

Home Secretary's speech to Police Federation Conference, Bournemouth, 21 May 2008

1. Introduction

Good morning.

I start by offering my own words of thanks and respect to everyone who has received a Bravery Award this year.

The Awards are a fitting tribute – and they do credit not just to the courage of individual officers, but also to the achievements of their colleagues, and to the reputation of policing as a whole in England and Wales.

Last week, we saw further evidence – if any was needed – of your bravery and dedication, as officers in Manchester dealt superbly with the disturbances caused by a small but dangerous minority of thugs.

Those pictures showed vividly the pressures you can come under. More than that, they demonstrated the composure and determination that you show when called upon to protect the public.

Jan – this year, as every year, we remember the officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

Constable Jonathan Henry.
Constable Andrew Graham Gough.
Constable Katie Louise Mitchell.
Constable Ian David Walker.
Constable Christopher Roberts.
Constable Christopher Hart.
Sergeant Robert Walsham.
Sergeant Noel McCarthy.

And as we remember fallen colleagues, so we should not forget the families they leave behind. The officer who was also a mother or a father, a wife or husband, a daughter or a son.

That's why, this summer, I will set out proposals to review the system of police injury awards.

And those proposals will include a major change.

In the future, the pensions of the surviving partners of officers killed in the line of duty should be payable for life, regardless of whether they go on to remarry.

That change is a key part of a package of support for surviving partners that I want the Police Negotiating Board to agree by the end of this year.

And at the same time, I want to do more for existing survivors who have already lost their partner in the line of duty.

At the moment, the pension they receive is withdrawn if they remarry.

I recognise that this can cause hardship, and so to alleviate the problem I intend to give police authorities the discretionary power to make one-off lump sum payments to help existing survivors who have remarried or may remarry.

I will work with the Police Federation and other members of the Police Negotiating Board on the details of the scheme, but I envisage this lump sum payment to be sizeable in most cases.

Jan, some strong words have been used in the past year. I know they haven't been used lightly.

And today I want to talk to you all directly – face-to-face – about some of the important decisions I've had to make this year, but also about some of the key objectives that I know we share.

And so that we can have as full a discussion as possible this morning, I want to leave plenty of time for the Q&A session after my remarks.

2. Pay

Four months ago, almost to the day, 25,000 of you marched through London. Many of you here were on that march, and I met some of you on that day.

Then, as now, I am in no doubt of the strength of feeling on this subject. Then, as now, I stand by my decision.

We all know the arguments. I know you strongly disagree with the decision.

But it was one that I took only after a lot of thought – after considering the full facts of the case. The need to keep mortgages and the cost of living under control – and that includes your mortgages and your families' cost of living as well.

And there was another crucial factor at play. Affordability – and for that read police officer numbers. I needed to ensure that you continued to have your colleagues working alongside you – all your colleagues.

At a time when families are feeling the pinch, I know how important it is to restore stability and confidence into discussions on your pay.

That's why we've opened discussions on a multi-year pay deal for the future. 2007 may be unfinished business for some, but it's clear that we need to get cracking if we want to reach an early settlement that gives you and your families the stability and confidence to plan for the future.

I know that this needs to be a two-way street. So if we can agree a long-term deal based on the Arbitration Tribunal index, I will implement that in full.

But let's be under no illusions. Setting out on the road to the right to strike will lead only to a dead-end.

The issue of officer benefits goes much more widely than pay. It's also, of course, about your pension arrangements.

I've already mentioned the additional package for surviving partners. I now want to turn to improvements for officers themselves.

First, I am announcing today new commutation factors for calculating retirement lump sums under the Police Pension Scheme 1987. These new factors – which are the same for both men and women – should be implemented in forces from 1 July this year. And they will be back-dated to 1 October last year.

This will increase the lump sum payable to all officers who retire under the 'old' police pension scheme, or who retired with a lump sum under the old pension scheme on or after 1 October 2007.

To give you an idea of what this could mean for different officers in different circumstances:

- a 50-year old male constable on the top of the pay scale and with CRTP threshold payments who retires after 30 years and commutes the maximum will get a lump sum of just over £109,000 – almost £23,000 more than under the old factors.
- a 52-year old male sergeant in similar circumstances will get a lump sum of just under £120,000 – almost £24,000 more.
- a 55-year old female inspector in similar circumstances will get a lump sum of just over £142,000 – about £14,000 more.

3. Office of Constable

We live in a changing world. And just as it is right and fair that we improve your pension arrangements and injury awards in order to meet the needs of modern day officers and their families, so too is it important to understand how policing is changing to meet the challenges of today's world – and tomorrow's.

With neighbourhood policing, with 24/7 response, with CID and protective services, with intelligence activity to counter the threat of organised crime and terrorism – whatever your specialism, each and every day, I understand, police officers are protecting our streets and our communities, upholding society's laws and ensuring respect for these laws.

All of these activities are vital to our well-being as a country.

And the responsibility we ask you to shoulder on our behalf is a great one, matched only by the faith that communities place in you to lead the fight against crime.

We all know that people's expectations of the police grow ever greater. And no-one understands what it takes to meet these expectations better than you.

Day in and day out, you are on the front line dealing with the changing face of crime and the increasing demands this makes of you.

Jan, you've made a powerful case for the Office of Constable this morning.

You're right to assert its centrality to the proud history of policing in this country. It is the bedrock on which so many of your achievements are based.

For the best part of two hundred years, the story of the Office of Constable has been the story of policing in this country. Long may that last.

When I publish the Green Paper on policing next month, my cast-iron commitment to the Office of Constable will be set out for all to see. Right from the first page.

The principles that make British policing the envy of the world have not altered.

But it is a fact of history and a fact of life that the procedures, skills, tools and partners you work with to put these principles into practice have changed dramatically since the early years of the 19th century.

Rather than see changes in workforce practices – the introduction of community support officers and the greater use of staff – as a threat to warranted officers, there will always be a distinct role for holders of the Office of Constable that sets them apart from the rest.

Only they – only you – should have the wide-ranging coercive powers that can be applied in the community at large.

Only you have a duty to obey lawful orders and exercise professional discretion – an essential safeguard for the public. And only you have a duty to exercise your powers whenever they are needed, off-duty as well as on.

But there is more scope for you to be supported – not supplanted, not sidelined – in the roles that you, and only you, can play.

I know that building new relationships and getting used to new ways of working can be difficult.

But I have to say my own view is that the introduction of PCSOs has been welcomed by the public – and that public support for PCSOs is an expression of public support for policing as a whole. It reflects well on you - as well as policing in general.

Some of you have fears that the trend is towards officers only dealing with confrontational situations and serious crime. I hear those concerns – and I firmly believe they should have no place in the future of policing.

Across the breadth and range of your specialisms, it is the experience and leadership that you as officers provide that makes you so valued.

It is your status – and the personal and professional qualities you bring to the job – that set you apart within the policing family, as together you work to protect the public.

Not only to make our country safer, but to make everyone in our communities feel safer as well.

4. Equipping the police for the future

People have high expectations of you. To meet them, you've got to have the skills, the tools and the space you need to do your job.

Last September – in this very hall – the Prime Minister announced a £50m capital fund for more than 10,000 handheld computers, so that officers can log crimes from the spot, and stay out on the beat and out of the station.

In the very near future we will announce how that money will be allocated to forces.

Such was the appetite that the fund was heavily oversubscribed. And so we will now go further and develop a second phase of the fund.

Officers need to be protected in the course of their duties and our trials to extend Tasers are showing real benefits – like the report in last week's Police Review of a 40% drop in officers' days off, due to fewer assaults and injuries, in the Northumbria trials.

If the trials show the value of Taser for protecting officers and protecting the public, I see no reason why they should not be issued routinely to all police officers.

5. Bureaucracy

The skills and tools for the job are one thing – but what about the things that get in the way of you doing your job in the first place?

The last thing you want is more fine words about cutting red tape. You want action.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan's report gave us a plan and timetable for meaningful action that will make a practical difference to every officer on the street.

I agree with Sir Ronnie that ACPO and the NPIA, working with frontline officers, should standardise the most common processes and the forms associated with them so that they are streamlined across all forces.

In the next few months, we will scrap the stop and account form. We will cut the amount of information you have to record on most incidents. And I want to see action taken in quick order to cut practices where officers have to key details in more than once.

For our part, the Home Office will reduce the amount of data we collect by nearly a third. And thanks to the Federation's constructive input to the PACE review, we know where we need to simplify a range of processes – including custody, bail and entry to premises.

Already, we are saving time and paper by streamlining files in guilty plea cases, piloting integrated prosecution teams of police and lawyers, and extending the use virtual courts.

But I want to go further, and appoint a senior figure to work with front line practitioners and their managers to make sure that change is felt on the ground. He – or she – will lead a new group of police officers and other practitioners to challenge and advise us on the impact of our policies on operational staff and the public.

And I give you my commitment today that I want someone for this role who has the skills and the credibility – including credibility with you – to make it work.

6. Conclusion

The Green Paper will set out my determination to allow you to use professional judgement more, and avoid getting bogged down in unnecessary processes.

I want you to play your part in this. Your views, your knowledge and experience are essential.

And I hope that one voice, in particular, will not be missing from our ongoing debates about the future of policing.

Jan Berry's. Throughout the time I have known you, Jan, you have managed to combine total commitment to the cause of police officers with a genuine willingness to engage on the big issues that matter to the future of policing.

As Chairman and General Secretary, you and John have been prized and valued colleagues. I have never doubted the tenacity with which you have pursued your members' interests.

Thank you for your years of dedication to the Police Federation. Thank you for your decades of service to British policing.

As I've found this morning, you will be a tough act to follow. And I hope that we have not seen the last of you yet – or for a long time to come.

You understand that a self-confident and professional police force is a force to be reckoned with.

And you know that a police force which looks to the future holds a position of privilege in our society, and commands the confidence of our communities. So do I.

Thank you.

[2400 words]