

Home Secretary speech at the Police Superintendents' Association conference

Paul, I want to start by congratulating you on your speech today and just to say thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to attend and address your conference after what has been an extraordinary year for our nation, for our police, and in fact for all of us.

Coronavirus has impacted every aspect of our lives, and it is testament to Paul's leadership and the hard work of everyone that we are still able to come together today – though obviously virtually – 100 years on from the first Superintendents' conference.

Now we may not all be in the room together, but the one thing we can say is that our policing family remains united.

And also stronger than ever before after what I consider to be the most astonishing response to this unprecedented national emergency.

So I do want to begin just by thanking all of you – all of you for everything you have done – and also by echoing Paul's tribute to every single officer we have lost this year through their courage and sacrifice.

Their service will never be forgotten.

We have all worked tirelessly and selflessly to protect the public from this deadly virus.

And that's on top of – as Paul has said – a day job like no other.

Once again putting your own lives on the front line to serve the very people that you choose to serve.

I know how hard it has been. In fact Paul and I have been speaking across the entire policing family throughout the coronavirus crisis to look at how police officers have been dealing with the crisis.

But thanks to you, an astonishing 91 per cent of the public in England and Wales are happy with the way local police responded to the outbreak.

So today, like Paul, I'd like to add my own E to the four that you have so effectively deployed throughout coronavirus.

That is exceptional – exceptional for the work that you have done and exceptional for the way in which you have undertaken your duties.

Now it is said that where there is no law, there is no freedom.

That law and order is the cornerstone of our free society.

And without it we have nothing.

But the events of the last week have exposed another emerging threat.

The so-called eco-crusaders turned criminals.

Attempting to thwart the media's right to publish without fear nor favour.

And a shameful attack on our way of life, our economy and the livelihoods of the hard-working majority.

I refuse point-blank to allow that kind of anarchy on our streets.

And I am right behind you as you bring the full might of the law down upon that selfish minority behind it.

The very criminals who disrupt our free society must be stopped.

Together we must all stand firm against the guerrilla tactics of Extinction Rebellion.

That means adapting to the threat they pose and ensuring justice is served.

Now in policing, you have a whole range of powers at your disposal, and of course they should be used.

It is right for the police to police against those who threaten our freedoms.

And by now, I think you all know I am a Home Secretary who is focused on driving change and getting things done.

When I spoke to you a year ago, I promised to stand with you and to put the police first.

To prioritise your wellbeing, your protection and also the support for your families.

And above all else, I vowed to listen.

Today, this Government of the People's Priorities has delivered on that.

Giving you what you need to provide the safer streets and cuts in crime that the public have asked for.

We have already achieved a great deal together, so today I'd like to celebrate the progress we have made since last year.

I promised to listen, and I have done just that.

Over the last year alone, I have made 32 visits to see the police in action, plus four virtual visits – including one last week at your own headquarters.

I have met remarkable officers up and down the country: a hero stabbed in the line of duty; the courageous cops who tackled the Reading terrorist to the ground before he could claim even more lives; dozens of new recruits who are absolutely excited about joining this incredible profession.

I have galvanised and united senior leaders through the National Policing Board.

I have worked alongside staff associations, including the Police Superintendents' Association, to understand your needs, the needs of the front line.

And I have answered the call for Paul to represent your views at the National Policing Board.

Thank you, Paul, for all your support and for the valuable insights of your members throughout the past year.

The Police Superintendents' Association have been a pivotal partner in delivering positive change for policing.

The strength of our relationship demonstrates just how far we have come.

We are bound together by mutual trust and that has made us stronger.

Throughout all of this, including coronavirus, my door has remained open.

I promised to put more boots on the ground, and I have done exactly that.

So far more than 4,300 officers have been recruited through our ambitious programme to recruit 20,000 new police officers by March 2023.

Despite the challenges of coronavirus, we remain on track to meet our target.

And with our colleagues at the College of Policing, the new Online Assessment Centre platform is being rolled out across forces to keep the momentum going forward.

More officers continue to come through the door – and that is another promise for policing that I have kept.

I also promised to give you the resources you need, and I have done just that.

The Government has delivered the biggest increase in police funding for a decade.

And, rest assured, I have heard Paul, and I will pull no punches when it comes to again getting you what you need in the Spending Review.

That is a promise that I will keep.

I promised to make the thugs who attack our police think twice, and I have done just that.

The recent National Police Chiefs' Council Officer and Staff Safety Review found that almost 9 in 10 officers have been assaulted throughout their career.

That is an ugly, but an unsurprising fact.

Shameful scenes of officers being abused during protests and pelted with missiles continue to strengthen my resolve to do more in this area.

I said we would consult on doubling the maximum sentence for assaults on emergency workers, and we have.

That is a promise that I have kept.

Like all of you, I was sickened and I am still sickened by the harrowing death of PC Andrew Harper, whose life was so cruelly snatched away by a gang of senseless thugs.

Their trial was a painful and ugly reminder of his tragic loss, which has sent shockwaves through the entire service.

Last week, I met his brave widow Lissie – who lost her husband in such an unspeakable and brutal way – to discuss Harper's Law.

And later today, I will meet Andrew's mother Debbie Adlam to hear about her courageous campaign.

I share their and your revulsion at anyone who thinks they can laugh at the law.

And the determination to ensure the punishment for those who kill an officer as they do their duty truly fits the crime.

With appeals in this case ongoing, there are limits to what I can say.

But have no doubt: I stand with you, against any vile thug who threatens the thin blue line.

If they come for our police, I will not hesitate to come for them.

And I will do everything in my power to ensure justice is served.

I promised to put your wellbeing first, and I have done just that.

The Front Line Review set out the dire need to do more to support those who sacrifice and those who do the uniquely challenging job that you all do.

Once again, this Government has acted and listened, with real progress now being made against the recommendations.

The National Police Wellbeing Service have published the first National Police Wellbeing Survey to help forces check on progress, and working with the College, we have provided more opportunities for you to have your say on innovation and improvements in policing.

I am delighted to announce we will go even further, as we publish the response to our consultation on the Police Covenant.

Our plans received overwhelming support – with 90 per cent backing this pledge to formalise and enhance support and protection for police officers across society.

I can now reveal that the Covenant will apply to all those involved in police work – extending this to staff, volunteers and those who have retired, as well as serving officers.

It will cover their physical protection, as well as their health and wellbeing.

Crucially, it will support families. The very families who too often wave their loved ones off, sometimes worrying if they will ever come home.

You, and your families, want and deserve the recognition for your service and sacrifice.

You have waited too long for this Covenant.

So, to ensure it makes a real and meaningful difference, I am creating a legal duty for the Home Secretary to report annually to Parliament on the Covenant.

The Covenant must reflect the heart of policing, so I will ask the sector to drive delivery and consider what more they can do, including creating a new Chief Medical Officer for Policing in England and Wales.

And I will also consider the findings of the Officer and Staff Safety Review as we develop more meaningful actions.

Ensuring the Police Covenant makes a lasting change to your wellbeing is another crucial part of the promise that I will keep.

I also promised to give you the tools, the equipment and the powers you needed to do your job, and I have done just that.

Since we changed the rules to make it easier to conduct targeted stop and search just a year ago, more would-be criminals have been confronted.

I provided funding for up to 8,000 more officers to be trained and equipped to carry a Taser.

Once more, a promise kept.

I also promised to make your working life easier and to give everyone the freedom to succeed, and I am doing exactly that.

I have radically reformed the complaints and disciplinary system to help ease the burden on you all and to ensure lessons from the past are quickly learned.

As Paul has said, I changed the law on the working week for Superintendents, helping those with caring responsibilities and crucially opening up the rank to more women.

And I have demanded more action on diversity from police leaders from day one – including at this conference last year.

Together we are moving in the right direction, with the highest proportion of BAME and female officers since records began.

That's a promise kept, but the job is not yet done.

My ambition in this area knows no bounds.

To build trust and to ensure equality across our forces, it is right that we represent the communities that we serve.

And we must create a true meritocracy, where everyone has the same opportunities to rise up the ranks, irrespective of their background.

Impressive work is being done across policing, and I'd like to thank Paul, the College of Policing, and every Superintendent who has taken part in their successful mentoring and coaching schemes.

I was heartened last week to visit the Police Superintendents' Association HQ to speak to black and minority ethnic members about the progress being made.

Our discussions were always animated, and there is a recognition that we should and we can do more.

The investment in 20,000 new officers is a once in a lifetime opportunity, which cannot be squandered, to create the next generation of police leaders who truly represent the society and the country they serve.

I will continue to challenge all police leaders, including Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners, to accelerate not just their efforts, but to change their approach and attitude in order to drive much more co-ordinated action on recruitment, retention and progression.

We will use the National Policing Board to drive accountability and assess performance to ensure policing creates a meritocracy and a culture where everyone, regardless of background, has the opportunity to rise up the ranks and progress to the top.

I started by saying this has been an extraordinary year for policing.

It has been. There have been tough times, changes, and of course, unprecedented challenges.

But there has also been inspirational policing, including incredible bravery and remarkable progress when it comes to policing.

The public have noted and they do know just how hard you have all worked to

keep them safe.

Confidence is being restored.

I have been true to my word in terms of my promise to deliver for the police, so that you are empowered to deliver for the people we serve.

I will not stop until you are empowered to take down every criminal, to serve every corner of society, and to receive the support and protection you all so richly deserve.

That is another promise I will be proud to keep.

Thank you.