

SPEAKING NOTE:

Can the police, as we know them, do all that society asks of them? Sir Ian Blair, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, would answer 'No' to that question.

he is worth listening to because frankly, he has been the architect of many of the developments in UK policing.

He has proposed fragmentation and to some extent, he has both allowed and caused a degree of fragmentation to happen. He has talked about a 'triptych' with SOCA on one side dealing with serious and organised crime and community support officers on the other side dealing with quality of life issues. The police would be left in the middle dealing with everything else.

Sir Ian's argument is that the days of the omni-competent police officer are over. He has said that the skills of mediation and community engagement which local officers need were no less significant than skills of intelligence development and armed intervention needed by anti-terrorist officers and that they were unlikely to be possessed by the same person.

My first problem with Sir Ian's views is that if there ever was such a being as an omniscient constable in the UK, it must have been a very long time ago. The police service developed specialisms from the first day officers wore plain clothes or became mobile. Certainly specialisms have grown and developed to quite an incredible extent, but in my view this does not justify breaking up the service.

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Of course no one officer is likely to have all of the skills required to do all police duties. I don't know anyone who ever thought that might be the case – except Sir Ian. Fragmentation will almost certainly lead to confusion, competition, duplication and anything but the joint-up thinking and joint-up action that is required to deal with crime, big and small.

Crime and criminals do not acknowledge or respect lines drawn in the sand. Policing should be seamless where a beat cop knows when to call in the CID, and the CID knows when to call in other specialists. When you're part of the same team you know and value team-work.

In the UK police federations, we represent cadets, constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors, over 98% of all police officers in Scotland. Obviously they are all paid at different rates and there are always some arguments and jealousies about rates of pay and differentials. But the different ranks never quite get to the point where they rip themselves apart or expend so much energy fighting one another that the government slips off the hook. We are all part of the same team.

Chairman, having delivered what I would call the party line, let me now pick up from Ron's point's and maintain the injection of a bit of controversy into the proceedings. Let me play devil's advocate – a role many would say I am very well suited for.

We all know the divide and conquer tactic. We all know the unity is strength maxim.

Why then are we standing by allowing other people to do police jobs? Isn't that part of a divide and conquer agenda? Isn't it damaging police unity and strength?

By opposing the introduction of these other types of police, have we not fallen into a trap? Have we not simply tried to close the door after the horse has bolted?

The real politic is as we heard from Monique yesterday, Governments do want to realise the economic advantages of reducing the cost of policing and want to reduce their direct linkage or responsibility to it.

Community Support Officers and the rest are a fact of life in some places and while the jury is still out on their value over real police officers, it seems certain that they are not going to go away. If they are going to do what we all understand are police duties, why separate them off into some lower tier, untidy mess. Why not badge them up properly as police officers and take them into the police service?

What I am proposing today is that we change our position of opposition, we welcome a new tier of policing into the fold and we get them organised.

From an operational policing prospective, this would seem far more sensible than having a fragmented police force. A co-ordinated police service could be arranged and delivered which would avoid turf wars and officers tripping over one another.

From a staff association or union perspective, what would be wrong with new and increased membership? Okay, it would probably mean a new category of member and that would bring increased work and a few headaches – so what?

One thing is for sure, if they don't become your members they will become someone else's. And before you know it, they will be trying to drag their new members up your ladder.

Surely getting someone else to do lower value police work is a good idea. It releases us from that low value base point and gives us the opportunity to strive for higher earnings to recognise our higher value work or our increased responsibility for supervision of the new employees.

Like every other change it presents threats and opportunities and to see it only as a threat doesn't leave any room for movement or improvement. When properly expressed initial objections do not win the day and you're faced with certain change, you either engage in that change or you get left behind.

And finally.

There are 4 questions in my mind that drives me to my conclusion.

- 1 What is good for policing – public perspective. NO ONE IS ASKING
- 2 What is good for police officers- Union perspective NO ONE IS LISTENING
- 3 What is good for PRA- WE'RE NOT THINKING IT YET.
- 4 The last one I don't need to ask.

What is good for policing – Governments perspective

The answer is evident. they've already worked that out and are doing it now, perhaps slowly, perhaps quietly, but they are doing it resolutely.

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So that leaves me with my final words. “When circumstances change, I change my mind, what do you do?”