

## **David Cameron Police Foundation lecture**

10 July 2006

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for inviting me here today.

John Harris was a man with a deep commitment to justice and good policing.

I'm delighted to deliver this memorial lecture in his honour ... and I pay tribute to the work of the Police Foundation.

While preparing for this event, I was looking down your list of very distinguished previous speakers.

I noted that Tony Blair addressed you in 1994 - three years before he became Prime Minister.

I congratulate you on your timing - which I hope remains excellent.

This is the right place to be discussing the police and the vital part which they play in combating crime.

It's also very much the right time to be doing so.

### **THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE**

Crime has a huge impact on people's quality of life and well-being.

A recent poll found that 81 per cent of voters are worried about the level of crime in Britain.

I believe that a Government which is serious about fighting crime must begin by recognising the scale of the problem ...

... and being absolutely determined to address it.

There are commentators who tell us that high crime levels are with us to stay ...

... that they are inevitable in a free and prosperous society ...

and that public concern about crime is overblown.

I profoundly disagree.

There's nothing inevitable about high crime.

It's our responsibility both to recognise that fact ... and to do something about it.

It's our responsibility because of the terrible impact that crime has on people's lives and communities...

...and because it's the poorest in society who are affected most.

I've made it a Conservative priority to develop new ways of regenerating our cities.

To improve people's quality of life.

And to enhance our society's sense of general well-being.

Fighting crime isn't just part of the answer to these challenges.

It is the vital first step without which there just can't be an answer.

Our crime rate is now ten times higher than it was in the 1950s.

Violent crime has doubled over the last decade.

Why should we accept this dismal record?

### **TACKLING CRIME – A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

The public are fed up of agonised apologies, get-tough promises and recycled crackdowns.

The tired rhetoric of toughness is no substitute for thoughtful and intelligent policy.

Fighting crime is a shared responsibility.

We're all in this together, and neither government – nor indeed the police – can solve all the problems.

Families, businesses, schools and communities all have a major part to play.

Tackling the problems of family breakdown, educational underachievement, and drug and alcohol addiction will sometimes take a generation.

Earlier today I spoke at the Centre for Social Justice about the causes of crime.

You may have noticed my remarks about hoodies ...

I was making an important point.

We cannot hope to fight crime successfully if we only treat its symptoms and are blind to its underlying causes.

And we must not expect the police to do the job of others.

We need to place far more trust in the people who are best at dealing with entrenched social problems...

... community organisations and social enterprises with the patience, humanity and emotional understanding that agencies of the state often lack.

## **THE CHAIN OF JUSTICE**

However, acknowledging our shared responsibility for addressing the causes of crime must never be an excuse for criminal activity.

And it certainly doesn't absolve government from its responsibility.

The criminal justice system is like a chain.

Every link in the chain - the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts, the prisons and the probation service - matters.

The Government has identified the "justice gap" as a "vital benchmark of the success of the criminal justice system".

But the gap has barely narrowed, with only a quarter of recorded crimes being brought to justice.

Conviction rates have fallen sharply, including those for the most serious crimes.

Justice is increasingly slow.

The period between offence and completion for criminal cases is lengthening.

Even if offenders are convicted, all too often the penal system fails them and the public.

The number of prisoners committing further offences within two years of release has risen.

More than nine out of ten juvenile offenders on the intensive supervision and surveillance programme have been reconvicted of a crime.

The prison population is at record levels - and overcrowded jails deny any realistic opportunity to rehabilitate offenders.

And the early release of prisoners has seriously undermined public confidence in the penal system.

These problems aren't inevitable.

They have been made worse as a result of poor policy choices and political mismanagement.

Legislative hyperactivity – 54 bills and counting – has left many in the system utterly bewildered.

There has been a total failure to plan for adequate prison places...

...but the decision to release offenders early was taken consciously, driven by the wrong values.

Frankly, the chain of justice is broken.

And each one of its links needs repairing

### **EFFECTIVE POLICING IS CRUCIAL**

But in this lecture I want to concentrate on one of the most important links in the chain – the police.

A decade ago, nearly two thirds of the public thought that the police were doing a good or excellent job.

Today, less than half of the public think that. That's happened in just 10 years, not 20 or 30. It can't be put down to the general trend of growing distrust for those in authority.

Effective policing requires the consent of the public ...

... consent which depends on trust and respect.

Re-building public trust in the police won't be achieved by better public relations.

It won't be achieved by the police giving the public learned lectures in sociology or criminology aimed at explaining why high levels of crime are inevitable or impossible to deal with.

Ultimately it can only be achieved if the police service fulfils Sir Robert Peel's first principle of policing – successfully preventing crime and disorder.

That may sound obvious.

But I believe that in recent years a damaging culture has infected policing in our country.

That culture has diluted what should be a single-minded focus for the police.

The public wants the police to be crime fighters, not form writers.

They want the police to be a force as well as a service.

So we must be frank about the areas where police performance is unacceptably poor.

Public spending on crime, justice, security and communities is at a record high.

Police numbers are at record levels.

New technology such as CCTV and the DNA database has come on stream.

So why aren't the police doing better with so much more resources at their disposal?

Let's not pretend that there are easy answers to improving police performance.

Instead, I want to focus on the three areas where change is needed: reform, accountability and leadership.

### **POLICE REFORM**

All of these have been neglected in a debate which has focused too much on structures and inputs ... but too little on *capabilities*.

If we have learnt one painful lesson in the last decade, it should be that money alone isn't the route to successful public sector reform.

Of course, resources are important.

And I welcome the increase in police numbers ...

...the deployment of Community Support Officers ...

... and the development of neighbourhood policing.

We can take these reforms much further.

We could grow the police family further by empowering local authorities to recruit many more wardens.

I've seen myself the success of initiatives like the one in Westminster, which has piloted over 100 'city guardians'.

They work closely with neighbourhood policing teams to deal with problems such as antisocial behaviour.

But it's not enough to put uniformed officials on the streets just to provide a reassuring presence.

People want officers to patrol actively.

To intervene, confront problems and challenge antisocial behaviour.

Officers can't do that effectively if they have to record every stop they make, filling a foot long form which takes seven minutes to complete.

And there's little point in increasing manpower if police officers are tied down with bureaucracy.

A Home Office study has found that police officers spend almost as much time in police stations as on the streets.

Less than a fifth of an officer's time is spent on the beat.

For the rest of the time he or she is invisible to the public.

A Home Office study last year found that only one per cent of police time is spent on proactively reducing crime.

One per cent - when proactively reducing crime is the whole point of policing.

I haven't seen a Home Office study showing how much time police officers spend filling out forms and questionnaires from the Home Office itself.

What I do know from visits to police forces is that the completion of Home Office returns has now become a major policing activity.

Last month the President of ACPO, Ken Jones, said:

"We need to restore the ability of cops on the street to enforce the law in an efficient and effective way. It has got horribly bureaucratic, horribly formulaic and Byzantine"

I couldn't agree more.

The constant plea which I hear from officers who write to me is: "let me get on with my job."

This is what one officer who emailed me recently said:

"Every month there is a new target / priority / scheme. I have turned up to jobs not knowing what this week's policy is .... Do I arrest / summons / NFA / fill in the latest pack?"

And...

"It takes at least 6 hours to deal with an arrest. If it's a complex case - much, much longer. If a normal, regular PC makes an arrest they will not see the streets again on that tour of duty."

So we'll end the recording of stops and end excessive reporting.

In return, police chiefs can do more ensure that resources are released to invest in frontline policing.

ACPO itself has estimated that wasteful and restrictive practices make the police 20 per cent less capable than it should be.

Civilian staff can increasingly replace sworn officers for routine administrative tasks, so releasing them for the very frontline duties they signed up to perform.

And let me be clear: I'm not talking about replacing police officers, but supplementing them.

Freeing sworn officers to fight crime ... to do the job they want to do.

The private sector has been operating prisoner transport and managing custody suites for some time.

There's no longer a hard and fast divide between the public, private and voluntary sectors ... and innovative Chief Constables will combine them in new ways to achieve the best results.

Forces need to look at other ways to reduce the cost of services and release manpower.

Like all managers, police chiefs need the flexibility to shape their workforces to meet local needs.

In my speech in Dalston at the start of the year I set out a tough agenda for reforming police pay and conditions.

Local flexibility for pay and conditions ...

Modern employment contracts so that bad officers can be removed ...

Payment to reflect skills, competence and performance rather than simply length of service or seniority ...

Enhanced entry schemes to make it possible for talented people and professionals to join the police later in their careers ...

I recognise that this agenda is a challenging one ... but it's hugely in the interests of all committed police officers – and that is, let me say it loud and clear, the overwhelming majority of every force.

I'd like to see Senior Constables recognised and rewarded for their experience and long term commitment ... so that they are incentivised to stay in their neighbourhoods.

And I'd like to see a new commitment to training.

A recent Police Federation survey found nearly half of inspectors had received no training for their role.

Professional training and personal assessment are essential in any properly managed and effective workforce.

None of this should be seen as a threat to the individual police officer who is the backbone of good policing in this country.

On the contrary, I'm convinced that these reforms will re-energise the police force...

...and radically improve the levels of morale and job satisfaction among rank-and-file officers.

So let me repeat the offer which I've made to the police.

You make the changes to improve police performance.

And we'll stop the centralisation, bureaucracy and political interference that gets in your way.

### **THE CENTRALISATION OF POLICING**

The trend of growing national political control of the police is a deeply worrying one.

A plethora of central agencies now intervene in local policing.

The Police and Justice Bill gives the Home Secretary unprecedented powers to direct police forces.

Crude national targets for police performance distort professional priorities, stifle initiative and frequently conflict with each other.

When the Government gives more responsibility to professionals on the ground – as it has done with the Education Bill – we will give our support.

But when the Government brings forward measures to centralise power we will oppose them.

Local police forces are not branch offices or franchised outlets of a national corporation.

Last week the Home Secretary announced a new National Policing Board with himself in the chair.

It is naïve to believe that this is intended to strengthen the tripartite relationship between the Home Office, police authorities and chief constables.

The Board is intended to assert Home Office control of policing.

In view of that department's catalogue of mismanagement, can anyone seriously expect that a move in this direction will improve policing?



An incoming Conservative government will not hesitate to scrap the Board, along with all of the apparatus of central direction of police forces.

## **POLICE FORCE AMALGAMATIONS**

The Government's plans to halve the number of forces must be judged against this background of growing central control of the police.

In his lecture to this audience twelve years ago, Tony Blair warned that police force amalgamations were "a denial of constitutional principle" which would "harm the fight against crime in our local communities".

Mergers will weaken local accountability and make Chief Constables more distant from the communities they are meant to serve.

They have been proposed with minimal public consultation and driven through to an absurdly tight timetable.

ACPO estimates that the cost will be £800 million ...

...the equivalent of almost 40,000 probationary constables.

There is universal agreement that police forces need to strengthen their protective services.

But amalgamations represent the slowest, most expensive and most risky route to "close the gap".

There's a real danger that they'll do the opposite of what is intended – deplete neighbourhood policing.

The problems are so serious that the Home Secretary has been forced to grant a stay of execution.

I welcome that.

But he still claims to be wedded to setting up large strategic forces.

I urge the Government to think again.

Other ways of achieving our shared objectives must be examined more positively.

Instead of strategic *forces*, the Home Secretary should be looking for more effective ways of achieving strategic *capability*.

There are enormous potential gains to be made from forces co-operating more closely.

Back office functions could be contracted out.

Support services could be shared and procured collectively.

These arrangements could be made robust and legally binding.

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM**

Fighting serious crime and terrorism will remain a priority for policing.

My Party's National and International Security Policy Group, led by Dame Pauline Neville Jones and Lord (Tom) King, is looking closely at how the police and security agencies should be organised in the future to meet the increased threat of terrorism.

We haven't pre-judged the issues or reached any conclusion yet about how the fight against terrorism should be organised.

If we conclude that it's necessary to create a new national agency to lead that fight, we will.

But we mustn't repeat the mistakes of the USA where there is a deep chasm between local police departments and the Federal agencies like the FBI.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Whatever structures are arrived at, the accountability of policing – that's the second area I identified where change is needed - will be a key issue.

We live in the age of accountability ...

... in a society in which people have legitimately high expectations when it comes to service.

There have been welcome developments in neighbourhood policing which can strengthen the links between communities and local forces.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships can involve local authorities in co-ordinating community safety.

By aligning these with Basic Command Units, a clearer line of responsibility can be built with local police commanders.

But these reforms simply aren't sufficient to provide a real local say over policing and balance the powerful influence of central government.

A more powerful, clear and direct form of local accountability is needed.

Police authorities cannot fulfil this role in their current form.

They are too weak in relation to central government and they are invisible to the public.

We will either reform them so they are directly elected, or replace them with an individual – a commissioner, sheriff or mayor – who is directly elected.

For the first time, local communities will be truly empowered to insist on the local policing priorities they want.

It will give them a real choice over the crime fighting strategy in their area.

And it will be an important element in the process of re-energising local democracy.

Let me challenge head on some of the concerns that have been expressed about this approach.

First, it has been said that elections will result in cranks or extremists standing for office.

That's a glib argument against any form of local democracy ...and it simply won't wash.

We either trust the people or we don't and, if we don't, then we may as well abolish elections altogether.

Second, it has been said that we would lose the independence and expertise of magistrates who sit on police authorities.

I recognise the valuable role which magistrates play.

And there's no reason why an elected police authority or individual couldn't find ways to retain the expertise and involvement of magistrates and councillors.

A third objection is that elected officials or authorities would be responsible only for policing - just one element of the criminal justice system.

We will look at ways of linking these other elements, including the local CPS, with their work.

Local criminal justice boards already bring together police chiefs, the CPS, the court service, youth offending teams, prison and probation services.

Making these boards accountable to the elected police authority, sheriff or commissioner would be one way of joining up the delivery of criminal justice in each area.

Fourth, it has been said that the operational independence of Chief Constables would be compromised by local democratic accountability.

In fact, increasing central government intervention today is the biggest threat to the operational independence of Chief Constables.

We will enshrine that operational independence in legislation.

The Home Secretary will retain only closely defined reserve powers to co-ordinate policing - for example in the case of a national emergency.

Finally, it has been argued that an elected individual responsible for the police might lead to corruption.

That's exactly why we will ensure that any allegations of corruption are investigated independently by a national police body, not by the local force concerned.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Of course, local accountability may give rise to anxieties about job security.

Greater accountability could result in a Chief Constable being sacked.

But in today's world, that's a price which anyone in a leadership role must accept.

And it is leadership which is the third area where change is needed.

The guiding principle which I've set out for the modern Conservative Party is trusting people.

And that includes trusting people - especially professionals - to do their jobs.

The great benefit for police chiefs of more genuine local accountability would be the scrapping of endless national interference.

Over the last decade or so, we have seen a new generation of Chief Constables assume command of our police forces.

On the whole, they are better educated, more extensively trained, more widely travelled and technologically more sophisticated than any previous generation of police leaders.

They are, in short, more professional.

And yet, at the same time, they are more circumscribed in their freedom to manage their forces than at any time in our history.

No group of chiefs has ever had to complete more returns to the Home Office, meet more targets, endure more reviews and generally keep their eyes on Whitehall.

There is something wrong here.

We cannot expect our Chief Constables to act as true professionals if we limit their freedom to do so.

We cannot expect them to meet the challenges that I have just spoken about unless we empower them to manage their forces as professional managers are trained to do.

And this includes finding new and better ways of doing things even when these new ways have not been spelt out in Home Office directives and circulars.

So Chief Constables should be set clear local objectives to cut crime - and then be given the responsibility and freedom to do so.

In the end, effective policing is about leadership.

I want to see Chief Constables who inspire their officers to go out and fight crime, and inspire their local communities with confidence that crime will be fought.

Chief Constables should be recognised as community leaders, and given the respect and authority which comes with true leadership.

Of course, the quid pro quo for trusting professional leaders is that there must be clear information for the public and a regime of robust public inspection.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary should be strengthened and fully separated from police forces and the Home Office.

The Inspectorate is too close to both.

It needs to become in part an economic regulator, ensuring value for money as well as monitoring standards.

It needs to be less a candid friend to police forces and more an outspoken champion of the public interest.

The Government's proposals to create a combined criminal justice inspectorate are a step in precisely the wrong direction.

Police performance should be measured by independently compiled crime figures ...

... collected and published at arm's length from local or national government.

## **CONCLUSION**

Modern police forces came into being locally.

They draw their essential legitimacy not from central government but from their roots in local communities.

As Sir Robert Peel said in 1829, "the police are the public and the public are the police".

The link between the constable and the citizen is the foundation of policing by consent.

This link is built on trust, respect and admiration for professional performance.

It has been weakened in recent years so that the job of preventing crime and maintaining public order has become more difficult.

But I believe that the strength of this link can be restored ...

... by empowering our Chief Constables to meet local policing needs as efficiently and effectively as possible

.. . and by holding them accountable as professionals, through new local institutions, for doing so.

So these are the components of a serious programme to reduce crime ...

Thoughtful, patient, long-term action to tackle the causes of crime.

Repairing the broken links in the chain of justice.

Bold police reform.

Greater local accountability.

And strong local leadership.

This is the way to fight crime effectively.

To improve the quality of life and enhance the well-being of our communities.

And restore public confidence in our criminal justice system.