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**Police Minister
Tony McNulty
Interviewed**

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For more information on the role of the Paddington crime reduction partnership referred to in this interview with the Minister of State for Security, Counter-Terrorism and Policing, visit **www.padpolice.com**

This Group has received accolades from the Home Office and HMIC for its work with the MET Police and their partners. In November 2007, in the category of 'Community Builder' its activities have been highly commended by the National Beacon Fellowship Awards.

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Perceptions of Change

Lynda King Taylor talks to Home Office Minister **Tony McNulty** about his responsibilities for security, counter-terrorism, crime and policing

When you meet Tony McNulty it is difficult to associate him with a BA (Hons) in Political Theory and Institutions from the University of Liverpool, an MA in Political Science from Virginia State University and, before his days as an MP, as a Principal Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at the University of North London. A Home Office veteran, he is conscious when it comes to politics and policing he has to master the art of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable. Equally he is “buoyant” on the Home Office's new role and how that has focused attention on new priorities for government.

Mr McNulty served as a Whip from 1999-2002 following a period as Parliamentary Private Secretary to David Blunkett. In May 2005 he became a Home Office Minister with responsibility for immigration, nationality and citizenship and a year later he was appointed minister for policing, security and community safety before becoming Minister for Security, Counter-Terrorism, Crime and Policing, at the very centre of the new department.

The Home Office split six months ago, with the new Ministry of Justice taking over criminal justice and offender issues, with the Home Office focusing on security, borders and policing. Mr McNulty admits only now are stakeholders beginning to understand all that happened in what has been a “seismic”

transformation. It was not a question he says of just splitting up the department for some minor convenience of a Secretary of State. “Considerable thought had gone into the process following a massive review,” he maintains, “not just of legislation but also of the organisational response to counter-terrorism. Not just in the Home Office but across Government.” Mr McNulty acknowledges he has been in the middle of it all and believes that as the new Home Office ‘beds in’ it will prove to be one of the most “significant transformation a Government has ever done in internal reorganisation”.

“The threat of terrorism has significantly increased so there had to be a real ramp-up of UK response,” he says. The increase in security and police budgets for terrorism, specifically in the recent public spending review, he insists, have meant “significantly more reinforcements in resource terms for all that Government has been trying to do to increase our effort in terms of counter terrorism – a single security budget for intelligence services and the counter-terrorism side of policing allows us to take the struggle forward”.

The new Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) has brought Foreign Office, Communities and Local Government staff into the Home Office and together they are shaping up to be the core of all that government does in security and counter-terrorism –

and based in the Home Office. This says Mr McNulty “is now coming to fruition and will endure as the right thing to do”. Getting a cross-government focus through RICU is more than simply a fight led by legislation. To Mr McNulty it is also an “ideological battle and struggle with hearts and minds”. He believes this opens up new possibilities. “Foreign Office, Communities and Local Government departments work very closely with us,” he says. “More departments are coming to the table, more productively, to see what they can do.”

Relations with Ministry of Justice are also developing – I met the Minister on the first day of the National Crime Reduction Board, which brings together what the Home Office does and where criminal justice and offender management take over. “Relations are good. I know people were concerned about what happens if prisons and offender management fell off the Home Office agenda.” If communications with the Home Office were always part of the problem will this split not make it worse? He says not. “Ironically, as it is in a separate department, there is all the more effort to ensure it works in sharing communications and a joint focus. I’m really quite buoyant about it all.”

The latest Police Performance Assessments (PPAs) were announced recently. To many officers they are too complex, clumsy, too bureaucratic, and do not have enough local accountability. Has The Minister any plans to



“getting police and PCSOs on the streets and engaging with people is a priority”

photo: Lancashire Constabulary

reduce the numbers of targets or performance indicators, or to look more fundamentally at the way performance in policing is measured and assessed? The answer is a resounding “yes” that this is the direction he intends to go in. What was encouraging about the PPAs announced, he states, were “most police professionals interviewed said ‘yes we accept the framework has been appropriate, increased and enhanced performance’ but the world of policing is ever changing and now it’s time to move on”.

Part of the moving on is towards local accountability. Mr McNulty says this will offer a “real local flavour to the performance framework and citizens’ focus on what the public feel they are getting and what their perceptions are of policing. The Home Secretary has said the aim is to take away as many targets as possible and really start to talk about the Home Office being the strategic centre of the performance framework. Then let individual forces get on with their role of being more accountable to their localities”.

The approach would remove the lowered morale of the type witnessed by being bottom of the league in Bedfordshire. Mr McNulty said he was “robust” in removing the perception that Bedfordshire was performing badly: the figures were to last April and in the two areas on which it had fallen down it had since made “considerable progress”. He said: “I have confidence that Bedford has addressed those issues.” There is no force, he adds, that is about to go into special measures or formal engagement by the centre to help them progress.

On future PPAs, Mr McNulty becomes vociferous and vehement on local accountability. He wants to make strands of any new performance framework have a citizens’ focus. “This is about how forces measure the satisfaction of their local communities – to push it down to the localised level. The difficulty in part is how to capture how the force is doing in terms of overall satisfaction by the public

simultaneous with the more formal accountability at the very lowest level – in terms of principally BCUs and how that can be achieved. That’s very much the focus of Sir Ronnie Flanagan but there must be some way of really driving performance at the local level either through Local Area Agreements or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) – something fashioned around the existing architecture rather than inventing something new.”

reassurance through neighbourhood policing will shift current perceptions of crime

The prospect of more legislation is not one that many people involved in policing would welcome. “I suspect the answer is probably not more legislation,” Mr McNulty says, “but on gun and knife crime, if there is a need for new legislation then we’ll have a look at it. But even last summer with the difficult knife incidents, both Tony Blair and John Reid were very clear that legislation is only one part of the solution – working with communities, and areas such education and awareness are just as important. It is about how we collectively as communities respond to it. Schools and communities must get across to people the fact that carrying a gun will result in custodial sentences, and we must get to a stage where we have a social and cultural drive that says it’s not on to carry them, let alone using them. Just as drink-driving was an accepted norm – through education and awareness campaigns we managed to drive it out of the system as a daft and fatal thing to do.”

There are various areas where the Home Office is especially exercised by the use of guns

and gang culture following the Rhys Jones tragedy. They are working closely with principally urban area forces to see how it can be better tackled. At the other end agencies, such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), are focusing on trying to choke off supply. He emphasises hand guns are banned in this country. “That, by definition, means most are illegal so working with European colleagues and international level is a priority. The law on banning replica guns came in at the beginning of October. We are reviewing the law around witness protection schemes and witness intimidation and anonymity.” He endorses utilising the laws we already have in a more imaginative way, rather than rushing to the statute book.

For Mr McNulty to achieve what he wants, he says there must be a way with all the assorted local agencies of ensuring the community infrastructure of a group such as ours gets support. “Local policing is so much more than just police. Local accountability is a shared endeavour.” That is why he says he is not convinced that accountability at local level such as elected sheriffs or police commissioners will work. “It defies the complexities. For local policing to work well the council have to be at the table, the health service, education and a range of others including the fire service to ensure all their work can be done all the better. Policing is not as it used to be, perceived as a little silo that floats above communities and considers what they do to them – that is nonsense. Far more needs to be done on the preventative side, the general community cohesion and building side.”

He returns to his personal priority – perception of crime. He admits that perception is a “real big issue not least in urban areas”. Through Community Safety partnerships and the new duty of local government, and CDRPs and neighbourhood policing he believes “that’s a pathway to correcting perception”. The work of CDRPs he says “must have as part of their

remit crime prevention and perception of crime – working with all agencies. Secondly neighbourhood policing and getting police and PCSOs on the streets far more readily and engaging with people more generally is also a priority”. That, he believes, will allay the perception of crime. “Perception is through the roof. It is an imbalance. It’s early days but a lot of the early empirical data done in London about the impact of safer neighbourhood teams have shown some quite extraordinary dips in the very high figures on ‘perception’. So it is all about presence and visibility as well as being accessible when officers are out on the street.”

He believes reassurance through neighbourhood policing will shift current perceptions of crime. Up and down the country he says police have got to improve on informing people what is happening and what has happened. “Communication is part of the overall awareness brief and is essential to policing. The police are bad at celebrating success. They are driven by a ‘can do’ and solving things mentality, shifting from one thing onto the next. Occasionally they should stop, celebrate and champion.”

Another current topic is what the Home Office is doing to encourage collaboration between forces now that mergers have been abandoned. Adamantly he confirms that “merg-

ers perceived as a kind of edict and dictat from Government, and enforced if people didn’t do it themselves, are off the agenda”. Encouraging collaboration between forces is however on the action list. “To be perfectly honest it probably took the police family six months collectively to get over the whole debate about mergers. Since that time there has been a real focus across the country on collaboration. Whether it’s at the business process back-office shared services type collaboration, procurement or operationally, there is a lot of good work going on that I’m happy about. We will need however to get much smarter at doing what we do within the existing resource base – make processes like IT work better for us to stay at the level of resource we are now.”

Mr McNulty has gone on record acknowledging the government had oversold the benefits of ID cards and would need to change its approach to win public consent. “Perhaps in the past in its enthusiasm it oversold the advantages of identity cards. We did suggest, or at least implied, that they may well be a panacea for identity fraud, benefit fraud, terrorism, entitlement and access to public services. Maybe in the past, we were offering the system as a panacea to all these ills in that it will help and benefit each one, but is not going to solve any

one of them.” He stressed however that the government remains committed to going ahead, and would need to place more emphasis of the benefits of identity cards for the individual. “We have been arguing what the state can get out of it rather than what it can do for the individual in providing a gold standard in proving your identity. There are now so many, almost daily, occasions when we have to stand up and verify our identity.”

And summing up the challenges of his job, he concluded that he has to “make sure we are utterly prepared for any terrorist threat, that all our communities get the policing they deserve, and to be more of a champion for our police”.



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