police, community support officers and residents to look at how neighbourhood policing can make our streets safer."

Indeed, a review of policing is currently being carried out by government-appointed Sir Ronnie Flanagan, examining the issues of cutting bureaucracy, neighbourhood policing, ensuring the public are driving local policing priorities and improved resource management. This could form the blueprint for the future of the service.

As we know from previous Home Office and Treasury battles, the Prime Minister will not just throw money at the problem of tackling crime. As a renowned lateral thinker, Mr Brown will be more inclined to increase funds for long-term crime prevention. Initiatives such as skills training, apprenticeships and community outreach programmes are more in line with Mr Brown's views on tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Targets

Mr Brown was an indirect author of targets in the police service and although he has expressed a desire to cut them down he will want proof the service is providing value for money.

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The political mind

For Britain's longest ever serving Chancellor, the realisation of easing into his new office must have been savoured and Mr Brown reinforced his authority following his inaugural Downing Street address with a near

total cabinet reshuffle.

Newly appointed Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, soon realised her stellar promotion was to be a baptism of fire when faced with serious attempted terrorist attacks, targeting hundreds of people in London and Glasgow. Here, Mr Brown showed his support for tougher anti-terrorist powers.

If Mr Brown had been Prime Minister in 1997, perhaps he would have stepped forward with knee-jerk rhetoric, blanket condemnation and rash statements for the purpose of political point scoring.

However, the approach he has developed over ten years as PM-in-waiting is very much that of the elder statesman. His response was considered and reassuring, and the public trust, which he has spoken at length about restoring, seemed to be won.

His new approach to government is even gaining cautious praise from political opponents. Far from being the puppet-master many commentators expected, his appointment of certain ministers and 'outsider' advisers indicate that he is serious in his purported goal of power sharing and more open government.

Mr Brown had stunned the media on the eve of taking over the reins of power. It seemed that the Prime Minister Designate was embroiled in controversial political manoeuvring when it emerged that Lord Ashdown has been offered first refusal as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The popular Conservative Quentin Davies had already been persuaded to cross the floor, and

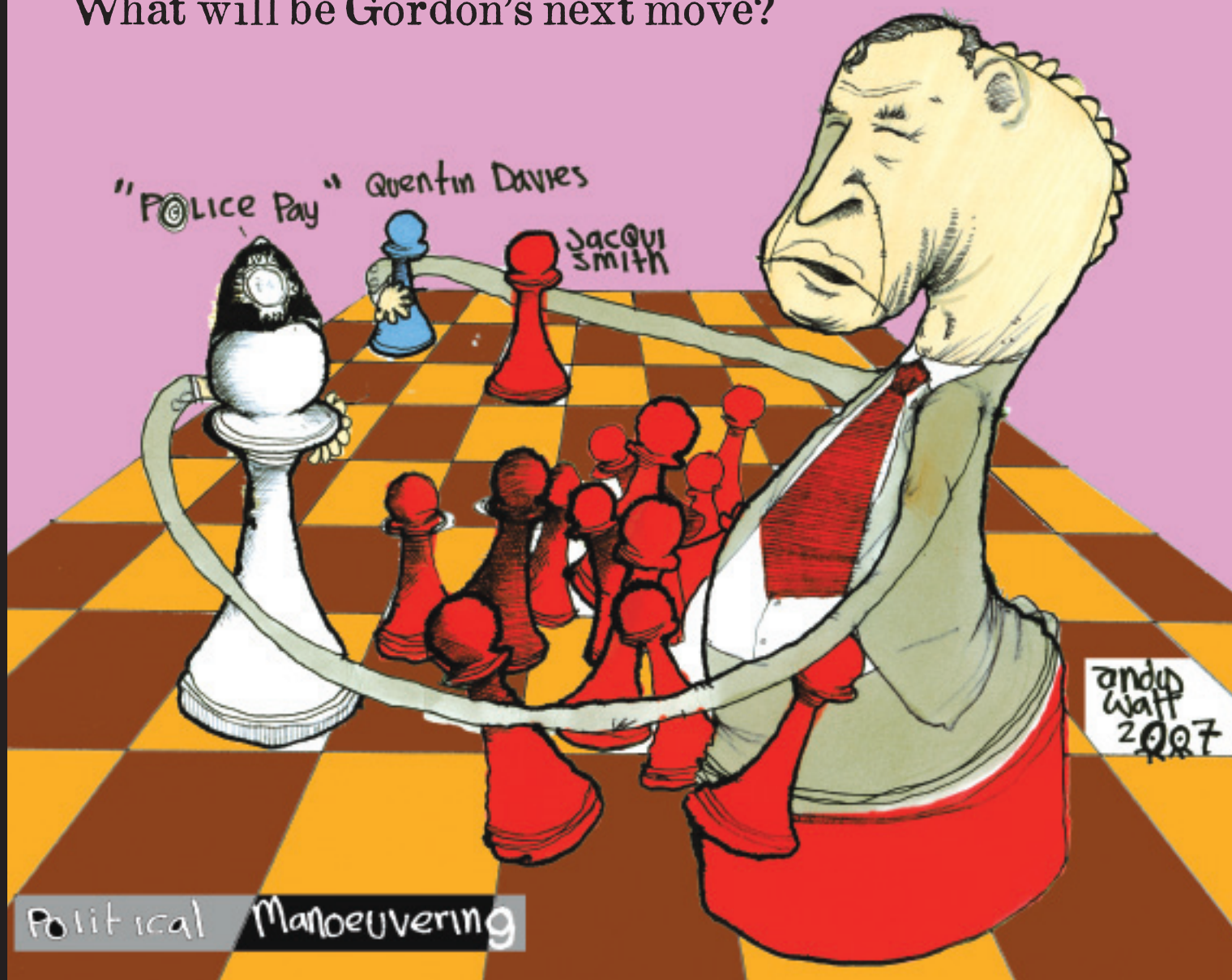
sealed the deal with a damning open letter attacking David Cameron.

In these early days of Brown's Britain, there seems to be a genuine impetus to shift power from the executive to Parliament, and open up decision-making to a wider and increasingly consultative, voter-led process.

The Police Federation has an established tradition of channelling insight and ideas into Home Office

initiatives, and the appointment of Jacqui Smith - reinforcing a well-known team of Tony McNulty, Vernon Coaker and Liam Byrne - is one the Federation will be working with. If the promise of an open door policy holds true the Federation and the Home Office should be closer than ever in achieving consensus on government proposals for reform, but only time will tell.

What will be Gordon's next move?



Political Manoeuvring