

**General Secretary's speech  
Constables' Central Conference Bournemouth  
Tuesday 20th May 2008**

Chairman, fellow delegates and guests, I rise on behalf of the Constables' Central Committee to propose the adoption of the 2007 Annual Report to Conference.

Before I present the content of the report to you and update you on our progress last year and our current thinking, I would like first to thank all the staff who have worked so hard to support me, our Chairman Julie Nesbit and you.

It is a great honour for me to represent all 108,599 of our members but it wouldn't be possible without the hard work and dedication of the CCC, the CBB Chairs and Secretaries and Constables representatives all over England and Wales – thank you.

I would also like personally to thank Julie, whose conviction I think has been well demonstrated today, and my deputy Steve Smith.

Conference, the number of new civil claims remains close to 2000 (1943) and for our members amounted to £13.5 million (13,501) compensation.

Perhaps slightly worrying is the number of new employment tribunal claims which have increased again this year to 196 from last year's figure of 172.

However, these figures do reflect how hard the Federation are working and of course the high level of service we get from our appointed solicitors and you have our thanks.

Conference, since the last time I addressed you a lot has changed. We have now a new Prime Minister, a new Home Secretary (coming in from the whips office, but with no less an appetite for whip cracking) and a new, albeit embattled, government to deal with.

They came in last July promising to 'listen and to learn'. Conference, as I'm sure you each can verify, as far as police service matters are concerned, they have not listened and they clearly have not learned.

We are not opposing reform. You as police officers know well that action can and must be taken to free up police time, improve rates of detection and clarify health and safety procedures among many others things, some of which I would like to discuss later.

The Constables' Central Committee is not a roadblock to reform and is committed to working with all parties to achieve service improvement – but we would like some of our proposals taken onboard and some WFM proposals shelved.

Policy making should be a two way enterprise, and 'if' it is old fashioned to suggest that reforms should have the backing of those who must deliver them, and who have years of experience in dealing with the issues involved (as opposed to under a year) then, Conference, I hold my hands up.

However, rather than work with us, the Home Office seems obstinately intent on imposing its own unpopular modernisations – and I use that word, modernisation, with a very due sense of caution.

Last January we joined together with our colleagues across the service and marched on Westminster (for the first time in 25 years). Conference, we acquitted ourselves commendably and we took our argument to the country, as well as to the government.

We will not stand idly by while our pay is eroded and the service we are so proud to serve in is dismantled and debased in the name of supposed efficiency.

Efficiency is not a matter just of streamlining costs and hitting centrally imposed targets – it is about delivering an effective service – the most effective service – with the resources available.

Colleagues, you know as well as I that front line constables are best placed to know when the service we deliver is effective and – dare I say it – efficient.

We are the ones dealing with crime in our communities and helping the victims of crime pursue justice – our officers are the ones putting their lives on the line for the public and we do it uncomplainingly, until we are told we are too expensive and outmoded.

Conference, the end of last year saw the publication of Sir Ronnie Flanagan's final review. The review was presented to a different Home Secretary than the one who commissioned it but has, nonetheless, had its recommendations swiftly accepted by the Home Office.

With the government's acceptance of Flanagan's recommendations we know that the NPIA is now rolling out demonstration sites up and down the country with a desire to find 'innovative' ways of replacing police constables with civilian staff.

That is why the Constables' Central Committee has launched its campaign "Communities Need Constables".

We shall also, through our current work with Pilat and Project Branthwaite, be surveying the membership and we'll be producing a WFM toolkit for the CBB Secretaries' assistance.

It is essential that community policing isn't emasculated by asking civilians to police our streets. We need constables on the beat not policing on the cheap!

Conference, I need now to outline the situation in the Police Negotiating Board. As you all know, last year's PNB ended in arbitration with the Home Secretary deciding not to accept the recommendation of the independent arbitration panel.

She then added insult to injury by the deceitful way in which her department leaked the decision, claiming to be 'on the moral high ground'.

The protest rally in January was extremely successfully in making a positive impression and in getting the support from the public we need to force the Home Secretary to pay police officers the wage we deserve.

We extend our thanks to the 26,000 serving and retired officers who came to London and participated on the day.

The support we got from politicians who joined us on the march and who helped us take our petition for fair play right to the Prime Minister's door was a testimony to how much we can achieve together.

I would like again to pay tribute to all those off duty officers who came on the march.

We do of course still await the outcome of the judicial review and the result of the JR will undoubtedly have implications on where we go next within PNB and the way we negotiate.

Indeed, last years fiasco has brought about the question "what does negotiation actually mean for 2008?"

If it means an Official Side of PNB that is controlled totally by the Home Office as in 2007, then "negotiation" is meaningless.

Whilst you will be further updated by the JCC General Secretary at conference, I can report that in preliminary meetings the Official Side has assured us of its intention to engage in a full negotiation process. We'll see! But I will continue to remind them that we seek fair pay and fair play!

I need now to turn to the important issues surrounding health and safety.

It is vitally important that we do not lose the framework that protects officers at work and ensures that all are adequately trained to use the range of equipment made available to them for use in the field.

The Police (Health & Safety) Act of 1997 extended the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to cover police officers. However, the issue of health and safety is currently under review by ACPO and the Home Office, with the possibility that police officers will be removed from the terms of the legislation.

The CCC accepts that police officers will often be treated differently to other public servants in many respects and that police officers are put in dangerous situations on a daily basis but does not accept that officers should be treated any differently under existing health and safety legislation.

H & S does not stop policing being delivered to our communities. It is the central duty of the employer to ensure (so far as is reasonably practicable) the health, safety and welfare of all employees. That Constables do a dangerous job is not an excuse to be complacent on risk mitigation.

I now need to talk about moving forward.

Conference, we can make no mistake about it, we as a service are in the goldfish bowl. The public are expecting us to deliver more! And we must be allowed to make inroads. As Constables, we are; or certainly 'used' to be, the visible and tangible link between law enforcement and the members of the public we serve.

I personally feel very strongly that Constables must be part of the communities they serve, rather than just responsive to individual events occurring within them.

The new Home Secretary was on the back foot in the press in early February for stating clearly in an interview that she would not walk the streets of London alone for fear of crime.

I wonder how safe she will feel walking the corridors of the conference centre tomorrow?

It is clear now that, as we approach the next general election, not only the government but the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats will be scrutinised over their approach to tackling crime and we as Constables must make our contribution to the debate heard.

We believe that many of the government's proposals to curb the numbers of police constables and raise the number of civilian staff stem from cosmetic reasons - "making people feel safe".

Well I tell you now Conference that making people 'feel' safe may be a job that CSOs can assist in – but our job is to protect people and also to detect and pursue crime. To actually 'make' them safe.

The government needs to listen...Communities need to be safe as well as to feel safe!

Communities need Constables.

Thank you Conference. I ask delegates to approve the Annual Report of the Constables Central Committee for 2007.