

UNISON POLICE STAFF CONFERENCE, GLASGOW, 16 OCTOBER 2008

Rt Hon JACQUI SMITH MP

Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to your conference today.

With nearly 100,000 police staff in England, Wales and Scotland playing such a vital role in the delivery of the police service for and to the public – and with UNISON the majority union for these police staff, I am particularly pleased to be talking to you today.

I want to begin by putting on record my recognition of the huge contribution police staff make, and to say a direct 'thank you' to you as staff representatives.

I value the engagement of UNISON – and particularly the leadership of Caryl Nobbs and Ben Priestley – in sharing our efforts to build a modern police service.

In your speech, Caryl, you made a point of highlighting the key role police staff play in delivering this modern police service for the public.

Your members, wherever they work, must show professionalism and expertise across a whole range of roles – in intelligence; in call handling; in human resources and resource management; as PCSOs; and in detention, investigation and surveillance.

It is a straightforward and unarguable fact that the police services of the UK could not deliver without your members. And it is clear to me that your members have a central part to play in continuing to improve the service the police provide to the public.

Policing Green Paper

This is a good time to be talking to you after what has been an important year for policing – and in particular as the consultation on the Green Paper has just closed.

I have seen your thoughtful and clear response to the Green Paper – and am grateful to you for the work that has gone into it. There is much for us to consider across a range of issues from delivering the Policing Pledge, strengthening the position of PCSOs, and cutting unnecessary red tape, and I look forward to continuing engagement and discussions with you.

For me, the Policing Green Paper set out some important new actions that we would take to free up the police – officers and staff – so that you can focus on issues which really matter to the public.

The focus is on delivering improvements for policing personnel and the public alike:

- The new Policing Pledge – agreed with the police and in place in the next few months – will give the public a clear understanding of the service they can expect.
- Better local information, including crime mapping in every force by the end of the year – will help people influence their policing.

- Stronger democratic accountability – linking the public, councils and police more closely through direct elections to police authorities for a majority of its members.
- And, crucially, from now on only one single target from central government on forces – that of increasing public confidence that people’s concerns are being tackled locally.

Building public confidence in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour can’t just be delivered by top down performance management. Instead, it means giving police professionals the responsibility and power to drive improvements that people can see and feel, and that make a difference.

That means valuing and supporting police professionals – officers, staff, PCSOs and specialists – as the experts in what works. And it means keeping the public fully informed and involved as well.

The title of the Green Paper – “From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing Our Communities Together” – makes clear our ambition for a police service that delivers at every level. I firmly believe that this only be achieved by using the talents of all those working in the police service.

The roles you undertake are crucial to delivering not just effective policing, but in securing the highest levels of customer service to the public.

Confidence

Confidence is the key theme running through the Green Paper – improving public confidence in the police service, and having confidence as members of the police service that you will be respected, supported and freed up to do your job.

PCSOs, with their strong focus on community engagement, have an obvious role to play in improving confidence. But, in truth, the responsibility to improve public confidence rests with us all.

For many members of the public, their first contact at their police station will be with front counter police staff – putting those professionals in an important position to directly and indirectly influence the ability of the service to improve the public's confidence in policing.

Pledge

The Policing Pledge will, for the first time, set out what the public can expect from our police service. A clear set of national standards covering everything from call handling to follow-up for victims – as well as a local element that is explicit about how local areas will be policed.

Police staff are core partners to the new deal the Green Paper sets out to deliver a better, more accessible and responsive service to meet the expectations of the public.

It is police staff who take the public's telephone calls and who serve as scene of crime officers and analysts working to provide a responsive and approachable service. You have a significant contribution to make to ensure that the new Policing Pledge is delivered.

PCSOs

I want in this context to put on record my recognition and support for PCSOs. Every PCSO I have met has been professional, dedicated and most importantly they have had the overwhelming support of their local community who see them every day.

PCSOs are not a replacement for police constables. I am clear that PCSOs should not be given the power to arrest, that must remain a power for constables alone.

Instead, PCSOs play a distinct and vital neighbourhood role providing high visibility patrol, community engagement and problem solving. But we need to give the public more clarity on the role of a PCSO:

- That's why, along with ACPO and the APA, we have agreed that all PCSOs must now be at least 18 years old;
- That's why we are going further to standardise uniforms so that the public are able to recognise a PCSO wherever they go;
- And, finally, that's why we should be clearer about the powers that all PCSOs have no matter where they are in the country. So, although the evaluation has not yet concluded, I believe that we should be looking at how to expand the current list of standard powers to include others, such as detaining a suspect until a PC arrives, the ability to disperse troublemakers and to impose a fine for graffiti.

These changes will enable the public to easily recognise and understand the role of PCSOs as a distinct and important part of the policing family.

Workforce development

Before saying something in a moment on workforce modernisation I do want to say something about pay.

Looking ahead to the future, your Green paper response points to the work on pay structures undertaken by the

National Policing Board. We are beginning work on looking at pay structures following the Green Paper themes of seeing how we can use to changes to pay structures to focus on the leadership, deployment and development of police staff (and also police officers). This is a big project and we are some way off from detailed negotiations. But even in advance of that we will need to consult carefully with your national representatives on this issue.

I know you want a national pay and grading system for all police staff in England and Wales. I will of course also need to ensure that whatever we are considering is affordable. But, without getting into details at this stage, I think there is lots of scope to work together. You have given clear indications on interest in a mechanism for driving improvement through skills, leadership and progression, and potentially linking competencies and pay. These fit very closely with the Green Paper themes I have mentioned and point to our shared interest in delivering the best possible service to the public.

Your current pay settlement is of course under negotiation now. I do not personally have a direct role in this and it would not be appropriate to comment on these negotiations in detail.

In that context, however, I was very pleased that yesterday we agreed a three-year pay deal for the police in England and Wales, and Scotland and Northern Ireland, that is one of the fairest pay deals in the public sector. All involved in the negotiations have worked hard, and in a spirit of co-operation.

This deal gives police officers and their families valuable financial certainty for the future and I am confident that it will reach their pay packets in full in time for Christmas.

One of the major themes of the Green Paper is how we can enable officers and staff to improve how their force works for the public.

And one particular aspect of that is the achievement of a workforce mix that will maximise delivery to the public.

There have been real successes – improving performance, and improving the way that tasks and roles are shared.

In Northumbria, for example, volume crime investigation has been reorganised in Sunderland North to put a police staff member as leader of a mixed team of warranted officers and partially warranted staff.

This new approach involves that team leader taking responsibility for the team's caseload, using their expert knowledge to set investigative strategy and tactics. Police staff investigative officers in these teams are given training appropriate to their role, including statement taking, interviewing suspects, file preparation and so on.

In the Green Paper, we made clear that all police authorities and police forces must challenge themselves to identify the workforce mix that will best serve the public.

In 2010, HMIC will be taking a hard look at what authorities and forces have achieved in this area. I think this is a clear signal of our commitment to workforce modernisation, and I understand from the NPIA that they have already had a number of new forces contact the workforce modernisation programme as a result.

And my clear message to you today is that you and your members have exactly the same capacity to drive and deliver excellence in policing as your warranted colleagues.

We have been using Operation QUEST to help the service and government to demonstrate what can be achieved – to strengthen the quality of service to the public, by tapping into the detailed knowledge and the vocation of operational, front line public servants.

Partly it is about staff using that knowledge to develop and then implement rigorous options for locally-led improvement.

But it is also – and this is the key - about supporting managers and leaders to understand and demonstrate the behaviours that create and sustain genuine empowerment.

UNISON members have been in the vanguard of making this approach a success in nine police forces – Merseyside, Suffolk, Avon & Somerset, Cheshire, Lancashire, Thames Valley, Norfolk, Sussex and Wiltshire. And we are now about to provide similar support to staff and officers in a further four forces – Devon & Cornwall, Greater Manchester, North Wales and West Yorkshire.

And new results from Norfolk Constabulary provide vivid examples of what can be achieved, where call handlers have had a central role in changing the way that officers respond to calls for service from the public.

By making convenient, scheduled appointments for the public, they have achieved substantial improvements in customer satisfaction.

Early survey data suggests that customer satisfaction has risen by 11% (from 86 to 97%), with members of the public making comments like: "... the appointment system is a brilliant idea, I didn't expect anyone to come out and see me so quickly."

And: "I think the system is working. It's a 200% improvement on what you had previously."

Since going live with QUEST, PCSO follow-up visits to victims of crime have doubled – so that now 55% of victims in the pilot districts receive a visit.

Scheduled at a time that's convenient to the victim, these visits are clearly valuable – not only because they show that the police are listening to victims and are taking their experience seriously, but also because they provide a further opportunity to capture information relating to the crime.

But these improvements don't have to be limited to the front-line – although, of course, improvements in the 'back office' have a beneficial effect on the effectiveness of the front-line service to the public.

And so, in the same force, police staff have helped to design and introduce a new system of intelligence management. Intelligence report processing rates have more than doubled, putting the force on-track to eliminate a backlog and provide much more useful information to support proactive and reactive operations.

In each of these QUEST forces – on the front line, on the front desk, and in the back office – the work police staff are doing to drive and deliver excellence in policing is making a real difference. I urge your members to continue to do so.

Conclusion

The future for policing must build on strong performance and success already achieved, in order to respond to what the public expects of the police service in the 21st century.

This work relies on all who work in the service, with your members playing a central part.

I thank you and those you represent for your contribution to what has already been achieved. And I look forward to our continuing work together.

Thank you.

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