

Tory attack on targets eroding officer discretion

Tory leader David Cameron promised police officers he would scrap targets and restore officer discretion as he hit out at the number of top-down bodies ‘interfering with local policing’.

Mr Cameron told delegates at the Police Federation’s conference in Blackpool that the government is creating ‘targets, directives, inspection and centralisation’ that take away their judgement and discretion. He told officers he would sweep away ‘arbitrary national targets that skew performance leading to police officers going for easy detections of minor crimes’.

He added that top-down bodies such as the Police Standards Unit, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and the National Policing Improvement Agency, are ‘completely, damagingly, one hundred and eighty degrees wrong’.

Mr Cameron told officers: “Your discretion to choose how to deal with minor crimes and resolve conflict on the streets has been diminished – and it is local communities that suffer. Police officers used to be street corner diplomats. Now, too often, you are agents of Whitehall.”

Sir Menzies Campbell, leader of the Liberal Democrats, suggested that there should be a ‘bonfire of central targets’ for the police and attacked them for ‘undermining the discretion, professionalism and experience of police officers on the front line’.

Mr Cameron also emphasised a need for the police to be locally accountable to people declaring they would abolish police authorities which he dubbed as ‘too weak and too invisible’ to exercise local accountability.

The Conservative party would introduce directly-elected commissioners with similar powers to police authorities.

Sir Menzies agreed that local accountability was important but that elected commissioners would lead to a ‘political service’.

Penalty notices are replacing ‘commonsense’ policing

Commonsense policing has been thrown out with the introduction of penalty notices for disorder given out for minor offences like ‘a man caught in possession of an egg with intent to throw’.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Police Federation, told delegates at the annual conference in Blackpool that PNDs were an example of ‘control-freakery that is eroding common sense’.

She referred to a number of cases highlighted by officers to the federation where people had been criminalised for minor offences in order to hit government targets.

“A child who threw buns at a bus? A man who threw water over his girlfriend? And a man caught in possession of an egg with intent to throw. These are hardly weapons of mass destruction.

“All these cases should have been dealt with by a quiet word and good old-fashioned commonsense,” she said in her keynote speech in front of Home Secretary John Reid.

Mr Reid said that targets and performance indicators must act as ‘genuine incentives to improve’.

He added that police officers should not be chasing minor misdemeanours at the expense of serious offenders – ‘the sort of ludicrous examples the Federation flagged up earlier this week. I call this behaviour hitting the target but missing the point’.

Ian Pointon, chairman of Kent Police Federation, said that the service was being reduced to tick-box targets and more bureaucracy and officers were getting less pay with the result that the service to the public was suffering.

Ken Jones, president of ACPO, said that the Home Secretary had been trying to help them push through change by reducing targets and that it did not always help to ‘point fingers’.

However, Mrs Berry said that there are now more ‘people counting than we have doing’ in the police service.

Mr Cameron takes tea with officers at conference



Photography: Andrew Carruth

Home Secretary John Reid: officers should not be chasing ‘minor misdemeanours’



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