

# PUBLICSERVANT

The authoritative work  
**'The Future for Policing – rhetoric, reform, reality'**  
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# PUBLICSERVANT

ABC THE PUBLICATION FOR TODAY'S PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERS



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# Politicians know

## little about policing

The fall in public confidence in the police will only be reversed when politicians stop interfering and allow officers to return to the frontline, Paul McKeever tells Lynda King Taylor

**P**olice should attend every reported crime, says former Merseyside chief constable and new HM Inspector of Constabulary Bernard Hogan-Howe. It seems a simple enough statement of intent but one that remains so hopelessly unfulfilled it does nothing to raise the public perception of policing. And Paul McKeever isn't the least bit surprised.

McKeever, a police sergeant to his soul and chairman of the Police Federation representing all 140,000 police officers up to and including chief inspectors, agrees with Hogan-Howe, but he adds that it is police service policies for dealing with crime and not individual police actions that are failing the public.

"We have highlighted this concern for years but unfortunately, with the exception of one or two chief constables, our fears have fallen on deaf ears," he says.

No one better appreciates the growing daily demands on policing – and the Policing Pledge adds pressures on officers when reputation and community confidence suffer. The service currently takes around 80 million calls a year and deals with 20 million incidents.

"When the public report a crime," says McKeever, "they are right to expect that a police officer can attend and deal appropriately with it. This will not only assist flagging detection rates but can also rebuild public confidence and trust."

Those essential elements, he says, have been gradually eroded "through the introduction of government-led policing gimmicks and the removal of police officers from the frontline". Officers have spent so much time at their desks in recent years, they do not always show the judgement that previous bobbies had on the streets.

If this demands reconfiguring the workforce then so be it. "But the warranted officer must remain the bedrock of the service, independent, free from all political interference and able to use discretion," he says. "Numbers must also be maintained for a flexible workforce."

"It is a price worth paying to ensure the public receive the police service they rightly expect," he says. The Federation has been calling for "a whole-sale root and branch review of policing for more than a decade. We fully agree with Sir Ian Blair that piecemeal reform causes more problems."

The recent policing white paper adds to that fragmented approach. "Too often we are reshaped by politicians who know very little about policing," he says. "A little learning is a dangerous thing. Dig deep and find out what's going on before you make

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You must explain and defend what police do and apologise if it's gone wrong . . . police want to show they care

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fundamental changes. It's one of the biggest dangers for the future for policing. Politicians think they have the answers – they haven't."

McKeever is buoyed by many of the local initiatives to raise public confidence and policing's reputation. However, he adds, it is often national matters that do the damage.

"There is a lack of leadership on the big issues," he says. "How far were we set back after the G20 protest policing (savaged by the HMIC report in November)? Where was the police and political leadership at that time?"

"At the same time, the CIA were facing media attack in the US over some of their practices. What did President Obama do? He visited the Virginia CIA HQ, stood shoulder to shoulder with the agents, saying 'thank you for what you do for America'. Where was the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary? Where was the senior leadership in the Met? It was hiding, and so public confidence goes backwards when you have those major knocks. You must explain and defend what police do and apologise if it's gone wrong . . . police want to show they care."

McKeever says you have to look carefully at the complaint figures (31,259 in the last year) and not just focus on the headlines. The Federation believes the complaints "not only reflect the increasing pressures on officers, but highlight the need to invest in appropriate training."

Despite many of the initial complaints not being upheld, he believes the statistics demonstrate "that some forces are not learning lessons and those systemic and structural faults which hinder policing need to be addressed".

Powers to search homes, seize assets

and freeze bank accounts have been extended beyond police agencies to councils and a host of quangos, and he asks: "Where is the consultation process you would expect the government to go through? How widely are these powers going to be used? What is the intention behind this? The public have trust in the police service to treat these powers in an appropriate way and I don't believe people will have the same faith in local authorities or Transport for London to use them."

He sees more cracks in the criminal justice system: "We take the blame for failures that occur elsewhere and abuse of power by other agencies will tarnish us."

Moves to reduce pressure on the courts are shifting the role of policing towards the "correctional business", he says. To date, says McKeever, the Police Federation "has been a lone voice calling for most offences to go before the courts". It is hugely frustrating for police officers who continually see the same offenders.

"The time is long overdue," he says, "for a complete review of the system. Let's hope we get some political courage and willpower to deal with these offenders properly."

● Lynda King Taylor's book *The Future for Policing – rhetoric, reform, reality will be published by University of Buckingham Press in the new year*

**McKEEVER:**  
"there is a lack of leadership on the big issues"

