



Text of a talk given by Chief Constable Barbara Wilding to members of the Institute of Welsh Affairs at the Cardiff Thistle Hotel on 24th September 2004

Ladies and gentlemen, may I say how delighted I am to be here with you this afternoon.

When the invitation to address you was extended to me earlier this year, your Development Officer suggested that you would be interested in hearing how I approached my new role, the challenges I saw and my vision for the force.

Before I begin, I would like to give you a brief outline of my background because it encompasses over 32 years of policing experience and was relevant to my decision to become a Chief Constable.

I started my police career on the small island of Jersey before transferring to the Metropolitan Police where I spent most of my career as an operational detective and in charge of specialist units in New Scotland Yard.

Ten years ago, I was appointed an Assistant Chief Constable in the Kent Constabulary, initially with overall responsibility for personnel issues and later for all operational matters. In 1998 I returned to the Metropolitan Police as a Deputy Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for a wide range of specialist functions including Special Branch, tactical firearms teams and the Royal family. As well as my day to day responsibilities, I have also led nationally for the Association of Chief Police Officers on a number of specialist areas including the national Suicide Terrorist Working Group, the Police Scientific Strategic Explosives Detection Committee; the Police Dogs Working Group and the Association of Chief Police Officers' Women's Forum.

My career has provided me with experience of virtually every facet of policing at both strategic and tactical level.

Although my work has been both challenging and rewarding, in recent years, it has largely focused on specialisms and has been somewhat distanced from my first love which is working with communities.

I have a passion for policing and a belief that we are here to make a real difference to the lives of people. It was my desire to become involved with the policing of communities and a

belief in my experience and vision of how policing should be delivered, that led me to the decision to become a Chief Constable.

Having said that, I was only really interested in two posts – South Wales and Kent. Kent is where I have lived for many years, and South Wales is where I have strong family links and where my husband was born and brought up. I should also add that I am a great admirer of Welsh pride in their heritage and culture and the way you have worked to preserve your special identity. Throughout my career I have fought hard to retain my identity and I feel at home here in South Wales and an empathy with the people of Wales.

I did not take the decision to apply for the post lightly. I visited the force and compared its performance with others of a similar size. I met with staff of all ranks and was delighted to find a highly motivated, committed, and enthusiastic workforce. I also attended the force open day, which was visited by over 5,000 people, and took the opportunity to gauge how people living in the area felt about the standard of service being delivered.

It was clear that the organisation had a strong foundation and was performing well. It was also clear that there was a willingness to do better and a capacity to accept change.

It was also evident that the force would face a number of significant challenges in the coming years.

Chief amongst the challenges would be the need to satisfy public expectation in the face of a ravenous and exponential demand for services but only modest growth in resources.

It was also clear that even a modest growth in resources could not be guaranteed as the recent tendency to place a higher proportion of the police budget on the council tax payer would mean that any increase in funding would only occur through a direct link between growth and service improvement.

It was also evident that South Wales had an unusual staffing profile in that many divisions of the force have a very high percentage of operational officers with less than 3 years service. It meant that the majority of uniform staff at the cutting edge of service delivery to the public were often our most junior officers in terms of service and experience

The property estate included buildings which were old and built to serve populations which were much less mobile than those of today. As a consequence many police stations were not fit for purpose and not where they would be placed if built today.

I was also made aware that the call handling systems were under great pressure and at peak times could be swamped by callers. As many other organisations have found, the growth of modern technology and particularly the mobile phone had resulted in a huge increase in demand.

The success of Cardiff as a Capital City and centre for sporting, cultural and social events was also proving to be a magnet for resources from across the force. An aggravating factor was a national requirement on the police service to cut overtime. This would mean that the policy of paying officers to work their rest days to police events in Cardiff would no longer be possible. Care would have to be taken to ensure that local policing needs did not suffer as a consequence of officers being abstracted from normal duties to work in the Capital.

The threat from organised crime, particularly drug dealers was real and whilst South Wales had not seen the spread of crime gangs and gun crime as some areas of England had experience the risk was ever present and had to be catered for. Fortunately, the force had already put in place some very solid defences and my challenge was to ensure we maintained and built them stronger.

Like many areas, anti social behaviour was a growing concern amongst the public and the source of considerable fear and anxiety. My challenge was to ensure that it was tackled proportionately. Hard core culprits would be dealt with vigorously. At the same time we would take account of the fact that the majority of young people want to be law abiding and that there is a strong risk of alienating them if they are consistently demonised with the anti social tag.

Finally, the force had an enviable reputation for the service being provided to the he many diverse communities within the area and I was determined that this work would be built on and reinforced.

I was appointed five months in advance of my January 1st 2004 start date and this proved a huge benefit. It allowed me ample opportunity to prepare and most importantly time to think.

I was invited to the force annual planning seminar which was held 3 months before my appointment. It involves the Police Authority and all senior managers and is the forum which finalises the strategic objectives for the coming 12 months It allowed me, to give a clear steer to the force on the direction I intended to set It also provided me with a first opportunity to articulate my vision for the force and to give senior managers my expectations of them and what they could look forward to from me.

In preparing for my role, I made a conscious decision that I would be a very visible Chief Constable and would aim to spend about 70% of my time away from my office. That decision was influenced by the fact that I see a key element of my role as a builder of personal relationships with partners and the communities we serve. To be able to do that of course I would need to be able to rely on my chief officer colleagues. Again, I was fortunate in that I inherited an experienced and very capable group of executives who had a proven track record.

My vision for the force was based on a number of key principles:

*Partnership working
Community focus*

*Leadership
Change*

and a firm belief that the police service has an important role to play in influencing the economic and social development of Wales.

Areas which are seen as secure and stable are also ones which tend to have the lowest crime and disorder rates and which have greater appeal to investors and creators of job opportunities.

Sadly, Wales, as with most other parts of the UK, has areas which experience disproportionate levels of crime and antisocial behaviour. National research has shown that 40% of crime is located within 10% of neighbourhoods and that these areas, all classified as deprived, experience three times as much burglary as the national average. Factors such as social isolation, community disorganisation and family conflict add further pressures that render people more likely to become victims of crime. The lack of social skills, literacy and numeracy also increases the likelihood of young people becoming involved in offending.

Areas which experience the highest levels of crime and anti social behaviour have difficulty in attracting investment for the simple reason that businesses would prefer to locate to areas where costs of crime are low. The consequence is higher unemployment, more social deprivation, loss of community spirit and sometimes loss of hope.

The case for regenerating communities and improving the quality of life is compelling and the police service fully recognises the vital part it has to play.

Essential to any strategy is the need for security, stability and good order, but the most critical requirement is to obtain the confidence and co-operation of communities so that they become part of the solution. This can only be achieved if expectations and promises are met and sustained. If we are to achieve these aims it will only be through tackling causes of problems as well as the effects of crime. Treating symptoms in an isolated reactive and unplanned way is expensive in the long term and seldom produces solutions. In essence, complex problems require joint and concerted action through partnership.

Through effectively tackling crime and disorder there are clearly large dividends to be gained and often this can be achieved without a huge amount of effort. It does however require commitment and a willingness to commit resources and to recognise the bigger picture. Regenerating an area is like building a jigsaw with different agencies and organisations providing pieces that will build up to a complete solution.

My vision is based on improving the quality of life of those living in our communities and I would briefly like to expand on the 4 key elements:

The first is a commitment to partnership working and before continuing I think it important that I put the costs of crime into perspective. Home Office research has put the total cost of

crime in Wales and England at £60 billion and that does not include other costs associated with fear of crime and quality of life factors.

Nearly £18 billion of that total related to the direct emotional and physical impact on victims, and over £14 billion occurred as result of violent crime. Quite clearly these enormous costs are not sustainable.

Crime and disorder partnership working is based on a recognition that complex social and economic problems cannot be solved by any one agency working in isolation. It resulted in the Crime and Disorder Act which provided a legislative framework to ensure that crime reduction activity was focused on local problems and solutions.

The Act was the catalyst that spurred on the building of effective crime reduction partnerships involving local authorities, voluntary groups, other agencies and to a more limited extent, the business community. It engendered a recognition that co-ordinated action is required to address the needs of high crime neighbourhoods.

In the face of the enormous cost of crime it is somewhat puzzling to find that some agency's and organisations are still reluctant to fully engage in tackling crime and disorder as if asking, "What's in it for us ?" It is a blinkered approach that takes no account of the true costs of crime and has resulted in large sums of money being spent on some areas over and over again without bringing a significant and lasting improvement.

Social cohesion is fundamental to the fabric of a civil society and it is of great concern that predications for the future indicate that communities will become increasingly fragmented in terms of age, gender, culture, religious and other socio-economic differences. An increasingly elderly population in terms of the working population will add pressures on health, housing and family relationships. Patterns of consumption will change in terms of choice and the ability to specify needs, and increasingly the "haves" and "have nots" will find themselves living alongside each other.

When looking to the future, a common link between all that is foreseeable is the complexity of interrelated factors. The only thing we can say with any certainty is that demands will grow exponentially whilst resources and funding will not.

It therefore follows that if we are to supply a quality service that meets public expectation then we have to become as efficient as we possibly can by targeting our hard pressed resources where they can have greatest impact and by co-ordinating action to avoid duplication and waste .

I therefore made it a priority within my first month in office to meet with the Chief Executives of the 7 Unitary Authorities within my force area to obtain their perspectives on local policing and on crime and disorder partnership arrangements. It was a very worthwhile exercise and was complimented by similar meetings with my divisional commanders seeking their views on partnership working. It gave me a real insight into local politics and an awareness of the level of support that existed. It also highlighted that communities that are

most secure and stable are those where partnership working is strongest. My challenge was to spread best practice so that good performance was more evenly distributed

Sharing information is a key area. Sharing information amongst partners and the community promotes greater understanding of issues and prevents unilateral ineffective action. True community engagement not only enriches the information base on which decisions are made but also enhances agencies knowledge and in all likelihood will improve long term performance. If police, partners and communities work collectively in tackling local priorities, this will result in communities growing in confidence, feeling respected and becoming more involved.

What we must never forget is that if we get things wrong because certain key information is not shared then there can be the most terrible human consequences. There can be no clearer example than the tragic Soham murders.

And we must also be in no doubt that offences are occurring daily that might be prevented by better information sharing. Domestic violence provides a good example. Here in South Wales, recorded levels of domestic violence have increased exponentially in recent years. Last year we saw over 1,500 additional offences recorded. That increase was partly due to new initiatives aimed at encouraging victims to report domestic violence, but it is very clear that there is still a very high level of under reporting to the police. And of course where children are regularly exposed to seeing their parents behave violently there is a danger that they will accept it as the norm and become abusers or victims of the future.

I was very encouraged to find an information sharing protocol between the Crime and Disorder partners was already in place. However, it was also clear that a great deal of confusion existed amongst some practitioners in terms of the practicalities of information sharing. The Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act were never intended to obstruct the fight against crime. Unfortunately, some people have misinterpreted the Acts and use them as obstacles to avoid disclosing information. Misunderstanding about information sharing inhibits the fight against crime and the main beneficiaries are the criminals. A priority was to organise a seminar involving practitioners to ensure that partners understood the practicalities of information sharing.

Crime and disorder partnership working in the public and voluntary sectors is now well established but less so with the business sector.

Many large businesses recognise their corporate social responsibility and have set aside large sums of money that are intended to benefit communities. However, significant sums of money remain untapped through a lack of awareness of what is available and how it can be accessed. This is an area that I am working on with business leaders in order to identify how we can bring additional funding to South Wales.

The business community is large and diverse. Some activities, such as those involving the licensing industry can have a direct impact on crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Some of our large towns and cities are suffering the consequences of poor planning which

has grouped large numbers of licensed premises within relatively short distances and which compete vigorously for custom through promotions aimed at encouraging customers to purchase more alcohol. It has encouraged a binge drinking culture and resulted in more violence and disorderly behaviour. The need for a balance between economic and social responsibility is clear and whilst partnership activity is being directed at this end much more needs to be done.

There are however many examples of the business community taking an active part in making areas safer and this is very encouraging and needs to be built upon and promulgated right across our area so that all communities benefit.

The lifeblood of the police service is public confidence and support. Without it we cannot deliver. If we are to retain, and build upon, that support and confidence then, in everything we do, we must be driven by a renewed and re-energised commitment to serving the public. We must be driven by the "quality" of service that we provide, as much as by targets and numbers. We must become more customer and community focussed.

Too often communities have been defined in terms of convenient geographical lines that are found on maps and some of our policing boundaries have followed suit. Such an approach fails to recognise that communities are not uniform. Local policing has to identify and take account of the needs of all the diverse communities in an area.

We also need to get better at communicating with the public. In meeting after meeting, the police are often criticised for lack of action. In many cases action has been taken, but we have not kept the informant updated and as a consequence they are left feeling disappointed and let down.

As I said earlier, the police estate is very large but some of our stations are not where we would choose them to be. I am therefore looking at areas where we need a presence, such as the many rapidly expanding shopping outlets which see tens of thousands of people each week. We are therefore working with the business community to provide police offices in these areas. Already in Swansea we have new offices on the Tesco and Asda sites at the Enterprise Park and Forest Fach and other similar. Others will follow across the force. In short we are looking base our police officers where people gather in large numbers rather than expect them to come to police stations which may be many miles away.

I am also looking at introducing new technology in the form of unmanned stations and kiosks that will enable the public to access us via telecommunication systems. This will mean that instead of members of the public finding a station closed, they will be able to enter part of it, in a similar way that some banks now operate. Inside they will be secure and will be able to access a range of services and information and speak with a police operator via a video conferencing link. In addition we are looking at kiosks, similar in size to a telephone box, that the public can use to contact us via the internet. These are relatively inexpensive and I would hope over time that we will be able to reach a position where a member of the public could find a facility within ten minutes of where they live.

The third element of my vision concerns leadership. I spoke earlier about the importance of partnerships in taking forward the community safety agenda. I do however recognise that the police service has a responsibility for co-ordinating activity and maintaining momentum at all levels. For example, we have set up teams of officers in some of the most deprived areas of the force. These officers are effectively ring fenced and their prime purpose is to work with partners to improve the quality of life of their areas. Their role is to initiate and drive forward work programmes. They have taken on the leadership role and have been very effective at guiding partnership decision making to maximise benefits to communities. Similarly, my expectation is that officers of all ranks will adopt a leadership role at their respective levels.

The final element of my vision concerns change. We in the police service have become used to that in recent years and it would be true to say that senior managers who retired as little as 10 years ago would find our working practices today very different. In recent years there has been a relentless pursuit of performance improvement and in order to gauge progress we have in place a wide range of measures that allow comparisons at both Basic Command Unit and force level. We are more accountable to the public than we have ever been and publish more information on performance than ever.

I firmly believe in a maxim of the industrialist Sir John Harvey Jones who once said, “ We must aim for the highest state of change an organisation can bear”. Modernising the police service is the only way we will be able to match public expectation.

Nationally a great deal of work is being undertaken and all aspects of policing are being critically evaluated from a service delivery viewpoint. What we are aiming to ensure is that our policing structures and conditions of service meet the needs of the 21st century.

For example, traditionally police officers have been recruited and trained on a generic basis. Such an approach does not take account of organisational need. Within South Wales Police, changes in conditions of service introduced a few years ago meant that senior detective posts were less attractive than they had been. As a consequence, many junior detectives no longer wished to take on the demanding detective inspector role. A consequence has been a shortage of senior investigators. What is required is an initial selection process that identifies organisational need and seeks to recruit individuals with an aptitude for a particular role. Following through my example, we should be looking to recruit individuals with a profile that identifies them as potential detectives. This is an area that I intend to take forward.

In all that we do we must target our resources where they are can be most effective . In other words we must be intelligence led. The lifeblood of intelligence is good information and partner agencies are awash with it. Many agencies receive items of information which may not mean much when viewed in isolation, but when matched with other related information, can build up into a picture that reveals patterns of behaviour and activity. We are currently working on a community intelligence programme that is designed to better coordinate activity towards hotspot areas and prolific criminals.

In conclusion, if I was asked to summarise in two words the direction policing will take in the coming months and years, my response would be “customer focus.”

We have made great strides recently in reducing crime and the number of victims has fallen significantly. In quantitative terms we can show clear evidence of improvements. What is worrying is that our success is not being reflected in increased public confidence. If we are to retain the confidence of our communities then the quality of our service must improve and we must consider every incident from the perspective of the person we are dealing with – whether victim, witness or suspect.

I have spent a considerable amount of time over the past 9 months speaking with my staff at all levels and have been delighted to find a willingness to take forward change and a desire to improve service. I am therefore confident that we will continue to improve our service and that the main driver will be customer focus.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address you.

Chief Constable Barbara Wilding