

# Remember, remember, the month of November

**Jan Berry, chairman of the Police Federation, writes about the future of the police service and predicts legislation likely to be outlined in the Queen's speech and how it could help or hinder officers.**

As I write, we are awaiting the outcome of the Police Arbitration Tribunal (PAT) for our annual pay claim. We have a compelling case, and as other groups of workers will already have received their increases I remain confident the tribunal will find in our favour.

The decision then rests solely with the Home Secretary John Reid. Will the same man who said, "You are the backbone of law and order in this country. We can achieve nothing without your hard work, determination and bravery," at our annual conference this year honour the tribunal's findings? If he fails to ratify the decision 170,000 officers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be asking whether he is fit for purpose.

## Queen's speech

Away from pay, November will be an interesting month for those with an eye on Westminster, and an important one for policing. The state opening of Parliament on 15 November 15 will see the final Queen's speech of Tony Blair's premiership. So what can we expect from the Home Office?

The answer, if history repeats itself, is plenty. After the chaos of the last 12 months, major institutional reform to immigration, and possibly a new points-based system,

is surely a cert. Further anti-terrorism legislation too, must be near the top of the list. A return of the proposal for a maximum 90-day detention and tougher control orders would be no surprise. And what of the respect agenda? The chance to introduce new laws may be just too irresistible to ignore, so perhaps fixed penalties notices for hoodies will be in the offing?

More seriously, one piece of legislation I fully expect to see is a National Offender Management Bill – mainly because Gerry Sutcliffe, a Home Office minister, accidentally revealed it during a fringe event we were addressing at the Labour Party Conference.

A Coroners Bill, establishing a framework for the appointment of Coroners, would be long overdue. New provisions to tackle organised and financial crime are also widely predicted.

As with all Bills, however, what looks good on paper is not always effective on the streets. Whatever the small-print, the Police Federation will ensure all parliamentarians are made fully aware of the real impact on the frontline of the latest Whitehall blue-sky thinking.

The service, too, must be up to speed. Last year, many officers I met were very well versed in the change in the law for Powers of Arrest. But it was many officers – not all officers. As is too often the case, training was a lottery from force to force. That must change.

## Wish list

At this time of year journalists are always keen to find out what the Federation thinks of what's in the Queen's speech. The answer maybe a cliché, but it's often not what is in it, but what is not in it, that is most important.

As a starting point, I firmly believe we need to see changes to inject a healthy dose of accountability into the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). It is clear the "I" has fast become redundant – police officers have lost faith in its independence bringing into question its legitimacy. The introduction of some form of watchdog would, quite literally, fit the bill, creating an avenue for police officers and of course members of the

public to raise their concerns about the IPCC. Something creating a litany of new laws cannot change, is the crisis in the prison system. The public, understandably, feel duped when people are released early.

More importantly, with so many prisoners addicted to drugs, releasing them before they have completed – or in some cases even began – their drug treatment programme only serves to give the conveyor belt of crime added momentum. This is made even worse, as, for many, help on release is often non-existent.

Closer to home, we must focus on the quality of performance rather than the quantity of sanction detection. Are we a government data collection agency or a crime fighting force?

### The future?

November is also significant because it will mark the one-year anniversary of the debate on the future of policing called for by the Sir Ian Blair, Met commissioner – at least it would, had such a debate taken place.

In the Dimbleby lecture on BBC1 Sir Ian posed the simple question, “What kind of police service do we want?” Commentators concurred and parliamentarians applauded in unison. But what since then?

There’s been no intelligent debate; no proper discussions. Just more of the same; piecemeal workforce modernisation; and change dictated by short-term financial decisions, not operational effectiveness.

Sadly, senior officers themselves at the Met appear confused. CSOs – originally the “eyes and ears” of communities – are now filling gaps elsewhere in the force, with some just “ears” in call centres.

Never before has there been such a need for a thorough and independent examination of the future of policing. It may be a dream but the words, “This year my government will listen to the public and police officers so that the police service is fit for the future,” would be the most welcome opening of the Queen’s speech.

