

Home Secretary's speech to the Police Federation annual conference

It's great to be here and really nice to see you all, as last year, we were all confined to being online and on the internet. And Steve Hartshorn, it's a pleasure to meet you today properly as well for the first time.

And as ever, this is just a wonderful opportunity for me personally to say something to you all, to thank you for the incredible work that you do and the way in which you engage and work with us.

And I have to say, Steve, as well, you know I'm a Home Secretary that calls a spade a spade, having a very direct approach, because that'll be absolutely my approach in terms of our way of working going forward as well.

We are here to find solutions to challenges and no challenge is undeliverable. So it is all about how we can find solutions and outcomes and also about being honest and open because that is the only way forward to achieve the change that all your members, everyone here and the rank and file and our brilliant officers, want to see.

And it's also worth pointing out that we show a huge, deep admiration when it comes to policing and of course it's my absolute desire and imperative to ensure that not only we finance and resource policing, but that we make sure policing remains as Steve has already said, the best it possibly can be, the most rewarding profession and a first-class public service.

And Steve, I know you, working with me, will strain every single sinew to do exactly that.

Some of you may think, when you read about our work more broadly in government and my role as Home Secretary, we always have a bit going on. But what I would say for me coming here today but also in respect of my work and the work of the government when it comes to policing, it is just so valuable and vitally important.

It's a statement of the obvious to say that being Home Secretary is an incredible job and I'm sure some of you are thinking 'what is she talking about?', judging from the press coverage that she receives; but it does hold a tremendous responsibility and a privilege.

And I say that in the sense that even if you look over the last few years, we have seen in policing, all sorts of good things happen and challenging things happen like the pandemic; but also from my perspective I have been present when history is being made in policing but also more broadly in terms of the changes that you've seen in policing as well.

So I do have a ringside seat. But actually I'm also in the arena with you all when it comes to bringing in some fundamental changes.

Now it goes without saying – in fact, I was at City of London Police this morning – , that each day I meet the very best of you across the country. Yes, in London predominantly, but even last week, I was actually in Stoke and meeting officers there.

And it is fair to say – and I think Steve has touched on this with some of the statistics that he has highlighted and public opinions voiced – that nobody does a harder job or a better one than the police.

And no one does more, in my view, to make our country great. And nobody gives greater public service.

Of course, it's that essence of public service that actually unites all of us. And that is why Steve, many of the points that you've made are so pertinent and that is why coming together and finding a different way of working is going to be so important to deliver for your members.

Like many of you, my values and beliefs obviously in my case have shaped my political work, but also my approach to public service. And Steve has just touched on a range of issues, some of which cost money, some of which don't.

Actually a philosophy is about more than money and economics, but deciding, in my case, the choices that we make as politicians, and as your Home Secretary, have to reflect naturally, the matters which govern us each day, but also the ability to exercise judgement and decision-making, like you all do every day, sometimes in the most challenging of circumstances that are really fundamental to who we are and what we do; that actually applies to what you do every day, which is the rule of law and the safety of our country.

Now, the leaders that I've always admired have always stood up for law and order and human rights in particular. And when I say this, I very much put this in the context of human rights are not just for criminals, but for the law-abiding majority – something that I know you will all stand by and feel very strongly about.

And that means standing squarely with you, our police. I think actually when you look at the wider public discourse, yes in politics, but as someone that is a legislator as well, I see it with commentators. I quite frankly have always held many politicians and commentators with a degree of contempt who constantly undermine the police and the work that you do day in, day out, because I've seen this now for almost three years in my role.

I could have changed my mind about policing. I spend a lot of time with police officers. I have nothing but pure respect and admiration and gratitude for all you do. And in my case that has only deepened.

I can say this – and I know some of you may have heard me say this previously when I've attended your conference – but in my first two weeks as Home Secretary, I saw some of the most appalling things happen.

I saw an assault on a police officer who had been attacked with a machete. I also saw the most tragic murder of PC Andrew Harper. And on top of that of

course, like many of you, I've visited major terrorist incidents and tragedies. I've actually seen your unique combination of clinical professionalism, alongside human warmth and kindness, and I've also been alongside some of you when we've been there on dawn raids, also watching you run to danger.

And with that, Steve has already touched on this, there is and I have a greater appreciation of the sacrifices made by you and also by your loved ones. Yes, by visiting memorials, and obviously the National Policing Memorial, the arboretum is just one example of that; but also when it comes to speaking to bereaved family members.

That has probably been one of the most painful aspects of my job, but in terms of the sacrifices that officers and their families have made, probably one of the greatest privileges that I have also experienced.

It's fair to say, and I'm very conscious of Steve's remarks and the requests, if I may put it that way, that have been presented today, that I've also sat down with you, your members, the Federation, to work alongside you and plan and negotiate to find the right way forward together.

And with that note, the Police Federation plays an absolutely central role in this when it comes to giving officers from forces across England and Wales that very voice, so I'm actually very grateful to you for your way of working, but also your respectful and reassuring presence in the dialogue that we have.

I think it goes without saying – and those of you that know me or have even met me and been out on raids with me and been on the front line occasionally when we've been together – that I'm very proudly pro-police. And I say this to a lot of people in Westminster, by the way, that anyone who feels differently should certainly vote for someone else.

One of the differences that you'll find with me is that distinction between politicians who prioritise systems and process and those who put people first – and I'm simply in that category of putting people first because policing is not just an institution. Just like the army or the NHS or even the teaching profession, it is a collection of dedicated professionals.

So the reforms that I have driven in the last two and a half years – working with the Federation, working with policing leaders, working with the National Policing Board – have all been based upon that belief, and the investments that I have overseen, just over recent years, £17 billion in policing, is also an investment in people – in each and every officer, and with the new recruits as well, and including you all, the next generation of policing leaders.

So you've heard me and you've heard others in government speak about the 20,000 extra recruits. To me, this isn't just the number. It is actually an infusement and an investment in new talent, the foundations of policing for generations to come.

I also recognise the fact that of course many of you wear a uniform, but your backgrounds and experiences are far from uniform. And I think that is one of the greatest joys of policing. And it's crucial that we continue to shape police forces that represent the community that are the best crime-fighting, protective organisations – but also proactive organisations.

I know many of you have seen this already and I meet new recruits very, very frequently: we have younger officers – and it says something when a Home Secretary says that recruits are getting younger and the police officers are getting younger; but also we have second career officers, men and women from different backgrounds and actually different professional backgrounds as well; graduates and a whole mixture all aspiring to lead their communities, but also be leaders in policing.

I'm also one of those that actually believes that you don't have to hold high rank to be a leader, nor inspire others. I think that just comes as second nature to what you do.

I also recognise that everything I've learned from being amongst policing and police officers and working with you has shaped the changes that I have led and government has led and actually our direction of travel.

I've also learned that the courage you have shown and the sacrifices you make, are even greater than I think members of the public and people realise. And that's why the Police Covenant matters so much to me – and Steve has touched on this and your former Chairs have been very strong advocates of this and in fact the day that I became Home Secretary, I very much said that I would not just bring this into legislation, I would deliver this for you.

The Police Covenant matters. And that's why I'm very grateful to you all, to the membership of the Police Federation and the leadership of the Police Federation for working with me on the Police Covenant Oversight Board.

Because there's no point in just speaking about legislation and policies. It is about the practical delivery that matters and makes a difference to you and your family. And I think together we have set the right priorities, driven delivery, but also done something else: we continue to challenge each other to do better and constantly learn from each other. And the Federation has actually played a huge role in gathering evidence on how best the Covenant can support families, but also jointly leading on considering new areas for the Covenant to address.

So we can never stand still, we have to keep on developing this and of course in relation to death in service, there is no doubt that every life lost on duty and in the line of duty is an enormous tragedy. And I'm absolutely determined that in future this sacrifice will be recognised.

Steve has also just touched on pay and pensions and if I may, I'd like to say a few words about this as well. If I may, Steve, I strongly urge the Federation to engage with us directly and the Police Remuneration Review Body, which does have a key role as you've touched on in advising the government on pay and conditions and the wider spectrum of pensions as well.

But I think it's important that your voices are heard, the voices of your members must be represented in that process. And as you know, the main public sector pension scheme including the police pensions, was reformed following recommendations of the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission,

All police officers will continue to have that lower pension age compared to other public servants which is linked to state pension age and I will continue to work with you absolutely in terms of being a voice but getting the representation that you need into those discussions to reflect the unique nature of policing.

That distinction is incredibly important. And Steve, I look forward to working with you and getting this right because it's never straightforward, but it's imperative that we work together to really make sure your members and your members' voices are heard in Whitehall on this issue.

We've also made great progress, substantial progress, in policing since this time last year when we were speaking together virtually online. Yes, the plan to recruit 20,000 additional police officers is on track and in fact many of you are followers of the Police Uplift Programme. I know because some of you contact me directly.

We already have over 13,000 – in fact 13,576 – police officers and I have to say I want to thank you for the example that you've all set not just in supporting the Police Uplift Programme but actually helping to make this an attractive career path.

And I'm someone that has been very vocal, in fact from day one, not just about recruitment, but retention. And that is something I know that over the last few years, we've discussed and we will continue to ensure that we can make sure that we're constantly investing in training, career development, making sure that we can retain our officers. Because there's no point actually going out there recruiting more where the attrition rate just goes up and up and up.

But as you know, I believe in investing in officers. I believe in giving you the resources and the training and I've also made it easier for you to use vital powers such as stop and search to keep our streets and communities safe. And in particular, when it comes to making those carrying weapons and drugs to think twice, I want to do everything possible to give you the confidence and the assurance you need to make sure that you can use your powers fairly, appropriately in the right places, but also bring communities alongside you as well.

And that's why we're working with policing partners to develop a new national framework for how the use of police power should be scrutinised at a local level. So that we can give you the backing you need to use your powers proportionately and effectively. It's the right thing to do.

And of course, that means enhanced use of body -video, which also protects you from those spurious claims, saying that you've misused your powers, and I think actually it was last year at this very conference where I made a

commitment that I would not let you be subjected to trial by social media. And I absolutely meant that.

Steve has actually touched on a couple of areas linked to that as well in terms of IPC, but areas where we absolutely need to stand shoulder to shoulder and that 15-second representation of someone taking snapshots on social media does not do justice to the incredible work that you do every single day.

And with that, of course the two-part Police and Crime Commissioners Review is delivering on our own commitments – the commitments of our manifesto and the government – to strengthen and expand the roles of PCCs to help them deliver effective police forces – yes, to cut crime and make our streets safer, but also to work with you in terms of protecting your ability to do your jobs.

The recommendations from Part Two were announced in March this year, all on strengthening and expanding the role of PCCs in the criminal justice system specifically, and of course this includes setting up the foundations for a greater role for PCCs in offender management, improving the levers PCCs hold in terms of local partnerships and also the facilitation of data sharing.

PCCs will also have access to the best possible evidence to support their efforts to improve public confidence in policing and also the criminal justice system.

Steve, you touched on this as well, there is so much more that has taken place now within government to join up policing, the CPS and the courts so that we can protect victims and deliver for victims against some of the most appalling crimes that victims have been subjected to.

And I think it's fair to say we should pay recognition and celebrate the fact that more than 8,900 Specials in England and Wales will soon be able to join the Police Federation and that is something that was one of the early requests that came to me and we've worked together to ensure that we've made that possible.

But if I may just touch on a few areas of policy which I know will be of interest to you. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act contains several important measures, many of which were requested by the Federation. And it's extremely important to me that the law empowers and protects police officers so that you can carry out your duties effectively.

That is why we introduced the new test to assess the standards of driving of police officers. Should any officer be involved in a collision, the courts will now be able to judge their standard of driving against a competent and careful peer with the same prescribed training rather than alongside a member of the public.

I want our highly trained officers to have the confidence that they need to fight crime effectively but also to be represented effectively. I also want to commend the excellent work that DCC Terry Woods has been leading on behalf

of the National Police Chief Council to encourage police forces to standardise police driver training.

When it comes to legislation and policy, I also recognise that the law needed to change to better balance the right to protest with the rights of everyone else. As ever, you've never hesitated to put yourself in harm's way while a selfish minority of protesters have used guerrilla tactics such as blocking motorways and locking on to oil tankers.

And I can tell you now I know whose side I'm on.

The increase in the maximum penalty for wilful obstruction of the highway came into force this month, and other public order measures in the Act will come into force on 28 June.

But we need to build upon these changes so I brought forward the Public Order Bill, which reintroduces measures such as the new locking on offence rejected by the House of Lords in January.

Under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, a Police Covenant report will be prepared and laid in Parliament each financial year. And the first report will be published in 2023 to cover 2022-23.

And like you all, I'm especially proud that Harper's Law will come into force from the end of June. I think we should pay tribute to Lissie Harper for the way in which she campaigned bravely and effectively but also with your support and I do want to commend the Police Federation for the support that you gave her in bringing that case directly to government.

Harper's Law means mandatory life sentences for people who kill an emergency worker while committing a crime will come into force.

And there will also be increases in the maximum penalty for assaults on police officers and other emergency workers from 12 months to two years in prison for common assault or battery.

I've also listened carefully to Steve's requests that we look at legislation to protect off-duty police officers and believe you me, I absolutely believe in that. I'm not going to lie to you or provide you with government speak right now saying that we've reached agreements or that there's more work to be done. But I can tell you now, without any hesitation or equivocation that I stand with you and that if I can, I will bring legislation forward.

And I will do so with the same pride and dignity that policing displays day in, day out through the service you give and through the sacrifices that you make.

One of the most disturbing sets of crimes you deal with, and I'm afraid has been at the forefront of policing in the last 12 months, is violence against women and girls. And dealing with this, of course, is our shared priority.

None of us in this room will ever let women and girls down. And as you've all seen through our new Domestic Abuse Act; our new cross-government Tackling

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and the complementary Domestic Abuse Plan; and the recent 'Enough' communications campaign which was launched in March, and the outstanding work from Maggie Blyth, who is leading this in policing. All of this now sets a new direction and a new framework when it comes to protecting women and girls and tackling some of the hardest issues around domestic violence.

And Steve has just touched on in his own remarks the point about victims in the criminal justice system. We have a very significant commitment now through the Rape Review to do so much more in bringing the perpetrators of violence and sexual abuse to justice. So we have the new 24 Phone Commitment to ensure that no adult rape victim is left without a phone for more than 24 hours during a rape investigation, a policy that stems from the Rape Review and I have to say a policy that has come together by working with you all, working with policing leaders, but also working with some of the technology providers that I've already met today in the exhibition hall.

This has also been backed up with a substantial funding package. So there is a plan and it is a sustained funding package so that we can absolutely deliver for victims. And you will also hear in the weeks to come from the Lord Chancellor Dominic Raab who will be speaking about the changes that we're making to give victims the right in law to the protection that they need.

So having police officers and prosecutors with the right skills is absolutely crucial. And that is essential when it comes to managing cases, not just effectively, but sensitively and in the right way so that we can ensure that justice is served. Yes, this means increasing the number of police officers and prosecutors focused in this area, but also ensuring that they have the right experience.

Some of you may be familiar already with Operation Soteria and I'm already working closely with Chief Constable Sarah Crew. Many of you will know the great work Sarah is leading on to test a new model for the investigation of sexual offences where we can identify the specialist skills required for those offences and determine not just the right way but the optimal way to deliver the skills and lead to the right justice outcomes.

I'm also pleased to announce two further measures this week. Following our pilot programme, I am relaxing the five voluntary conditions on the use of Section 60 Stop and Search. Having listened to you all very clearly, very frequently – in fact, you have all articulated day in, day out that Stop and Search is a vital tool in getting knives off our streets, and importantly in saving lives.

I can also announce today that I'm also authorising Special Constables to carry Tasers and your voice has called for these important changes. And it actually speaks to a point that Steve has made about the investment in training, investment in our officers, but also the investment in the skills and the resources when it comes to policing.

I know many of you feel that you've waited a long time for a Home Secretary

to be on your side and listen to your calls for change. Not only have I listened, I've acted and I'll continue to work with you because I do think it's important that you have a Home Secretary that champions many of your calls in government.

Of course, we should not only celebrate success, we need to work together to create a better culture and higher standards. Giving officers every possible support includes giving them the confidence to blow the whistle when things go wrong, so that we can root out misconduct and corruption and some of the issues I'm afraid that have dominated the headlines too frequently over recent months.

The whole country was absolutely shattered and horrified by Sarah Everard's abduction, rape and murder by a serving officer. And this horrendous case – and I'll never forget it, getting the day to day reports and the other revelations that came forward – undermined confidence in policing and the public are in urgent need of reassurance.

I'm unequivocal that unacceptable behaviour must be rooted out and at the same time called out. That is where we will work together to bring about that change, and of course lessons must be learned, and every necessary change must be made without fear or favour. That is absolutely I know what you want to do.

And so on that basis, it's right that we work together to take action to improve public confidence in policing at a time when we are investing in policing, recruiting more officers, working hard to retain officers, investing in training and everything else.

Taking action to build confidence and improve confidence in policing with the public is absolutely vital. That of course speaks to Steve's point about boosting police professionalism, but in particular the focus on leadership and training and skills.

That also means a particular focus on leadership at Sergeant and Inspector levels, and working with policing partners to tackle disparities when it comes to policing and the criminal justice system.

Of course, across policing, we also need to raise the bar so that women and girls feel confident in reporting crimes. And that is why I have established the Inquiry that is now led by Dame Elish Angiolini QC, which will be carried out in two phases.

First, it will establish whether previous allegations when it came to Sarah Everard's killer were handled appropriately, providing an account of his conduct and the circumstances around his continued employment as a police officer.

There are many questions left unanswered right now.

Phase Two will consider the broader issues raised by this case for policing as a whole but also for the protection of women. Dame Elish has my total support to get all the answers which the Everard family and the public

desperately and rightly want to find out.

I have also commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to carry out a review of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in England and Wales, looking at what forces are doing to identify and deal with predatory and misogynistic behaviour.

This effort is underway, and I think it will provide us an evidence base to inform Part Two of the Angiolini Inquiry.

The Inspectorate will also conduct an inspection into the Metropolitan Police to investigate the devastating findings of the Daniel Morgan Independent Panel and to assess the current counter-corruption capability of the force.

The inspection report was published in March and it painted a distressing and disturbing picture of the force, particularly of its inability proactively to tackle corruption issues.

So it's vital that we work together and we support each other on this. But also it's vital that the Mayor of London works closely with the incoming Commissioner to ensure that the full response to this is one of their first priorities.

Of course, there is so much more to do when it comes to not just public confidence, but effectively improving the trust in the police complaints system. And of course, when it comes to the awareness of the IOPC's role, especially with young people and those communities with the lowest confidence in policing.

Police misconduct statistics have been completely revamped, and will now cover the protected characteristics of officers involved, which will allow us to understand and answer some of those challenging issues around disproportionality in the discipline system.

The rise in cases of officers misusing social media or abusing positions of trust for sexual purposes, is concerning. And we have seen egregious examples in recent months.

But it's also vital that our officers speak up when they witness misconduct by their colleagues, which is why two years ago we strengthened the duty on officers to report wrongdoing.

All institutions require scrutiny. And anyone and everyone within those institutions should welcome this. Hard-working, dedicated and decent police officers like you all, are dreadfully undermined by such intolerable behaviour and it is the worst type of behaviour.

I know you will feel deeply about this – I know Steve and all your colleagues do too. I also know – and I've heard this from too many officers – that it hits you all incredibly hard when a minority have abused the greatest privilege of being a police officer with such appalling behaviour. Public confidence in the police could not matter more. And you cannot do your jobs if that consent and support breaks down, and I know you want, as I do, for

the public to feel safe and secure. And that's why you choose this career path.

So, of course together, we want to ensure that policing is dynamic, professional, attractive, and that go-to career choice that people want to choose. The police officer workforce is more representative than ever before. And the latest data does show that the highest proportion of ethnic minority and female officers are in place since records began.

However, more work is evidently needed to recruit more black officers.

We must do everything we possibly can to ensure that policing has an inclusive culture. And that's just a basic principle of fairness. Everyone should have access to the same opportunities. I'm a great believer in that and talent should be recognised wherever exists earlier and in a more consistent way.

And the Uplift Programme in particular is that once-in-a-generation opportunity to not just increase diversity in policing, but so much more; to allow us to level up to give people that ladder of opportunity in policing so that you can achieve every single goal that you wish in your career.

And, that includes improvements in workforce data engagement, sharing best practice, but ultimately giving you the freedom to succeed. And I believe in that because experienced officers are incredibly valuable.

I've given the College of Policing further funding to create a National Leadership Centre to not just improve standards but drive standards so that we can see that continual investment and professionalism and in training and also to support better talent management.

There are now leadership standards for Sergeant and inspector rank, and more are on the way. And that means talent management and promotions will be fairer and better – and I'm hoping swifter too.

The total number of new recruits is greater than the uplift because of the retiring officers. Overall, 31,000 new recruits have joined since November 2019. And there are many new colleagues among you. They all need support from each of you.

I'm sure you could look back and reflect upon your time from when you first joined, all of you were new officers once. So I ask you to look back and think about what would have helped you then and how you can be supportive of your newer colleagues, but also be the type of inspirational leaders that they will also seek to be.

So in conclusion, as your champion in Westminster and in government, I can tell you now, I will not hold back. I will call a spade a spade and I will do everything that I possibly can to make policing as attractive and dynamic and as rewarding, and rightly so, to make sure that policing represents the very best of you all.

The public overwhelmingly recognises that our safety, democracy and civil

society depend on you. And I have to say that is something you should all be incredibly proud of. And that's something that I'm very proud of about you too.