



Paul Kelly, chairman of Greater Manchester Police Federation

Government's failed policing experiment

This government speak well and claim the highest number of police officers in the UK's history, but I note that they are not committed to make any claim of maintaining those numbers. I honestly believe they have put in place a plan that will destroy one of this country's greatest and most revered assets – the British police force. No false modesty, we are the envy of the world.

Imagine utopia; engineers would be German, cooks would be French, clothes made by Italians and the police would be British.

In Britain when the police are called there is a common standard and a 'Bobby is a Bobby'; an all-rounder, skilled, empowered and equipped to answer that call for help when a member of the public calls. We are the port of last resort and the public deserve no less when they call 'the police', they deserve exactly that, a police officer. So given the challenge of policing into the next Millennium how does this government respond? With the investment in over 16,000 PCSOs.

I applaud creative thinking; I applaud initiative; I applaud the courage to dare to try new methods in problem solving. However, by far, I applaud the ability to accept that you are wrong. This government brought a new and unusual initiative in the guise of neighbourhood policing, yes, it is new, and using unsworn uniform personnel as its bed-rock the community support officer (CSO) was born.

The idea that by taking an individual, giving them limited powers, placing them in a uniform the resembled a police officer and sending them out into the community would cure the problem of anti-social behaviour and minor criminality was born on that very same day.

Sadly, the experiment failed and failed miserably – no disrespect to the fine men and women who become CSOs – it is not their fault. You cannot send a soldier out to fight a battle unarmed and untrained – be clear, we are in a war. The enemy are criminals and foul gangs that make the lives of decent law abiding citizens unbearable.

The elements that cause this misery are quick to identify weakness and when you send out a civilian dressed as a police officer they do not fear them, indeed there are many examples when they positively goad and abuse them, because they are fully aware of their limited powers, training and equipment.

Already, in Manchester they are being used in plain clothes to carry out non-uniform duties. For all those in Westminster who are too conceited to listen to their own research into the effectiveness of CSO deployment - the Home Office had an independent review of the effectiveness of CSO deployment and that found: 'Where PCSOs were deployed they had no measurable effect on the levels of criminality or incidents of anti-social behaviour'.

By definition – dealing with criminals and jobs on the street is confrontational – that's why you give your police officers powers, CS gas, batons, tasers, handcuffs, and firearms. Sadly, such powers and weapons are needed in this war on crime and to send out soldiers in this war with no more than a yellow jacket and a big hat is not acceptable.

Mr Blair, Dr John Reid, you will leave a legacy when you go and unless you change your policies that legacy will be the destruction of the most revered law enforcement agency in the world – I for one will never forgive you for such a shameful act.