

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Policing priorities](#), HC 635

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 14 December 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Tim Loughton (in the Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Simon Fell; Carolyn Harris.

In the absence of the Chair, Tim Loughton took the Chair.

Questions 42 - 103

Witnesses

I: Sir Mark Rowley QPM, Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service.

Written evidence from witnesses: [MPS](#)



Examination of witness

Witness: Sir Mark Rowley QPM.

Q42 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the latest session of the Home Affairs Select Committee on our inquiry into policing. I am very pleased to welcome this morning Sir Mark Rowley QPM, who is the relatively new Commissioner of the Met. Welcome back, Sir Mark. I am sorry I am not Dame Diana Johnson. The Chair is unable to be with us this morning, so I am stepping in to chair this session.

Sir Mark, we have a very wide-ranging brief with an awful lot of different areas that the Committee wants to question you on. I will open by asking why on earth you wanted to come back, having escaped the Met in 2018 after a distinguished career there?

Sir Mark Rowley: I realised I am still in love with policing is the straightforward answer. Policing is a critical public service and you can argue that the protection of the citizen is the first role of the state. The Met is a fantastic organisation with tens of thousands of great men and women who do amazing things day in and day out. It is also an organisation that needs reform, and which has real challenges with some individuals who have let us down, the way we are organised and the day-to-day services to the public. I hope I have something to contribute as a leader to help tackle that and equip those fantastic tens of thousands to succeed better for London.

Q43 **Chair:** Why did you not feel that in 2018 when you left mainstream policing?

Sir Mark Rowley: I spent my last four years in policing running the counter-terrorism capability nationally, which was a great privilege at a difficult time. I think with policing, as challenges of different types of crime have grown, as social change has taken place, a range of factors have increased the difficulty of the environment and we have struggled to keep pace with that, and front-line officers will tell you that themselves.

Q44 **Chair:** After four years out of the Met, have you found the Met in a better shape or a worst state than when you left it?

Sir Mark Rowley: If you look at the reports of the inspectorate, they say that we are in a worse state, in that we are now in an engaged process. The process described in the press as special measures is an engaged process, because we are not offering a big enough service to London and we have issues with our integrity, with the officers who are letting us down. We are definitely in a poorer state as a consequence of a range of factors, as I have mentioned. It is our job to bounce back from that.

I do not start with a counsel of despair. We have so many people who care about policing London and do amazing things day in and day out. They are as frustrated as the public that they are not working in an institution that helps them succeed and do as good a job as they would



HOUSE OF COMMONS

like to do. What they do day in and day out is extraordinary. In my 93 days so far, 1,538 of them have been assaulted protecting Londoners. That is indicative of the commitment and dedication, yet as an institution we are not organised in a way that can meet the modern challenges, where we are not just dealing with the classic crime in a public space. We have massively increasing amounts of work to do on crime that takes place largely in private—rape, sexual assault, child abuse and so on—and the growing threats of crimes online.

It is covering those three areas, which are well laid out in the Home Office's beating crime plan. Covering those three areas has created a stretch so that, as police resources have gone down and back up again over the last decade and other pressures, the service has struggled to keep pace.

Q45 Chair: Nobody doubts the commitment of your officers and the very difficult job they do. Nobody doubts the challenges from the criminal fraternity, in everything from fraud and internet crime through to terrorism, but the accusations against the Met from myriad different reports label the Met as everything from institutionally corrupt, misogynist, racist to all the other things that we have heard too much of. How is that linked with the challenges that they face in dealing with crime, rather than the challenges of a structure that appears not to be fit for purpose and appears still to attract too many bad apples, which is probably an estimate of where it is institutionally vulnerable and failing? What is causing that?

Sir Mark Rowley: I think the bad apples phrase is a bad one, if you don't mind me saying so.

Chair: I agree, yes.

Sir Mark Rowley: Saying "bad apples" suggests the problem is just a few people over there somewhere. There are some systemic issues that have allowed bad apples to become pockets of corrupting behaviour. I use the word "corruption" because it corrupts our integrity and of course for policing integrity is our foundation.

What is very clear to me is that it is not pervasive, but it is widespread. By not pervasive I mean it is not the experience of every officer perhaps of colour or every female officer. It is not the experience of every one of them that they experience unacceptable behaviour, racism, misogyny and so on, but there are multiple pockets across the organisation that are doing that. It is widespread, but not pervasive.

I asked Baroness Louise Casey to bring forward her interim report and that came out a few weeks ago. It was very clear and compelling and concerning. It basically says, if I reduce it to a couple of points, that the systemic failings are that we have been too weak at identifying and confronting such behaviour and in that weakness there is some bias as well. Black and female officers come off worse in our misconduct systems



than white officers. We have been systemically weak at confronting it, which allows—your phrase—those bad apples, to become pockets and become bigger than they ought to be.

That gives me the challenge of having hundreds of officers who should not be in the organisation; meanwhile I have tens of thousands who are doing their absolute damndest to serve London. I need to sort out both of those and I need to take on that toxic minority, at the same time as sorting out all the issues that are necessary to enable the majority to do a better job for London, because they are frustrated at what is around them.

Q46 Chair: I am still trying to get at what has caused that. You can say that because of resource issues it makes it more difficult for your officers to tackle certain sorts of crime, which you may then link to why you have not had the prosecutions or why the detection rates are low. Resources do not influence whether you have officers under your command who are clearly misogynist, racist, corrupt or whatever it may be. How have they been able to enter and continue within the force? Is it purely a question of having more resources going into checks and balances, more people doing the vetting? Is it the vetting system of who you let in? Is it the ongoing scrutiny of some of those officers? Is it a failure of disciplinary action so that people are getting away with it, therefore it encourages more such behaviour? What do you have to do now that deals with the problem of that number of officers who are clearly below the standard and to make sure that their numbers are not swollen by more people coming in who, frankly, do not cut the mustard and should never be police officers in the first place?

Sir Mark Rowley: Completely. There are a couple of things wrapped up there. There are causes and response. I will break my immediate response into two parts—enforcement and prevention.

There is a lot I can do quickly on enforcement. We have built a new anti-corruption and abuse command to go more proactively after identifying the problematic individuals and teams and beefing up our investigative response to that. We will be suspending and sacking more officers and I am already seeing some evidence of that.

The prevention side is about the quality of leadership and vetting. A lot of it is culture, and you do not change that overnight. Baroness Casey in her report says do not reach immediately for an action plan and pretend there is an action plan you can tick off and fix this in six months, because that is not possible.

On the underpinning issues, I link it to two factors. Leadership and culture is a part of it that is within our gift and we should and must do better. One element I am keen to get the investment in is a leadership academy. The amount of leadership training we do in policing is very low. I was doing some comparisons with the military. A chief superintendent who is running a big chunk of London or a big specialist area with



thousands of officers may have done no leadership training in the previous decade. They might have done some operational courses to command firearms courses, but in leading and managing a big part of the service they have done none. If you look at military equivalents, they will have probably done more than a year of command courses.

Q47 **Chair:** Why has that been missed?

Sir Mark Rowley: Cutbacks in national programmes. The College of Policing and its predecessors over time have had to cut back the provision of those courses, and there have been cutbacks in local provision. There is one element where it is cultural, but if you do not give people training in leadership you can understand some of that.

The other resources issue—and Baroness Casey makes this comment in her interim report; it is point 3 of the themes in her concluding letter—is that some of the underpinnings are missing. Over the last decade we worked desperately hard when we faced budget cuts to try to protect the front line. You cut back as far as you can do in human resources and other administrative functions such as vetting and try to do them as leanly as possible. There is a danger that you overcut them and you do not see the product of that until later. Everyone supports the ambition of not cutting the front line. I was part of some of those decisions, and you try to balance that, but then in hindsight you discover some of them went too far and that weakens the approach. Some of the foundational underpinning, some of that boring stuff that is not about front-line policing, that sits underneath it, is absolutely critical.

Q48 **Chair:** Do you think that some of those underlying institutional, widespread, however you want to describe it, weaknesses that I have described are reflected in the senior ranks?

Sir Mark Rowley: I am setting up a leadership team to be able to succeed for the future. Of the top 14 officers in the Met, by the time we get into the first couple of months of next year, through various churn and movements we will have swapped out eight of them, including myself.

Q49 **Chair:** Five hundred officers are reportedly suspended or on restricted duties because they have been accused of serious misconduct. You have said that about 100 officers have very restrictive conditions on them because, “Frankly we don’t trust them to talk to members of the public”, which is quite worrying. What proportion of those are senior ranks or are they all at constable level?

Sir Mark Rowley: Very few. There are one or two senior ranks in there, but very few. One of the areas of help that I am looking for in police reform that the Home Secretary has expressed support for and London MPs, when I have briefed them, have expressed support for is regulations that give us more leverage to remove officers who are not fit to be police officers. We have police officers who have gained serious criminal convictions while police officers whom we cannot sack. We must put



HOUSE OF COMMONS

restrictions on them to limit the damage they can do as leaders or serving the public.

Q50 **Chair:** Why can you not sack them?

Sir Mark Rowley: The responsibility for who is a police officer in London—the final word on removing them does not sit with me. It sits with independent legal tribunals, which do not have the same interest in the quality of policing in London that I do. That is a very unusual situation. You are holding me to account vigorously for the quality of policing in London, including its integrity. That is perfectly reasonable, but it seems unfair that you do that, yet I do not have these levers and I end up with officers I cannot remove. The Home Secretary seems persuaded by the principle of the argument and is looking at whether any fast-time changes to regulations can be made.

Q51 **Chair:** You would support a change effectively to the final decision could be made by you?

Sir Mark Rowley: Yes, me and my senior team—exactly. Of course, we should be suable in court if we get it wrong through employment tribunals, all of those normal accountabilities, but if I was a chief executive of John Lewis I would be able to decide who my team were. As Commissioner of the Met I do not have the final say in it, which seems odd, particularly given the significance of public service and scrutiny.

Q52 **Chair:** Very roughly, if that law change were to happen tomorrow, how many officers would you sack?

Sir Mark Rowley: If I had an exact number that would imply I knew everybody who was bad. I have tens of thousands of great people and hundreds of people who should not be with me.

Q53 **Chair:** All right, so we are talking about single percentages?

Sir Mark Rowley: Yes, hundreds, not beyond that. On how I get to that number, we have over the last few years on average been sacking 40 to 50 officers a year, from what the data shows. If you look at Baroness Casey's report, it is very obvious that that was not vigorous enough, through a leadership perspective and through the legal issues. The only conclusion one can come to is if that was not vigorous enough, there must be hundreds.

Q54 **Chair:** Of those hundreds you are going to sack, given that disproportionately BME officers are subject to disciplinary action, would the sackings reflect that disproportionate number of BME officers?

Sir Mark Rowley: In the future, no, they would not. Frankly, the people who are getting off lightly are largely white men behaving badly to black and female colleagues. Getting more vigorous on them will more than redress that balance.

Q55 **Chair:** You agree that there is a problem about the disproportionate



numbers of BME officers who seem to be subject to disciplinary measures, even though you cannot take it at the sacking level?

Sir Mark Rowley: Yes.

Q56 **Carolyn Harris:** What kind of impact has that smaller number had on your staffing levels for officers who were able to do all the tasks they were expected to do, to duties they should not be allowed to perform?

Sir Mark Rowley: For a range of reasons—misconduct, sickness, other reasons—we have over 10% of the police officer workforce not fully deployable. Some of that you would not want to change. Some of them are officers who have picked up injuries and disabilities in the line of duty. You would never want to change your support for them and finding them meaningful roles that do not require full operational deployment, but a lot of them are people in the middle of misconduct processes or people with chequered sickness records who are hard to deal with through our own satisfaction performance processes. That greater than 10% number concerns me because it goes to the quality of policing for Londoners and to the pressures on the officers who are the tens of thousands, day in, day out, going out there, as I said earlier.

Q57 **Ms Abbott:** You began by talking about the challenges faced by the Metropolitan Police. Obviously one of those challenges is the Metropolitan Police's relationship with communities. You will not need me to remind you that in 1981 a Conservative Government commissioned the Scarman report, which spoke at some length about the poor relationships between the police and the community. In particular, it spoke about the disproportionate level of stop and search on black people. Can you tell me why 40 years later the relationship between the police and the black community is no better and there remains a wholly disproportionate level of stop and search on the black community?

Sir Mark Rowley: We clearly have not moved far enough or fast enough. Whether you go back to Scarman or Macpherson there are obviously various milestones in that journey. Policing has come a long way in that time. The behaviour of the majority of officers is far better and is fit for the standards of today.

I do not want a picture that says there has not been progress, but clearly there has not been enough. From recent events and the evidence laid out in different reports, including Baroness Casey's, it is very obvious that we have not come far enough. To still have pockets of officers who are racist and misogynous and behaving that way undermines the trust with black communities. Our behaviour is part of it. The policing context is very challenging. Those pockets of racism within the organisation are bound to undermine our relationships with communities.

Stop and search is a very complex question and we have discussed this before. Crime does not fall evenly in London, so neither will stop and search. Stop and search will not necessarily be proportionate. It depends where the challenges are, where the victims are and where the crime



HOUSE OF COMMONS

patterns are. Clearly, the way we are doing stop and search in London is not working from a black community's perspective, regardless of the fact that most months we are seizing more than 400 weapons, and since before Covid we have managed to bring down serious violence by 20% or 30% and knife crime by a similar amount.

We are making progress on that, but the way we are doing it is not working for black Londoners. The only way we are going to change that is by a reinvestment in community policing and finding the right solutions to the crime problems in different parts of London by working with the communities to do that, and that includes with the black communities.

Q58 Ms Abbott: What you are saying is that the disproportionate level of stop and search relates to the level of crime in the black community, but even allowing for that, your officers are stopping and searching the black community disproportionately.

Sir Mark Rowley: I am not sure that is the case. I have accepted and will continue to accept that we are not getting everything right and I have a minority of officers who are racist who should not be in the service. I am not trying to pretend that we don't have things that I need to fix. However, one of the things we are trying to tackle is protecting all Londoners, and sadly young black men in London are 12 times more likely to be murdered than young white men. That is data over the last decade, not a short-term blip. It has bounced around with different numbers and in some years it is 20 times. Our efforts to protect those young men and trying to stop that means we are going to put more stop and search in the areas where there is high crime. That is not an excuse for not working with communities and doing it in a way that builds trust. Clearly the way we are doing it now is not building trust, and that is a challenge. This is a complicated question about how you do policing. When it feels to communities like it is done to them rather than with them, you end up with these trust issues.

Ms Abbott: I do not think the young black men you are stopping and searching would accept that you are just doing it to protect them. You also said that your officers are operating in a very challenging situation. It was challenging in 1981. We had just had a riot in Brixton. Anyway, I will move on. In October the Committee wrote asking whether the Met would implement any new national commitments to recording ethnicity at vehicle stops. Will you?

Sir Mark Rowley: We are looking at how that gets done. We did a pilot a year ago, which was a very limited pilot that tested some of these issues. There are a handful of forces now doing a national piece of work to evaluate how best to do this, how to record the data, how to make it as non-bureaucratic as possible. As soon as the results of that come forward, as long as it is practical and workable, we will do it.

Q59 Ms Abbott: You do not need me to remind you that this question of recording ethnicity of vehicle stops was raised by Scarman 40 years ago.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is disappointing that it has taken the Met so long to progress on this issue. Has the gangs matrix outlived its usefulness?

Sir Mark Rowley: I do not think it has. The way we protect people is by targeting the most dangerous and that is one of the key factors. The public would expect us to be able to work out who are the most dangerous offenders and to focus police effort against them to protect the people they prey on. We do that with terrorism cases, looking at people we are most concerned about, we are increasingly trying to do it with predatory sex offenders, and it is the same with gangs. It is spotting the men of violence who drive the violent behaviour that leads to knife crime and crime in London.

The gangs matrix is our way of trying to do that, trying to have a system that does that. We have done some work recently where it has become clear to us that the administration of that has had some failings and we have taken 1,100 people off the matrix. We have tightened its use, restricted the number of people on it, but part of the fundamental principle of how we stop people being stabbed and shot in London is about targeting the people we identify as dangerous, and we will continue to do that.

Q60 **Ms Abbott:** You do not accept, as Amnesty International, for instance, has said, that it needs to be dismantled in its entirety?

Sir Mark Rowley: It is easy to make widespread glib comments like that, as reports sometimes do. My job is to protect people in London and the way I do it, in part, is by having officers equipped and briefed with the right intelligence to target the most dangerous, organised, prolific offenders. I will never apologise for that and will keep doing that.

Even if we had twice the resources we have today, by some magic wave of the financial wand, the amount of policing work to do in London would still be more than the resources that we have. Therefore, it requires targeting of effort, using data and intelligence to target against the most dangerous and prolific people, as much as targeting to provide the most protection to the most vulnerable individuals and locations. I will never apologise for that targeting. That is critical for success in policing today. Reports like the one from Amnesty International seem to have an implication that police should not target effort, which is a guarantee for failure.

Q61 **Ms Abbott:** What the report says is that stigmatising young black men on the basis of the music they listen to, their social media behaviour or who they are associated with is completely unacceptable. Do you not accept that?

Sir Mark Rowley: There are several statements in that question. I do not accept that is what the gangs matrix does. It tries to identify dangerous people so that we can focus our effort on them.

Q62 **Simon Fell:** Thank you for joining us. I want to go back to culture. The



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair has already touched on the number of officers you have who are on limited duty or suspended outright at the moment. If I can look at the processes you have put in place since you came in, could you talk a bit around the progress that your new anti-corruption and abuse command has made?

Sir Mark Rowley: We have done several things. We are putting in place new systems to try to improve the vetting and identifying of officer misconduct. We are improving our vetting systems. We are doing some improved data washing of officer and personnel details against national computer systems on offending behaviour in a way that was not possible manually to keep going through. We are doing some data-washing systems and some other systematic things like that. We have done some public and internal appeals, which you will have seen reported in the papers, using Crimestoppers. While of course that produces some nonsense and mischief, it also produces, so far, tens of extra lines of inquiry that are being worked through at the moment by that team. That has been productive.

That very clear tone and change in effort is generating more case work and we are looking again at whether there is anything within the existing legal powers that we can do to be more assertive in dealing with the people who are existing problems that we have not managed to deal with so far. We are trying to do everything possible in pulling levers, in getting more assertive and getting more information into the system to deal with it. A lot of this sits in our hands, but at the same time we are making the case to the Home Secretary that while we can make a lot of progress, we could make more progress more quickly if we had a regulatory regime that was less bureaucratic, less slow and less restrictive of our ability to deal with those who should not be police officers.

Q63 **Simon Fell:** I will come on to some of the detail around those levers in a moment. You have the new anti-corruption and abuse hotline. How many calls have you had into that?

Sir Mark Rowley: We do not run that. That is run by Crimestoppers. We have had tens of referrals from Crimestoppers. They do some initial triage. They are triaging out some of the nonsense, but we have had tens of reports from them that merit follow-up and we are digging into those. Some of them have people who are prepared to have follow-up contact, some of them are anonymous, and of course the more anonymous it is the more you want to triangulate it with other information.

Q64 **Chair:** Did it start only two weeks ago?

Sir Mark Rowley: Two or three weeks ago, yes.

Q65 **Simon Fell:** Can you talk us through what the process looks like? Once they have done the initial vetting to ensure that the quality calls come through to you, or the quality information comes through to you, what does an investigation look like at the other side?



Sir Mark Rowley: It depends. Some of these might be cases of allegations that officers are using their position to coerce people sexually. It might be about criminal release of information. It might be dishonesty. It could be a range of things. The initial piece of investigation is about looking at all our other records and seeing if we can try to triangulate this—does this report have anything that might suggest it is true?—and start to build as big a picture as possible with that initial research.

There are two ways you can do an investigation. You can be reactive or proactive. You can take a view that this is a starting point, it does not give us a case at the moment, but the intelligence is sufficiently worrying that we might want to do some surveillance or monitoring of officers, or it gives us a starting point and some concrete evidence, so we might go into a reactive phase where we are interviewing the officer and going into it that way. Whether you do it covertly and proactively or overtly and reactively depends on where you get to. All the way through you are looking for things that confirm or negate the material. We have been quite candid that some of it will be mischievous, but I am sure a lot of it will not.

Q66 **Simon Fell:** On pulling the levers that you mentioned before, one of the findings from Baroness Casey was that the Met had failed to look at cases where perhaps there had been multiple complaints historically against an officer but no action had been taken. Are you now retrospectively going through the data you hold?

Sir Mark Rowley: Yes, anything we can go back to we will. Unfortunately it was not generally that no action was taken. It was that weak action was taken and there is a challenge that once a case has been dealt with, even if we dealt with it far too leniently, we do not have the powers to reopen it generally for misconduct. Interestingly there is a legal provision that the IOPC can reopen cases it has investigated, with certain criteria. Cases that we investigated cannot be reopened, and that is one of the things that we have asked the Home Secretary if she could improve on for us so that we can do that.

The particular thing that Baroness Casey talks to in her report is about how officers' allegations have sometimes been dealt with individually, rather than saying, "Well, there is a pattern of behaviour here". In those first cases, it may have been reasonable to deal with that as a one-off and with words of advice, but with repeated behaviour, if people are not learning from the words of advice, they clearly should not be in the organisation, yet every case has been dealt with individually, rather than collectively. Some of those patterns are very concerning, so that is what we would like more powers to do. We will not make that mistake again, but it would be good to be able to go back and clear up some of those historical errors.

Q67 **Simon Fell:** Is that another request you put into the Home Secretary?

Sir Mark Rowley: Yes.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q68 **Simon Fell:** Obviously you are stirring up a lot of historical cases and rightly putting scrutiny on your officers. What is this doing to the morale of the force?

Sir Mark Rowley: In conversations like this, that is why I keep saying let us remember the tens of thousands who, day in, day out, are protecting the people of London. It is a difficult point because they are as upset as the public that a minority of their colleagues are letting them down and they feel that deeply. There is no widespread desire to cover this up or hide this. They want these individuals dealt with, because they feel, "I am working hard. I am working with integrity. I want these people sorted out." They are frustrated that the institution has not been strong enough or sharp enough to deal with it, and they want it dealt with. They wish the public narrative in these conversations was more about the good things and the good majority and what they are doing day in and day out than it is about this, but they understand the need to tackle it.

Q69 **Simon Fell:** You have challenging recruitment targets at the moment, and so a similar question: how does this impact your ability to recruit?

Sir Mark Rowley: I cannot draw a causal line between the two. It must be possible that these reputational issues affect recruitment and I am not naive to that. The research we have done is quite tentative on whether that is the case or not. We are working towards our end of financial year 1 April target for the national recruiting approach. I have said publicly before that we are probably going to be a few hundred short of that, that we will make up in the subsequent months.

Of course, we are keen to maintain quality. Rushing to an arbitrary deadline is less important than sustaining quality and I am sure you would all agree with that. It is a challenge in a competitive employment market, such as London is at the moment, to sustain so much recruitment at such a pace.

Q70 **Simon Fell:** On that quality point, one of the points made by the chief inspector was about officers being recruited who had links to criminal activity in the past, and they did not have the appropriate supervision wrapped around them when they were brought into the force. Are you confident that that is not going to happen again and that the appropriate checks and balances are now in place?

Sir Mark Rowley: I am still looking at vetting. Improvements have been made. We should not be allowing people in who have worrying connections with organised crime, but of course there are fine balances here. You do not want to damn somebody for their family, for example. If an officer wants to join and they have a cousin who is unsavoury, you must look at the strength of their relationship and their behaviour, otherwise you are damning everyone in the family. There are nuances like that, where it is perfectly proper to bring in some of those officers, but you put some conditions around it and say, "You understand that is how you behave in the future and your contact with that part of the



family” . You might put some conditions around it. This is not a simple black-and-white issue.

Likewise, if someone has a minor criminal indiscretion at the age of 13 and they are now 25 and have a good working history, none of us would want to damn their employment prospects for ever. There are nuances here in the work to be done. The HMIC national work says that the police service has not always had that right. That is one of the reasons for the data washing, getting more into the understanding our workforce, those we have and those we are recruiting.

Q71 Simon Fell: We have seen very publicly some of the unacceptable behaviour in the force and messages being shared back and forth and all that horrific and quite toxic stuff. A lot of that is hidden. Obviously they are WhatsApp groups between friends. How are you trying to change the culture internally so that it does not come to a phone being found and messages being released that lead to the shock of change, but that from recruitment up you are starting to see a cultural shift in the force?

Sir Mark Rowley: I have put out some very clear statements on standards. One of the things that struck me, reflecting on this, happened when I did some workshops with front-line officers on their view, and they said, “Boss, you should be clear on what the standards are”. They were saying that to me, and Baroness Casey’s report was saying the same, so we put out some clearer guidance.

There are some general national police standards, but they are quite broad brush and they are not in my mind crunchy enough on where the line is and what the issues are. I was explicit about three things. First, if you make an honest mistake, as long as you admit it straightaway we will always look to give you the benefit of the doubt, because that is what you want in any organisation. Secondly, we are not trying to create a puritanical environment. Of course robust language is in the nature of policing. We are not going to pretend otherwise, but that does not license in the name of banter anything that is racist or misogynist. Thirdly, “For the avoidance of doubt, here are three or four examples of things that are definitely across the line”. It was going through systematically.

The reason for doing that is some of the cases I have seen, which indicate a lack of confidence in leaders in the organisation about saying, “That is across the line. That is out of order” and being too forgiving, which is Louise Casey’s point as well, of things that are clearly racist or misogynist and seeing them as a misunderstanding or as banter. That is not acceptable.

Q72 Simon Fell: A lot of this is between closed groups who would not share with colleagues outside of those closed groups what they are saying or thinking or images or evidence or whatever it might be that they are sharing. I am interested to know how you would measure success when a lot of this is within the culture and is hidden by its very nature.



Sir Mark Rowley: You measure success by the fact that these cases become less common over time. It is a combination of some people changing their behaviour and some of it gets weeded out. It is a mix of the two.

There are two previous Commissioners who have made rooting out a corrupt minority a big part of their commissionership. There was Sir Robert Mark in the 1970s and there were Paul Condon and John Stevens at the turn of the century with corrupt CID squads. In both cases that changed the landscape, partly through enforcement, getting rid of the worst, and partly through that very clear declaration of people raising their game and behaving differently. I would expect the same to happen this time.

Q73 **Carolyn Harris:** Sir Mark, if we can turn to something different, which depending on which side of the argument you are on is either extremely inspiring or extremely irritating. I suspect for you it is the latter. It is protest policing. What more do you need to be able to deal effectively with the most sophisticated style of protest policing in London at the moment?

Sir Mark Rowley: An Act has come in recently and a Bill is going through at the moment that cover a lot of these issues. There are powers around people taking devices to lock on with them, so some of the more complex situations that have been created to give us more powers of stop and search and prevention on those. Those are being dealt with.

My biggest concern, if I can push back here, is that I think Parliament has created a problem for policing with the rules set for protest. The first point of law is that law should be clear. The balance between what is lawful and reasonable and what is not is very unclear. The reason is the 1986 Public Order Act creates some thresholds for police intervention around the phrase "serious disruption to the life of the community". That has never been defined. That is quite a broad phrase that people interpret differently. That is then further complicated by the Human Rights Act, which creates principles about freedom of speech and so on. Every time the police intervene, they must work out serious disruption to the life of the community and "Is this proportionate and necessary? How does this fit with freedom of speech?"

Basically, Parliament has left a very grey space about what is lawful and what is unreasonable disruption, and expects police to work out a line through the middle of it. The only way that line gets tested is through the courts and sometimes through criminal trials. Sometimes, we get judicially reviewed or sued, and we win some of those and we lose some of those. That grey space has been defined through that very painful police decision-making and litigation process.

I think that Parliament should create provisions to enable clarity on that point. Whether that is through primary legislation or creating provision for a code of practice to define that I will leave to lawyers, but I think it is



your job to say where the legal balance is, not to pass it to me to try to work through the fog, which is what happens. I have seen examples previously when I was in the Met, and I have seen it in the last three months, where things get blown around politically, depending on who is protesting and what the issue is, depending on who is saying the police were too soft and who is saying the police were too hard on the same incident. That is the difficult context we are working in. The most helpful thing would be if collectively you were to draw a clearer line.

Q74 Carolyn Harris: We have created an environment where you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. Looking at October and November this year, there were 755 arrests, there were 182 charges brought, but there were nearly 12,000 police officers deployed in that. That is extremely disproportionate to the success rate of prosecutions. Are your officers having the training to be able to enforce the legalities, where the sophistication of the protesters is outstripping your ability to enforce?

Sir Mark Rowley: They are very well trained. If this Committee wanted a private session with some of our public order commanders to go through their considerations and how they try to steer through this, I would be very happy to set that up. They are very expert. They have immense legal knowledge because they are trying to understand all the case law and work out where they draw the line.

Public order policing is resource intensive, and it is deeply concerning to me that that is 12,000 officer shifts that were not policing London's communities because they were dealing with protesters in the centre of London or on the M25 or wherever. That is not considering some of the follow-up investigative work, which would add thousands more shifts into this as well. Public order policing is resource intensive, because it is about dealing with crowds of people and some of it is about moving people and about gentle use of physical force. It is not all about criminal justice, so I would not expect more than that.

Some of the recent legal changes that have been made have been helpful. Putting public nuisance on the statute book was helpful, because it used to be a common law offence. It is now a statutory offence, and the more serious offenders CPS have thought appropriate to charge with that more serious offence rather than obstruction of the highway. Twenty-six of them have been remanded in custody, which I think has dampened the ardour of some of the protesters, which has been helpful—those blocking the major routes. That has been useful.

One of the reasons why it would be helpful if you wanted an operational briefing is the practical operational difficulties. If I say a bicycle D-lock, do you know what I mean? If someone D-locks themselves by their neck to the top of a gantry above a motorway, it is not a five-minute job to remove them without decapitation which is clearly beyond proportionate. If you have to angle grind a D-lock off somebody's head safely while working at height, that is a very complicated thing to do. Even though in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

most of these cases the police are there in a few minutes, some of them take time to clear. That has been a challenge for us and, because of the significance of the motorway network, some of these offenders have been charged with public nuisance rather than merely highway obstruction and then it is treated more seriously. These cases are very obviously serious disruption. I am not pretending there is not clarity there.

Q75 **Chair:** Why do you have to remove them? Why can you not just leave them there and let the traffic continue?

Sir Mark Rowley: I am completely up for that. National Highways feels that there is a safety risk. That is its call and I am not criticising. I can understand its call, because it is concerned probably more about drivers being distracted than about the individuals. It has all the expertise on driver distraction on motorways and if it is its call that it is dangerous so be it. I would love to ignore all these characters, but it is not always possible.

Q76 **Chair:** That is very interesting. So far, you have blamed Parliament and National Highways.

Sir Mark Rowley: No, I did not blame them. I said that is their decision. It is not my decision, but I also said I am not criticising them for it, because I can understand that the distraction factor is a big concern for them.

Q77 **Chair:** To follow up on the protesters, it has been a very topical issue and has certainly filled the mailboxes of MPs, with the public rightfully outraged, and many of them have said that if they have D-locked themselves to a gantry they are quite safe. Why do we have to stop all the traffic for however many hours it takes to then bring them down? You have said you would be up for just leaving them there, but National Highways has all sorts of warning signs when there are other potentially distracting hazards on the motorway. They can get everybody to slow down or whatever without having to stop the motorway. Are we not just pandering to them by giving them the attention and they are having a causal effect, which is to cause major disruption on major roads to thousands of cars with people trying to go about their daily business?

Sir Mark Rowley: I am not going to criticise another agency's decision. I am just explaining the decision-making process, but I understand that point of view.

Q78 **Chair:** On why it is all Parliament's fault and the greyness of the law, as you have put it, section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 says it is an offence "if a person, without lawful authority or excuse, in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage along a highway". What is grey about that?

Sir Mark Rowley: What is grey about that is the Human Rights Act means that you cannot always apply it, because there is case law that says more than minor disruption to the roads may still be lawful protest.



This is why I say Parliament has created a confusing space, because legally we cannot interpret that highways obstruction offence on its own. We must balance it against the will of Parliament in that legislation, against the will of Parliament from the legislation in the Human Rights Act, and the case law says some highways obstruction is perfectly reasonable in the context of protest being that lawful excuse. It is another example of a grey area.

Q79 Chair: It does not mean that they must carry out that protest on the road blocking the traffic. They could be instantly removed to the embankment or the pavement adjoining the road to carry on their right to protest. Would you not interpret it like that? Why must they protest by causing maximum disruption across a highway?

Sir Mark Rowley: I do not have to interpret that. That is the way the courts have created a binding precedent that it must be interpreted and there is a case called Ziegler on this point. I agree with the principle of what you are saying, but once we start to use force to push people from the road to the pavement they may resist, and then you end up in an arrest situation. Is that lawful? If the courts are saying it is lawful and reasonable in some circumstances to do a protest that creates disruption on the roads, which they have said, then us intervening is illegal. That is part of the greyness that Parliament has created.

Q80 Chair: Do you look on enviously at your equivalent in the Paris police force where the equivalent Just Stop Oil—or whatever that is in French—protesters block a road in Paris and the minute the police or gendarmerie arrive they are removed, whether they are glued to the pavement or not? France is subject to very similar human rights legislation to us, so why can they do it but we cannot?

Sir Mark Rowley: You need an expert in international jurisprudence to cover that point. You will see examples of us moving that quickly. When people have glued themselves to roads, we move very quickly to remove them, because that goes beyond reasonable, but there are other situations where people have been walking down roads and they are minor roads where we have not felt it appropriate to intervene because the law would not support us. That is the balance.

Q81 Chair: That is not the impression that has been given to the public about a rapid response to this. Certainly, although they appear to have suspended their activities at the moment, presumably because it is too cold and they want to be in their nice, warm, fossil-fuelled homes, the College of Policing has this five-step appeal model. The police officers are required to follow each of these five steps before taking action, which starts with a simple appeal, ask the person to comply, then goes on to a reasoned appeal, then apparently goes on to a personal appeal, then presumably goes on to offering them water and asking them if they are going anywhere nice for their holidays, before eventually—

Sir Mark Rowley: That is glib and not accurate.



Chair: Well, we have certainly seen them giving out water and officers asking them if they are all right. It would be much safer if they were not sitting on the road with lots of angry commuters trying to get to their jobs. That is such a long, drawn-out process that the College of Policing has come up with. Do you think that is appropriate still?

Sir Mark Rowley: We get through that process in a couple of minutes in cases where it requires it. Whether that process takes half an hour or seconds or minutes depends on the situation. If someone is blocking a major road, which is clearly causing massively excessive disruption, that process will not hold us up. The only thing that might hold us up is the physicality of it. If someone is literally not removable because they are glued or locked to something that takes time, but that process will not hold us up if there is an urgent need to remove them.

Q82 **Chair:** Several of them have been prosecuted. Some of us would say perhaps that should be more and perhaps the penalty should be more severe. That is a matter for the courts. The courts have set the precedent that by causing obstruction on whatever basis they are being prosecuted, they are prosecutable. It is not as though they are coming up with completely different forms of gluing themselves to the road or locking arms across the road. It is now fairly easy for the police to recognise that an offence has been committed and it is highly likely to be upheld in the courts based on the 182 who have been prosecuted, notwithstanding human rights protest considerations. Are you getting much quicker at removing them now than you were when they first started on the basis of that or not? It does not look like it.

Sir Mark Rowley: We are much quicker. In the first week or so there were a few occasions where I think we were not as quick as we should have been, and I have said that publicly and I will say it again. In the majority of this we have been as rapid as we have been able to be. The only two things that have stopped us removing people rapidly have been the physicality of the situation. Glues and locks and things sometimes slow you down in some circumstances. The second thing that has meant we have not removed people immediately on a few occasions has been when the disruption has not been that serious, it has been on minor roads, and our judgment is that the current legal framework does not empower us to do so. Except where it has been physically or legally impossible, we have been very speedy on most of these occasions and very successful.

Q83 **Chair:** Do you feel restrained in picking up somebody who has glued his or her hands to the tarmac? In France they just seem to pick them up and whether the tarmac is still attached to their hand is the lookout of the protester rather than the police officer.

Sir Mark Rowley: Our advice is that we need to use solvent removers for the glue, on the basis that that reduces the harm done to them. I understand—



Q84 **Chair:** Whose advice is that?

Sir Mark Rowley: Just legally in what is reasonable force and what we are allowed to do. That is our advice, but I will always go and reflect on it. The law is about using minimal force and if there is a way within a few minutes to remove somebody without causing significant harm to their hands then we are expected to do that. You are obviously massively frustrated by it. I am not advocating this as a perfect solution; I am just advocating the legal and practical context that we work in.

Q85 **Chair:** I, like many MPs, have been massively frustrated because it takes up a lot of e-mail boxes and we get a lot of flak for it. You are massively frustrated because it is diverting a lot of your officers from catching criminals and keeping the public safe.

Sir Mark Rowley: Completely.

Chair: They appear not to have a similar problem in other European countries subject to the same human rights laws. They are rather more proactive in saying, "Right, we are not having that". You have said there is greyness in the law, there is policy from National Highways or whatever. It seems that we are just going round in circles on this. We are all frustrated. Everyone is losing out, trying to get on with their lives. It is costing you a lot of money and diverted police officers, yet still we have this problem or we will have when the cold snap ends, presumably.

Sir Mark Rowley: There are always sharper ways to police and we constantly look at ways of doing that. As I say, in the first week or so we could have been quicker. There is also clarity in legislation, I know from the conversations that we have had with the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary that they are keen to look at whether there are sharper distinctions in what is legal and what is not and, on my point about serious disruption, that would help us. I know that they are working on that at the moment to see if they can make some progress on it for us.

Q86 **Ms Abbott:** On the workforce, do you know what proportion of black and ethnic minority officers there are in the Met at every level, not just rank and file police officers but in management going all the way up to you? If you do not know, could you write to tell the Committee?

Sir Mark Rowley: We do, but with many ranks I cannot do them off the top of my head. I am happy to write to you. Since I have started as Commissioner I have seen that we have had a couple of promotion rounds at different levels in the organisation. One of the things to look at, of course, is whether black officers and female officers are doing at least proportionately well in those promotion processes, whether 20% of the eligible people are black officers, 20% of the successful people are black officers and so on. In the two processes that I have seen since I started they have been at least proportionate, if not slightly better, which is good to see. I will write back with the detail.

Q87 **Ms Abbott:** To get back to Just Stop Oil, I should say that I do not get



HOUSE OF COMMONS

many e-mails about it. The Chair asked why you have to cause a disproportionate amount of distraction to protest. I would say that that is how you protest.

Sir Mark Rowley: You are helpfully illustrating the problem I wrestle with every day.

Chair: When did you last glue yourself to a rail?

Ms Abbott: What I am saying is that you were hearing one side of public opinion on this—

Chair: The majority, I think.

Q88 **Ms Abbott:** I don't know. Not in zones 1 and 2 in London. I want to say that there is another side to the story, before you go away and think that it is just about Mr Loughton's constituents.

I want to go back to rebuilding community trust in the police. What makes you think that you can do what no Commissioner has been successful in doing in 40 years, which is improving the relationship between the police and the community and also doing something about the disproportionate level of stop and search of the black community? You seem to have said that there is a disproportionate level of stop and search because black people are more criminal.

Sir Mark Rowley: I did not say that at all. I did not say that at all.

Q89 **Ms Abbott:** I think that you will find that that is not a very persuasive argument.

Sir Mark Rowley: This is why we need to be able to have a sensible conversation. That last comment is not what I said. It is not what I said and is a little mischievous, if you don't mind me saying so.

I am saying that we have to look at issues in the round. It is not fair that different crime types fall differently in London. If we are to tackle issues like the disproportionate murder of young black men, that requires working in black communities in a different way. I am not trying to say that we have everything right. I am not trying to suggest that every bit of our stop and search is right, because it clearly is not. I am saying that it is a valuable tactic. Unless we as the police can build community policing where we can work with communities to wrestle with how we deliver stop and search in a way that is effective and reduces crime and also builds community trust— and what other things can we do together, police and communities and other agencies, to reduce the risk of crime in a particular area?—if we cannot have that conversation, then we cannot succeed. I know that it is difficult and sensitive stuff and there is lots that the police need to do better. I am not pretending otherwise, but that is the thing that I am trying to illustrate here.

Q90 **Ms Abbott:** My first question was what makes you think that you can improve these matters when the issues with rebuilding community trust



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have been the same over 40 years since the Scarman report?

Sir Mark Rowley: It is clearly not good enough at the moment, but I do not accept that it has been the same for 40 years. There have been big improvements in policing in many respects over that period. Trust at certain times has gone up. It has not stayed level, it has not fallen back over that period evenly. The trust and confidence data in London over the last four years has fallen sharply for all communities. Some black communities are towards the lower end of the range, depending on which demographics you look at, which is obviously of great concern. Therefore, it is not an even picture over that period of time and it is not accurate to say that it has not improved.

It clearly has not improved enough. In a world of more scrutiny and greater expectations, our progress has not been fast enough and that has to be the only conclusion that you come to, looking at the data. That is the reality of it. I am not going to personalise this to me. I am responsible as Commissioner, but the inference in your question is: are you the most amazing individual who is going to sort it on your own? Of course it is never going to be on your own.

Q91 **Ms Abbott:** I am not asking whether you are amazing. I am asking you how can you change what has not been changed in 40 years.

Sir Mark Rowley: We as a team can change it, because the thing that I am most committed to is community policing. That has to be at the centre of this. The unique British invention is policing by consent, policing that is rooted in communities. That is our heritage from 193 years ago and that is what we stand on. That stand is a little dented today, but we believe in that much more than forces in many jurisdictions across the world.

Part of the reforms that I am going to put in place is about strengthening community policing and building on those historic relations. Of course, community policing has been damaged in recent years, resources have been cut back, PCSOs have been reduced. There is a whole load of other issues in there, but the starting point is committing to that in how we work together with communities, rather than imposing tactics. I am looking at new ways of delivering stop and search that build on global best practice and build trust, rather than damage trust.

I have been out in different communities across London meeting different community groups and community leaders, getting a very personal and raw take on their experience and what they see and what they don't see. I am desperately committed to this and I have a workforce that is committed to it. I am always an optimist. I think that we have so many good people who really care about this that we will succeed.

Q92 **Ms Abbott:** You will be aware that the most recent data tells us that mixed ethnicity Londoners, black Londoners, LGBT+ Londoners and Londoners under the age of 25 all have less confidence and trust in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Metropolitan Police than other groups. Are you doing any particular work to change that?

Sir Mark Rowley: I have been particularly talking to those groups. As we rebuild neighbourhood policing, we will look at how we deploy it in a way that targets more resources at the communities where we have the lowest trust. It goes back to our earlier conversation. Often the lowest trust matches the highest crime as well. That is one of the big challenges. Those whom we need to do better at protecting have the lowest trust in us. Unless we can fix this by working with communities, we will not succeed.

Q93 **Ms Abbott:** Finally, Neil Basu has criticised the Race Action Plan's failure to "Galvanise all chief constables to accept that we remain institutionally racist". You are on record as stating that the Met has systemic issues with racism but you have resisted characterising the Met as institutionally racist. Why?

Sir Mark Rowley: I will use language that is clear and simple. I have talked about having systemic issues that have affected racism and misogyny in the organisation. I have been clear that this is not about bad apples alone, this is about how the organisation operates. I am clear and simple in my language. I understand why people use the word "institutional" but it is not a word that I am drawn to using, not least because it has so many definitions and interpretations.

Q94 **Chair:** Sir Mark, can I turn to some rather less subjective issues? The National Audit Office has estimated that nationally, with the new recruits coming through and with workforce turnover, by 2024, 38% of police officers will have fewer than five years' experience, up from 12 % 10 years previous to that. New recruits in the Met currently account for about 25% of your headcount. Is that a good thing or is it a worrying thing, in potentially losing grey hairs and experience but bringing in newer people who may have a different culture but who may accord more with what you are trying to achieve? What are the upsides and downsides?

Sir Mark Rowley: The upside is that the officers are joining with the passion and enthusiasm of new recruits. They care about policing and about policing London. That creates enormous opportunity. The challenge for the organisation is coping with that much training and development and coaching in one go, because normally one would be losing experience and building recruits in continually. We have had a decade or so where we took the experience out and we have rapidly brought the new recruits in, and because it has been done in that way rather than the normal replacement route, it creates a greater stretch on the organisation.

I see some real impact of that in the policing of London because of officers going away for training top-ups and moving between different parts of the Met to get the right experience. If it was a smaller number of people, it would be manageable. When it is a large number of people it



creates challenges for their colleagues and it creates an inconsistency in policing sometimes for Londoners.

Q95 **Chair:** Notwithstanding the pressure on resources, quite a lot of your budget will be going on more training, because you have more raw recruits coming through, and then more training at the senior levels, as you mentioned earlier, because we failed to keep up with the Army approach to more sophisticated training. It is going to take up quite a bit of your budget.

Sir Mark Rowley: I need more budget for that. I have been looking back at budgets, because it is quite confusing with budgets dropping and then coming back again. If I go back to 2010-11 and look at our budget in real terms per head of population in London—because London has also grown significantly in that period, as you will be aware—to get back to the same budget per head of population in real terms as we had in 2010-11, we would need a 27% uplift in our budget, £878 million.

Therefore, even though we have a bigger front line in numbers, some of that is paid for because they are paid less in real terms, but some of that has been afforded because everything that sits behind them—HR, leadership, training, vetting, all of those system issues that we touched on earlier—have been cut really fine. That is a challenge. Those foundations are weaker than they need to be to underpin an organisation, particularly one with that level of experience. That is part of what we have to build back in.

Q96 **Chair:** If we touch on structures and whether you think that there is any structural reform in the way that the police in the metropolis are organised, I know that there has been some criticism from London Councils about the interaction with the borough command unit commanders, the BCU, which is now the way you operate. Local councils want to have greater engagement. Do you think that there is a sufficient level of engagement between the Met, the BCUs and individual London authorities at the moment? Is there a better way of doing it? Do you see any weakness in the area, as some of the councillors have expressed?

Sir Mark Rowley: I understand their point. We need to do better in engagement locally. The way that we have resourced the local structures has not made that as easy as it could be. The local chief superintendents and some of their teams are keen to do it but I do not think we are resourced in the right way to do it.

One of my commitments is to try to build the strongest neighbourhood policing that we have ever had in London. Part of that is about how you do the partnership work. Successful community policing is done in partnership with local authorities that have many of the levers that go to crime prevention that sit alongside the police's enforcement and problem-solving skills. Therefore, I am looking at some changes in the local arrangements that will enable that with the number of senior officers and how they are deployed that will make that more possible.



Q97 **Chair:** Nothing major structurally?

Sir Mark Rowley: No. A big structural reorganisation would be more distraction than benefit.

Q98 **Chair:** Can we come back to your old bailiwick of terrorism? In the four years that you have been away, do you think that the terrorism challenges in London and nationally have changed, have got worse or what?

Sir Mark Rowley: The threat level is not critical at the moment, it is a notch below that, but there are still real challenges. If I look at the briefings that I get from Matt Jukes, who is my successor's successor in that national role, we are still facing significant terrorist threat, the majority from Islamist groups and a smattering from other groups, particularly extreme right-wing terrorism, which is now about one in eight of the caseload between policing and the security service.

It is more about individuals inspired by propaganda and rhetoric at the moment than it is organised groups, but there are signs that some international groups are starting to find a foothold to become more organised overseas in source countries. That will present further opportunities for international terrorism to start to try to project itself internationally.

The recent speech by Ken McCallum, the director general of the Security Service, was instructive and most of our casework is together with it. You will have seen in his speech how a lot of the national threat issues now are around hostile states as well as the terrorism issues. That workload change that he talked about is reflected in some of our national counter-terrorism work.

Q99 **Chair:** One of the things that makes the Met different from other constabularies is the responsibility for terrorism. Given the considerable criticism in the various reports that we have discussed about the state of the Met, do you think that it is sustainable that the Met should retain the additional lead and you overseeing it for terrorism as well as for policing the metropolis?

Sir Mark Rowley: It is not only sustainable, it is essential, in my view. First, a slight correction. The Met has the national lead in co-ordination, but the regional units are hosted by local forces—West Midlands, Manchester and so on. It is a dispersed model with the Met at the centre of it. The reason why it is absolutely essential is that dealing with terrorism is so connected to local policing. For example, because we have quite an asymmetric country towards London in lots of good and bad ways, 60% of terrorist suspects, the subjects of interest, live in London and the majority of attacks take place in London. The workload is so London-centric and you want the work to be connecting counter-terrorism investigations to community policing in the prevention and enforcement space and also when, tragically, an attack happens, you want a joined-up



HOUSE OF COMMONS

response. You do not want to separate these out into different agencies. For all those reasons, it absolutely makes sense to keep it where it is.

The last point to make is that our counter-terrorism approach, and what policing and MI5 do, is internationally regarded as one of the best operating models in the world. In all the challenges the Met faces, the senior end of policing is routinely graded as excellent in all inspections, terrorism, organised crime work, the protest work. It is in the routine in London that we are not doing as well as we need to do. However, the more extreme and serious areas are done fantastically well. Messing with something high risk that works seems to be a risky strategy, particularly when the threat is so rooted in London.

Chair: Let me touch on one final subject, unless other members would like to come back with anything else.

Q100 **Simon Fell:** Can I pick up on one point? To follow up on that point, an awful lot of the radicalisation that you talked about is now happening online, whether it is incel activity driving people to radicalisation or other forms. Do you think that we are doing enough in Parliament to give you the powers you need to identify these people early and to better protect the public?

Sir Mark Rowley: This is tricky territory because you start to tread on the lines of where is free speech and where is criminal behaviour and where should the state intervene. You are collectively wrestling with the Online Safety Bill, to which the Government have made some suggested amendments. It is difficult territory.

I think that there are some challenges. In my period outside policing I did a report with Dame Sara Khan, who at the time was Counter-Extremism Commissioner, and she asked me to work with her looking at legal provisions around extremism and hateful extremism. My personal views were expressed in that report and I still have some of those views.

There is scope in some of our laws around hate crime and extremism to clarify the lines, in some cases pulling them back and in some cases pushing them forward. Rather than take my analysis, the Law Commission did a serious piece of work in this territory and it was equally concerned that the hate crime legislation needs a bit of a refresh.

Q101 **Chair:** The final issue I was going to raise was Operation Midland. We have taken evidence about the whole way it was handled by the Met, the IOPC reports and everything, and we made some recommendations on that. Do you have any particular reflections on how it was handled by the Met and are there any legacy issues from that for you as to how future investigations into similar circumstances should be conducted by the Met?

Sir Mark Rowley: Frankly, with all the other things that I am wrestling with, it is not something that I have dived into and spent a lot of time refreshing my memory on. One of the key issues in that was search warrants and the approach to that. There has been a lot of training and



improvement around that. You may well have taken evidence on that in the past.

The fine balance that is very difficult and important is the point about belief of victims and trying to have the right approach in that. You will have seen that the national policies have just been changed in nuance on that. There is a point for me about wanting to be open and encouraging to victims to come forward and to take reports and to initially accept that you are making an allegation of crime and of course we take that allegation as a starting point. However, as you get into an investigation, you have to be clear that you are going to be completely open-minded and even-handed and follow the evidence. The investigation can't be mistaken for starting with assuming that one set of facts must be correct. You have to be open-minded about that. That national guidance has changed, which is very helpful. That is the critical learning for me.

We know how we got there. It was police and politicians and others and our inspectorates and regulators. We all knew that 20-odd years ago we had not done a good enough job about violence against women and girls and that there was too much discouragement to come forward. Creating a system that was as receptive and encouraging as possible was of course the right thing to do. What we have realised over the last few years with a couple of high-profile cases was that some of the nuances in that were slightly wrong and we have corrected it.

We do not want to over-correct and lose that massive uptick in confidence. For example, in the last decade we have more than tripled the number of rape reports in London. That is largely fantastic news, because that is about people having the confidence to come forward on a crime that is massively underreported. We have gained a lot of ground through that more receptive approach, but this was just about correcting a nuance.

Q102 Chair: We have not covered the whole issue of rape and sexual offences, on which we have done a lot of work on this Committee. It remains a big worry. The most recent London rape review found that two thirds of cases end in the victims withdrawing their case. Whether or not we get the conviction rates once they get to court, of which precious few do, in the time that they are being handled by the police and potentially handed on to CPS, the rape victims say, "I can't go through with this any more". Therefore, we are losing so many of those potential convictions simply because the victims are being deterred by the way in which their case is being investigated and taken up. That is still the biggest challenge, isn't it?

Sir Mark Rowley: That is one of two. I am very concerned in London about the backlog in the criminal justice system. We have a case backlog of 16,000 in London. It is disproportionately big. London is always going to be the biggest, but it is disproportionately bigger than across the country. The effect of that is that if you are a victim, the number of years before your case comes to trial is enormous.



The other challenge in this area is being more proactive. Most of this is about men who prey on women and children. Of course there is some that is not about men, but it is a very small percentage. It is largely men who prey on women and children. I say children rather than girls, because boys can be victims. We need to adopt the counter-terrorism approach to identifying who the most dangerous men are. We are working on that at the moment and I am going to change the approach in London. There are many tens of thousands of men who are potential predators. If you look at people with convictions for rape and sexual assault and harassment, the numbers get into tens of thousands and start to stack up very quickly. How do we take that big list, in the way that we do with terrorism or gangs, and ask who are the most dangerous ones where we need to be much more proactive in going after them to protect women and children in London, and perhaps who are the ones where partner agencies can do work in diversion and prevention?

I would balance your point of challenge. Yes, we need to do better as a criminal justice system for making it as supportive and as speedy a system as possible for victims, but to prevent there being more victims we need to get better collectively at identifying and going after the most dangerous offenders.

Q103 **Chair:** One final question. Having heard all of the issues that have been raised and all the criticisms in the reports that there have been, what out of all of that keeps you up at night most?

Sir Mark Rowley: I sleep very well, thank you. The biggest challenge—there are many of them. To pick on one that we have not touched on, policing needs to succeed through having a precise and focused mission. One of the things that is making it hard for the fantastic majority of men and women in the organisation to proceed is what I call a blurred and bureaucratic mission. As the work that we need to do has grown and got more complicated, we have loaded extra things on the side of it. The reason I pull this one out as the biggest issue is that it is probably the one that we need the most support on.

For example, the mental health demand in policing is crippling the front line. I was with a front-line team in north London a few weeks ago on a Friday afternoon. They started the shift with 25 officers and they had to strike 13 of them off, largely to go to hospitals to watch mental health patients who were waiting in casualty for hospital assessments. This is at a time when in the last year the place of safety beds in London has dropped from 1,700 to 1,600—so there is reduced provision and at the same time there is more work for police. If I had a relative going through a mental health crisis, however caring, compassionate and enthusiastic as a caring amateur mental health professional a police officer is, I would want that relative to be with a mental health professional, not with a caring police officer.

Whether it is about that, whether it is about some of the bureaucracies that we have created that mean that sometimes police officers are more



HOUSE OF COMMONS

worried about getting the paperwork right than they are about confronting violent people on the streets, we have done a lot to make policing harder than it needs to be. It is very hard when you are trying to protect people from gangs or exploiters and rapists in private and online and there is lots that we have to do that we cannot be making it hard and impossible. Therefore, the thing that worries me most of all is getting the space to succeed as opposed to being drowned in those other responsibilities.

Chair: All members here recognise that issue around mental health time on the front line in our own respective constabularies. It is not unique to London.

Sir Mark, thank you very much indeed. We are very pleased that you are back. You have always been very open and engaged with the Committee in the past, for which we are grateful, and I am sure that that will continue in the future.

Sir Mark Rowley: Absolutely.

Chair: Although we have focused on some of the negatives today and you have responded to some of the pockets of problematic officers, undoubtedly the vast majority of your officers do an outstanding job to keep us safe, for which we are very grateful, and we would like you to pass that on from the Committee. We hope that most of them, and you, can have as normal a Christmas as possible in performing your duties. Thank you very much for your evidence today.

Sir Mark Rowley: Fingers crossed for that. Thank you, Chair, thank you, Committee.