

Volume 14 Issue 2

April 2008

policing TODAY



The journal of the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland

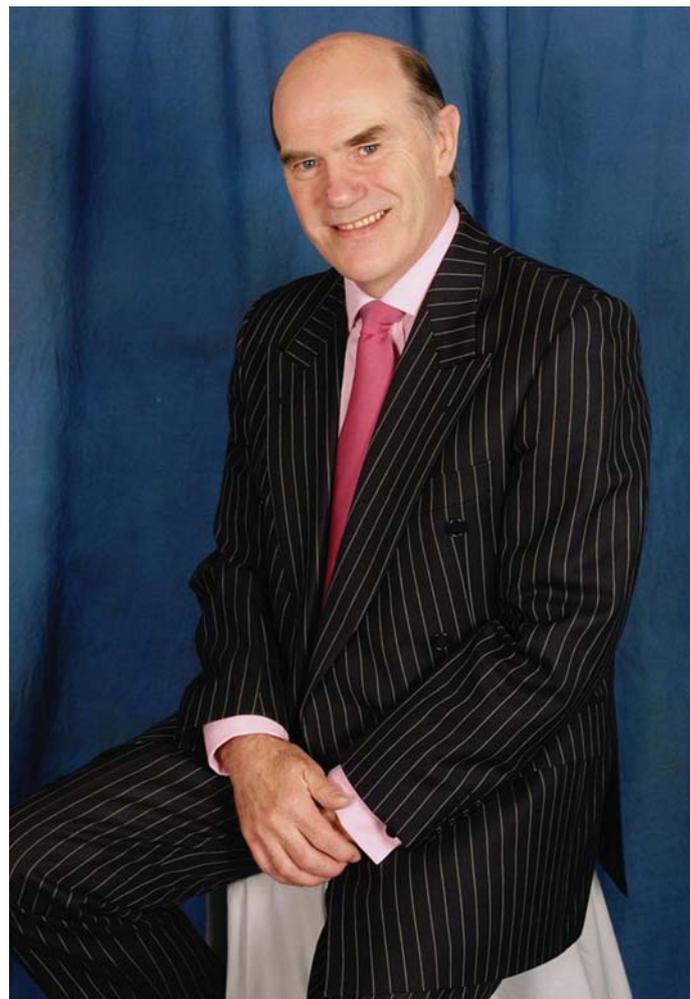
Tributes to Mike Todd Change in Scotland Criminal Records



FOLLOWING FLANAGAN

Sir Ronnie Flanagan talks about his Review of Policing & Tim Brain assesses its financial implications

Reviewing the Review



Following the publication of his Review of Policing, **Sir Ronnie Flanagan** talks to **Lynda King Taylor** about the thinking behind the report and discusses the implications for the future

Sir Ronnie Flanagan, since 2005 the Home Secretary's senior professional advisor on policing and HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, is a force to be reckoned with, as he was on the rugby field where he played and coached at senior level. He is also a lover of the poetry of Yeats and studied psychology, and has a reputation for robustness: when the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland criticised his RUC inquiry into the Omagh Bombing of 1998, his response was that he would "publicly commit suicide" if he believed her report was correct.

Sir Ronnie joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in 1970 and became its Chief Constable in 1996, the same year in which he conducted a fundamental review of the force. A graduate of the FBI Academy, he has travelled extensively in Europe and USA studying policing and in 2005 reviewed policing in Iraq.

In his far reaching review, Sir Ronnie says: "The Police Service cannot stand still: the best customer service and citizen engagement are critical to the delivery of successful policing in the 21st century." He recommends the re-evaluation of the management and deployment of police resources, a reduction in the number of centrally-imposed targets to

improve efficiency, the elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy, strengthening of the partnership working between the police and other agencies and a better emphasis on local accountability. He sees the review as an opportunity "to alter the course of how we deliver policing. We can free up valuable police time and transform the working environment of individual officers. But this has to be in the service of public protection". And Sir Ronnie is adamant that the review will not sit on a shelf and that if legislative changes are necessary the imminent Green Paper will provide opportunity for further debate and consultation.

It is clear that the review comes against a background of public spending constraints which will mean reduced officer numbers, "The current number of police officers in England and Wales is unsustainable," he says. "There is widespread recognition among the leadership of the service that maintaining police numbers at their current level is not sustainable over the course of the next three years". Sir Ronnie accepts that recent growth in police numbers has been very welcome and necessary but says "the financial reality is that it is not going to go on. My view is if we free

police from the burden of bureaucracy – and I have discussed this with a relative conservative estimate – the possibility is we could free the equivalent of 2–3,000 officers per year to more front-line duty. We should not slavishly adhere to police numbers". What number does Sir Ronnie think there should be? He says: "There should be rigorous research to agree a reduceable minimum, which would probably not be much below the numbers we have now. I am talking about a slight reduction in numbers. When I began this review, even to suggest that would have been an anathema as more people were thinking of continuously increasing police numbers. I am saying, lets concentrate on policing not the police or police numbers."

Nothing in his review, he maintains, "threatens in any way the critical importance of the traditional role of the constable. But too many are straitjacketed by process. I want them freed up from routine tasks which they don't have to discharge and to have others do them" to allow police to deal with the crimes." A lot of backroom police work he insists could be better done by a civilian professional: "why have a police constable analysing the books in a complex fraud case when a forensic

accountant would do a better job?” He rejects the view that the use of other support staff has gone too far. “It does not need sworn police officers to undertake many behind front desk duties. Often civilians do more routine tasks more effectively than police officers. If a person comes into a station and wants to see a police officer then one should be available to them. Nothing in my report is at the expense of police officer availability. Policing makes an impact on all our lives and is much too important and to be left to police alone. Policing is only truly effective when it involves police partnerships with all their communities they serve.”

Communities have differing demands and expectations of their policing service. And Sir Ronnie says that “as public servants, police must listen to the different demands, discern differing needs, expectations and work together to address that. Working in partnership is crucial importance in policing reform and can not be overestimated”. He also believes that policing is not just a Home Office responsibility and other government departments, such as Communities & Local Government, have their part to play. We should, he suggests, “trial pooled budgets to see if there are monies that can be brought together to address very localised management issues – such as dysfunctional families. There is much scope for progressing partnerships across Government departments involving police and using problem solving techniques to address those quality of life issues which concern individuals when they open their front door.” He also thinks that police authorities should be improved and strengthened on a regional basis.

Sir Ronnie enthuses about bringing “entrepreneurial energies” to policing, including income generation and private sector sponsorships – and the reform of the funding formula. By improving the management and deployment of resources, exploiting technology, working in partnership with other agencies, he says “the police will be better able to manage the risks they bear on society’s behalf. Only by creating high quality engagement and involvement with local people can we accurately understand what matters to communities, what their priorities are and how the police should be targeting their efforts.” His view is that the next scheduled

review of the police funding formula this should be carried out now. The last full review occurred 2005 and there has been rapid demographic change since. The allocation of grant funding to police authorities should be based transparently “on objective need in order to better match resources to threat and demand”. In the longer term, the Home Office should seek agreement with ACPO and APA on a revision to the funding formula that better deals with the shifting demands of protective services.

smarter working could transform policing

His report proposes a reduction in police bureaucracy. If red tape was cut, it could release, he says “up to seven million hours of police time every year, the equivalent of 3,500 officers or several small forces”. He draws an analogy between bureaucracy and cholesterol. “There is good cholesterol,” he says “and there is good bureaucracy and necessary audit trails.” He cites areas such as domestic violence which is not about simply investigating an individual act but having documentation and mechanisms to notify other partners who may be at risk. “We need to monitor that,” he says “to ensure what is a serious assault today does not become a murderer in a few months time.” There is, Sir Ronnie admits, a need for such good cholesterol but “what we must eliminate is the bad cholesterol that clogs up the arteries of policing. Sometimes that has been imposed on our organisation – other times we have imposed it on ourselves as we have become so risk adverse that we want to record absolutely everything – just in case there is a subsequent question, complaint or Inquiry without asking what is the real value of such a bureaucratic approach at the expense of officers spending time out with the public they serve.”

“Smarter working could transform policing” he insists. “Police forces must be freed up from unnecessary bureaucracy and better

targeted at responding to the threats the public face and reducing the harm caused by crime. But individual officers and forces must be accountable for the decisions we give them the freedom to make. Over the past 25 years our police service has been transformed with many changes improving the service. But in the process of improving the service we have also become process bound. That is why we must address the drivers of bureaucracy. We must strive for a police service that gives the police the flexibility and support to act with their own professional discretion and one that offers accountability to the public”.

Sir Ronnie’s review proposes a major cultural change for British policing by standardising for the first time the way police work. It seeks to sweep away the tradition of each force choosing its own way of working, and to pave the way for officers from Northumbria to Cornwall to use the same policing manuals, forms, computers, radios, technology and software systems. He says that “in some areas forces are moving towards a greater willingness to come together, and changes could be considered so people do not feel they are paying monies in one area for policing in another”. If policing areas ‘voluntarily’ want to come together then no barriers should be placed in the way of a force’s voluntary merger with another.”

Better management of resources, less paperwork and greater use of technology could help free up valuable police time and transform the police giving individual officers more discretion, delivering efficiencies, and enabling police forces to focus on the specific threats to their communities. It sounds like common sense. Sadly, too often common sense is not so common and his and everyone’s hope is that the impending Green Paper proves otherwise.



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This article first appeared in issue 14.2 of *Policing Today*, the official journal of ACPO (The Association of Chief Police Officers).

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