

**Metropolitan Police Management Board Response to the Ethical
Challenges of Policing in London report by London Policing Ethics Panel
October 2014**

In my role as the Management Board lead for Professionalism, and with the responsibility for introducing the Police Code of Ethics into the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), I have been asked to provide the formal response to the first report of The London Policing Ethics Panel, "Ethical Challenges of Policing in London".

The overall response is that the Commissioner and Management Board very much welcome what is a concise and, most importantly, practically grounded assessment and description of the unique ethical challenges that are presented by policing London. The report has received a broad readership, especially among the leadership of the MPS, and has been well received. I will now comment in more specific terms on the individual sections of the report.

Introduction

Any discussion of ethics is, in essence, a philosophical and academic exercise, and while this has self-evident merit, the discussion of policing ethics has to be firmly rooted in practical application and the everyday challenges that the role presents. In this regard, it is positive that the report centres its discussion on the concept of 'policing by consent', and by extension, the need to retain high levels of public trust and confidence. The quote from 1829 that features at the foot of page 6 is a good reflection of what, in modern parlance we refer to as policing 'without fear or favour'. That is fundamental to our legitimacy.

Why a London Policing Ethics Panel?

It is positive that the report is determined at various points to emphasise the ethical demands of policing. Demands that are day to day and experienced at all, and especially the most junior levels of the Service. They are 'real life' and sometimes mundane dilemmas - but dilemmas nonetheless. It is 'Living Ethics', and the report recognises this very well.

The Job of Policing

The ethical challenges faced are unique and the report is correct to assess that this is in large part due to the nature and extent of the powers that are vested in the Service. They are also unique because of the nature of those that we encounter - from the vulnerable to the most violent, and often in scenarios that are the most stressful imaginable.

Ethics

We would agree with the appreciation of the individual nature of the 'Ethics of Policing', and that is reflected in the way in which we have embraced the recently launched 'Police Code of Ethics' and the manner in which we have integrated it with a considered process to identify values, standards of behaviour and principles of leadership.

The Ethics of Police Authority

The tremendous power that the police possess - to impact on people's lives in the most dramatic way - creates a responsibility to ensure that the public 'trust us'. Trust that we will treat them fairly. Trust that we will help, and do the right thing.

It is important that the report specifically refers to the concept of moral dilemmas. These form part of day to day policing even where the law and policy may be clear. This is not about understanding. It is about judgement based on a values or ethical basis to guide decision-making. And, as the report identifies, this decision-making often has to take place at speed and/or in highly stressful situations. This is what makes policing ethical challenges unique and the report describes this very well.

The Extra Pressures on Police Officers

Ethical decision-making in policing does not take place against a 'neutral' background. The consequences - in at least two respects - create a significant additional pressure. Firstly, the actual consequences of poor (or even good) decisions can be extreme, even resulting in loss of life.

Secondly, the layers of scrutiny and process (Professional Standards Investigations; IPCC Investigations; Inquest/Inquiry; Court Processes and Media Coverage) can dramatically affect officers for years. It is right that the report recognises this context.

The Psychology of the Police Brotherhood

We do have some reservations about the use of the terms 'Blue Wall of Silence', and the 'Brother/Sisterhood of Policing'. There is no doubt that part of the response to the pressures of the job is what I prefer to call 'The unthinking loyalty' that Officers show to colleagues and that can lead to perverse and unethical behaviour and defensiveness. Using the terms of the panel gives the phenomenon a systemic nature that is not necessarily recognised or accepted. But the dilemma is one that is real and one that we are challenging through our professionalism programme. The question is how we make it real and effective at

a ground level, and how to achieve the result whereby an officer's first loyalty (and therefore action) is to the Values and the Standards of behaviour.

Policing is Getting Harder

Society is ever more complex and layered, and the relationship between the public and all representatives of authority is changing. The Police are at the sharp end of those changes and face even greater levels of scrutiny. We welcome the roll-out of body worn video as a chance to be both open and transparent, but also, provide a greater understanding to the public of the situations our officer's face; in some sense, to bring the policing ethical dilemmas to life on film.

The Special Ethical Challenges of Policing London

London is unique as a policing environment and we welcome the way that the report recognises this. But, despite that complexity, if we push to always return to policing 'without fear or favour', always rely on our values and our standards of behaviour, then the challenge is manageable. The section finishes with the line, "Being an ethical police officer in London can sometimes require not only the courage of a soldier but also the skills of a diplomat". We can't argue with that, but there is also a dimension that might be described as 'ethical wisdom and confidence', and this is what we have to use our training and development to enhance.

An Unwelcome Paradox

We would accept the analysis of the challenges and the premis of the paradox. The assertion that this leads to "self-protective attitudes", that are... "less likely to gain consent", is perhaps open to challenge. We would characterise it more accurately perhaps as less openness - a withdrawal, if you like, rather than self protection. It is a subtle distinction but an important one - especially when considering how we remedy the situation.

Next Steps

Both steps form part of the work that we are undertaking within both the Total Professionalism programme and the work being undertaken to improve confidence. We are keen to continue to develop a relationship with the panel and to explore practical opportunities to make use of their insight and perspective in the future.

As stated at the outset, The Commissioner and Management Board welcome the report and the contributions that it makes to describing the nature of policing ethics and the consequences to policing by consent if we are unable to effectively meet the challenge of these everyday practical dilemmas. We also

particularly welcome the broader public exposure of these issues by an independent body as greater public understanding is critical if we are to have a balanced discourse on these critical issues.

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Professionalism