

A portrait of David Ruffley, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, a light blue checkered shirt, and a dark tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred view of a large, ornate building with a prominent clock tower, likely a government building in London.

Ruffley Speaking

Shadow minister for police reform
David Ruffley talks to Carol Jenkins
about his views on the current pay row
and his proposals for policing under
a Tory government.

While many MPs watched with interest as thousands of police officers made history by marching through London to protest against the pay deal, Tory shadow minister for police reform David Ruffley went one better. The Suffolk MP joined the 25,000 officers who marched from Park Lane to the Tate Gallery to show his support for their cause.

“I thought the march was inspiring and was carried out with a lot of dignity,” he told *Police*. “There was a lot of good humour but at the same time officers were making a very powerful point – they were angry at the way they have been treated by the Government.”

Mr Ruffley believes officers have been short-changed by the Home Office over the pay deal and is unequivocal in his support for the current pay process. He is also quick to emphasise that in the 18 years of the last Conservative Government, even when there were difficult economic times, it always honoured the pay award.

“What concerns me is that the service went in good faith to the bargaining table to arbitration, and it quite rightly expected the independent arbitration award to be honoured in full,” he said.

He described the Home Secretary as a “poodle to the Treasury” and accused Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling of

wanting to send a “macho message” to the rest of the public sector. This has broken a bond of trust between the Government and the police that he fears will be difficult to repair.

Although Mr Ruffley joined officers on the march, he is not in favour of giving officers the right to strike. He is keen to preserve the ‘no strike agreement’ which he believes forms the bedrock of policing.

“I’m convinced the Home Office has a secret agenda to erode the Office of Constable over time in a bid to prove a point and keep a handle on public sector pay as a whole.”

“The fact that police officers don’t have the right to strike makes them special. They are also special because of the large number of restrictions that they have on their personal life when they are off-duty.

“The Government seems to have lost sight of this and is now treating police officers as public sector employees. I’m convinced the Home Office has a secret agenda to erode the Office of Constable over time in a bid to prove a point and keep a handle on public

sector pay as a whole.”

What concerns Mr Ruffley is that this year’s decision could set a precedent for future pay awards. He pledges that future Conservative Home Secretaries would honour “without question” any arbitration awards, and that if for some reason the Home Secretary felt he or she could not honour the award, it would go to a Commons vote. If this system was in place now, Mr Ruffley is convinced that MPs would have come out in support of the police.

Despite sharing the sentiments of the officers on the march, Mr Ruffley is doubtful of the possibility of a reversal of the decision.

“I think Jacqui Smith has dug herself a hole that’s going to be very difficult to get out of. She has been told there is a national pay policy and, instead of standing by the police service, she has turned against them and bowed down to the Treasury.”

Since becoming shadow police reform minister in July, Mr Ruffley has wasted no time in getting out and meeting officers of all ranks. These visits have painted a picture of a service bogged down by bureaucracy and a “shambolic” IT system that slows up officers and creates more paperwork. Despite acknowledging the fact that establishing a common IT system for police and all of the criminal justice agencies is a difficult task, his view is that it is achievable.

“While we can’t create a common IT system in 12 months, what we do need is a bit more leadership from the Home Secretary and for it to be made more of a priority than it currently is.”

Mr Ruffley blames the Government for contributing to an increase in bureaucracy by passing laws “in an almost knee jerk fashion.”

“The amount of legislation they have introduced over the years has contributed to more bureaucracy. In the last ten years they have created more forms, not taken them away.”

He rejects the Home Secretary’s claim that the latest anti-bureaucracy drive has resulted in 9,000 fewer forms and calls for a national set of forms that require minimal completion.

Hounded: David Ruffley described the Home Secretary as “a poodle to the Treasury”



“There have been five major red tape reviews in the last ten years but there has been hardly any follow up on progress chasing. I discovered in a recent parliamentary question I asked that the Home Office post of National Bureaucracy Advisor has been vacant since July 2006. This proves how little time and attention is paid to this issue by the Home Office.”

Mr Ruffley also criticised the move to give the CPS the power over charging decisions – a role that was previously the responsibility of the charging sergeant. While he acknowledges the need to reduce the number of cracked and discontinued trials, it is his view that this move has taken away officers’ discretion.

He recently conducted time and motion studies in Suffolk and Hampshire forces to get a better insight, and found that officers lost valuable time waiting for CPS prosecutors to make decisions.

The Conservative Party will be bringing out its own proposals on how to reduce bureaucracy and restore discretion with frontline officers in the coming months. This will include views on a root and branch reform of the current performance indicators, which it believes increase bureaucracy and further remove officers’ discretion.

Mr Ruffley described the current set of indicators as “dysfunctional”, saying they do little to reassure the public that crime is falling. He is sceptical about the Government’s claims that the new Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) system to be introduced in April will be an improvement upon the current Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) system: “You need a very minimal set of indicators and that involves radically slashing what we’ve got at the moment.”

The Conservatives also want an overhaul of the inspection process and the creation of a new independent body similar to the National Audit Office to carry out inspections. It believes that the HMIC is too closely aligned to the Government and so can never be truly independent.



Photography: Press Association

Stepping out: The shadow minister joined officers on the recent protest march

History shows that past opposition politicians have promised that they will solve funding issues if they get into power. But Mr Ruffley makes no such promises and admits that while the current financial position for many forces is challenging, it is likely to continue.

What he does promise is an overhaul of the current funding formula that his own party introduced when it was in power, which has resulted in some forces being given much lower budgets than they claim they deserve.

While he supports the current workforce modernisation agenda, Mr Ruffley is keen to protect the Office of Constable and rejects any suggestion of performance-related pay.

It’s clear that Mr Ruffley has done his homework and has a genuine respect and admiration for frontline officers, something he admits stems from the fact that all his previous experiences of

the police have been positive.

He has never forgotten the professionalism and compassion showed to his mother in 1989 when, as a widow living alone in Bolton, she was burgled. The offenders broke into her house and stripped the property of her possessions and valuables that had been left to her by her grandparents.

“The officers dealing with the crime promised her faithfully they would get her possessions back. They stuck to their word and recovered everything that was stolen. My mother was so impressed that she made a donation to the benevolent fund.”

“One thing I have also learnt is that the police don’t take too kindly to politicians taking liberties with issues such as their pay.”

Mr Ruffley speaks with candour about another incident that has also shaped his view of the police. Five years later, his mother died and he was driving back from her funeral in Lancashire to London in a “terrible state” and admits to driving at almost double the speed limit on the West Way at midnight. He was pulled over by two officers who asked him if he had realised how fast he was driving.

“I told them that I had just buried my mother in a cemetery in Southport and as a soon as I said it they used their discretion and said no further action would be taken against me. They made a commonsense decision and one that I will never forget.”

He continues: “Since taking on this role six months ago I have met hundreds of officers who have displayed such discretion and who have a great passion for what they do. “But one thing I have also learnt is that the police don’t take too kindly to politicians taking liberties with issues such as their pay.

“This is something that Jacqui Smith needs to take on board before she does anything else to alienate a police service that we should all be supporting and not working against.”