

Speech: Home Secretary Police Superintendents' Conference speech 2018

I'm delighted to be here today at the Police Superintendents' Association's Annual Conference.

Now before I say anything else I know what you are thinking. Let me say right from the start, I am watching The Bodyguard.

I am not happy about what happened to the Home Secretary in the last episode.

Also, my codename is not Lavender.

I'm probably feeling a lot more nervous than the Prime Minister Theresa May did when she spoke at this conference 3 years ago.

And that's because I know that I have at least one guaranteed critic in the audience.

And that's my brother.

He'll be watching my every move and listening to every word I say.

I'm sure as soon as I've got out of here and in my car my phone will ring and he'll tell me all the things about what I've said and things like that.

Or he'll just say I should have worn a better suit!

Mind you, I probably should take it on the chin given I'm responsible for thousands of journalists now following him on Twitter.

The combination of being Home Secretary and having a Chief Superintendent as a brother, has taught me a lot about what it means to be a Police Super.

I know what an important role you play each and every day managing frontline officers.

I know how hard you all work coming up with the strategic direction for your forces.

And I know how much effort you have to put in every day to fight crime in your communities.

The Police Superintendents' Association is a very valued government partner.

And I'm very sorry that this conference will be the last Gavin will attend.

Since he took over the presidency in 2016, his dedication, passion and commitment have been really impressive and we will all be really sorry to see

him go.

The association provides constructive advice to the government and it is a powerful force for change.

We haven't always agreed in the past, and of course we won't always agree in the future.

But what I appreciate most about the Police Superintendents' Association, is the willingness to have conversations with government.

Conversations about how to improve policing and make things better.

And that's what I want to talk to you about today – my view on how we can work together to improve policing.

Because even though I think my outlook for policing is a bit more optimistic than Gavin's, I know that improvements have to be made.

Many of you will be aware of the National Audit Office report on police financial sustainability today.

And whilst there are a number of aspects of the report that I don't quite agree with, it rightly recognises the pressures on the police.

When I stood up at the Police Federation conference in May, I said that I will stand with the frontline.

That I will do all I can to support your teams.

And that I will listen to the police.

It is these 3 principles:

Standing with you.

Supporting you.

And listening to you – that informs every single decision I make about policing as Home Secretary.

You've been telling me that you and your forces are feeling stretched.

That the nature of crime is changing and that sometimes you feel that you just can't keep up with it.

We know that so-called 'traditional crime' is down by a third since 2010.

But that there are all sorts of other crimes which are being reported more than ever before and putting demands on policing.

Like hate crime and child sexual abuse.

The threat from terrorism we've sadly seen has also escalated and evolved.

And we also know that you are now more likely to be the victim of crime online than offline.

There has also been a recent increase sadly in serious violence – including homicides, knife and gun crime.

But from all sides, the clamours from the press, politicians from all parties and the public seem to be for you to do “more, and do more, and do more”.

And as superintendents, you sometimes feel like you’re being pulled in all sorts of different strategic directions.

You’re having to change the strategic direction of your forces to manage new and emerging threats and to adapt your resources accordingly.

I want you to feel that you are comfortably equipped to deal with the changing crime landscape.

And yes, part of it is of course resources.

That’s why we’re now investing over £1 billion more in policing than we did 3 years ago, including more money raised through council tax.

That’s why just last week; I announced a £21 million extra to help law enforcement agencies to help fight online child sexual exploitation.

That’s why as a government we put over £50 million over the next year to boost cyber capabilities within law enforcement at a national, regional and local level.

We’re also making £40 million available over the next 2 years to help support the new Serious Violence Strategy.

Despite this increase in funding, I do recognise the pressures on policing.

Let me be clear with you, I will continue to fight on the police’s behalf to ensure you have the resources you need to do your jobs effectively.

But making sure that forces are fit for the future isn’t just about the finances.

You also need to have the tools and support to do your jobs.

Firstly, I think it’s vital that you get the training you’ve asked for.

As Gavin has already said, those of you who work in Public Protection Units sometimes feel like you’re thrown in at the deep end without having that necessary training and support.

And as we’ve just heard the truly shocking stat that 87% of those leading units to protect children receive no training or development for the role.

This needs to change.

I fully support the work the College of Policing is doing to develop a public protection learning programme.

And my department continues to assist the College to develop the Licence to Practise Scheme for people who are working in these high risk areas.

This should mean that no one is put in a position where they're being asked to take on vital public protection roles without adequate preparation.

Secondly, you and the men and women that work for you, you need the right powers.

One of these powers, for example is Stop and Search.

I am consulting on extending Stop and Search so that officers are able to stop and search anyone suspected of carrying acid without good reason.

We all remember the case just a few weeks ago of the 3 year-old boy who was seriously hurt when he was the target – a 3 year-old boy, a target – of an acid attack in Worcester.

A month before that, 2 teenage victims were taken to hospital in East London after they were sprayed in the face.

Criminals cannot feel they can walk around our streets carrying dangerous weapons and get away with it.

The men and women who work for you need to feel comfortable and supported when they are using Stop and Search.

As I've said before, the evidence shows that if you're black you're more likely to be a homicide victim than any other ethnic group.

If Stop and Search mean that lives can be saved from the communities most affected, then of course it's a very good thing.

And as senior leaders, I want you to support frontline officers to ensure they're confident in using this important power.

Thirdly, you need to feel like you're being rewarded for the work that you do.

I know that some of you feel like the roles that you currently have, have morphed over time and that the job you now do doesn't resemble the job you originally signed up to do many years ago.

Perhaps the area you cover has got larger, or the number of people you manage has gone up?

Maybe what you're being asked to deal with an issue that is particularly challenging without getting all those resources and the support you need?

The National Police Chiefs Council has submitted proposals which would allow chief constables to give a discretionary bonus payment of up to £4,000 a year

for officers who take on those hard to fill roles and superintendents with especially challenging roles.

And today I can announce that I offer my full support to these proposals and that I intend to legislate so these bonuses can be given out.

I can also confirm that chief constables will be able to authorise these payments to be backdated to 1 September 2017.

Fourthly, you need to feel like your welfare is being taken seriously.

I was disgusted to see a recent video on social media of police officers being kicked from behind on the floor in a McDonalds restaurant.

Being beaten up should never be a part, or considered to be part, in any way, of the job. And I am in no doubt that those who assault police officers deserve to face serious consequences.

That's why I support the Assaults on Emergency Workers Bill which doubles the penalty available for low level assaults on police officers.

The bill will receive royal assent this week and sends a clear message that attacks on public sector emergency workers will not be tolerated.

At the Police Federation Conference, your teams also told me that they want better protection in the form of tasers and spit and bite guards.

I've now written to police chiefs across the country stressing the importance of both of these.

But it's not just your physical welfare that we need to be thinking about.

It's mental health too.

The association's most recent resilience survey showed that half of respondents reported feelings of anxiety.

As I made clear at the Police Federation Conference, I want us to work together to totally transform the welfare provision for policing.

We've already pledged £7.5 million for a new national police welfare service.

And today I'm pleased to announce that £400,000 of this money will be used to support the proposal by Chief Constable Andy Rhodes and the College of Policing, to get a new wellbeing outreach prevention service on the road next month.

The first of a fleet of the so-called 'wellbeing buses' will be pulling up outside police stations and providing accessible, stigma-free support and information for anyone who feels they needs it.

But I know that sometimes for you as leaders, it can be hard to ask for help.

You might be good at signposting support services for others, and yet not

very good at taking up the offer yourself.

I urge you all to take advantage of the services now being offered.

Finally, and most importantly, I want you to know that I will listen to you.

The Frontline Review is now underway and I want to encourage you all to take part and to tell us about your experiences in policing.

The Policing Minister Nick Hurd has been leading this important work and I know a group of you put your questions to him earlier today.

There are lots of different ways you can get involved.

From face-to-face discussions to online conversations.

In fact, the Home Office's first Twitter session caught the attention of over 40,000 people, and we had some 500 comments within the first hour.

So it's clear that there is a lot to say.

But I don't want you to leave it up to others to get involved.

As Supers, you're making decisions on behalf of your forces every single day.

And I would love you to be more involved. You get a very different sort of insight to that of your colleagues, and I want to hear what you all think too.

So if there's one message I want to leave you with today, then it's this.

When you speak, I will listen.

The Police Superintendents' Association is a great force for good.

You are tireless advocates for Police Superintendents and you've played a vital role in developing policing.

I want this to continue long into the future.

And my door will always be open to you.

Thank you.