



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Home Affairs Committee

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

Wednesday 26 April 2023

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Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Lee Anderson; James Daly; Simon Fell; Carolyn Harris; Tim Loughton.

Questions 546-597

Witnesses

[I](#): Sir Mark Rowley QPM, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service.



## Examination of witness

Witnesses: Sir Mark Rowley.

Q546 **Chair:** Good morning everybody. Welcome to the Home Affairs Committee. This is the final session of our inquiry into policing priorities. Before we start proceedings, I want to make a quick statement.

Saturday 22 April marked the 30th anniversary of Stephen Lawrence's murder, and as our report into Macpherson 22 years on acknowledged, "policing today is very different from twenty-two years ago." However, during our policing priorities inquiry, we have continued to hear about persistent shortcomings across the police service and serious concerns about ongoing racial disproportionalities.

Having said that, we are very pleased, Sir Mark, that you are with the Committee this morning. You were with us quite recently to give evidence, but in the light of the Casey review we wanted to invite you back to ask you a number of questions. When we had Baroness Casey in front of us—we were very struck by her evidence to the Committee and what she had to say—I started by asking her about her recommendations and her findings in the report about the institutionalised misogyny, sexism, racism and homophobia in the Met. I also said to her that she was very clear in her report about her views about you—the Commissioner—and your deputy, and the confidence she had in you.

I asked her whether she was disappointed that you had not been able to accept the findings of institutionalised racism, sexism, misogyny and homophobia, and I just want to read to you what she said in response. She said, "I think the Met Commissioner is unfortunately splitting hairs over words." She went on to say, "I feel it is a really missed opportunity... Deep into this, I just feel it is a shame. I hope that, over the next few weeks and months, as the Commissioner gets more into meeting Londoners and listening to what they have to say, he will not only accept my diagnosis but accept what is not a label but an accurate description of the organisation. I think he is letting his police down; I think he is letting his staff down." Do you want to comment on what Baroness Casey said? Have you changed your mind in the few weeks since the publication of the review?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I keep reflecting; I keep thinking about this because I know it's a word that matters deeply to some people in some quarters, but I'm still at the moment of the same view. I have completely accepted the diagnosis that Louise lays out in her report: the fact that we have racism, misogyny and homophobia in the organisation; the fact that it is not simply a few individuals but that there are systemic and cultural failings in there; and the fact that it affects the experience of our people in the organisation and the experience of the public in terms of policing. I fully accept those issues, and I was speaking out in very much the same terms from the moment I was appointed last September, well before her report.



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I have been very clear that I came back to policing after nearly five years out because it is a moment for reform in policing and I want to be part of that because I care deeply about the public. I know that in many ways I might have made life harder for myself, but the reason I am not accepting the word is that it means so many different things to different people.

**Chair:** She set out very clearly the four tests.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** And I am agreeing with her tests, but her definition, if you like, is different from the Macpherson definition and from some dictionary definitions. I have been asked about at least three different definitions in media interviews over the last few weeks. Some mean that nobody is a racist and it's just about system, and it goes all the way through to some definitions meaning that most of the organisation are racists or misogynists. That is the conundrum for me. I am not going to put a label around my organisation that has so many different interpretations. Every time I use it, I cannot say, "I am using that word, and by that I mean this, this and this, not that, that and that." That is the reason I am doing it.

Q547 **Chair:** So you stand by it—because that became the story, didn't it, at the time of the publication? The story was you not accepting the definition of institutionalised racism.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Baroness Casey and I discussed it well before she published the report. She knew my view and she knew those issues, and she decided to make it the story.

Q548 **Chair:** I just wondered, on this issue: the national head of the Police Federation, Steve Hartshorn, said that he did accept the definition of the Met being institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic. I think he did this in a personal capacity, but he said that it was necessary to provide the leadership to recognise that. What do you say about that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Steve is entitled to his own opinion. There are different opinions. There are people at different levels in the Met who agree with me and some who don't. This is a really tricky issue. I am simply saying that I am not, as the Commissioner, going to put a label to my organisation that gets interpreted by many as meaning that the majority of people are misogynist, racist or whatever. The focus should be on what we are going to do about it, because, 25 years since Macpherson and 30 years since the awful murder of Stephen Lawrence, lots of good people have tried hard to improve things—Home Secretaries, police authorities, police and crime commissioners, Mayors, Commissioners and leaders across policing. As you said at the start, progress has been made but we have clearly not collectively dug deep enough to make the difference that needs to be made and that is why this reform is required.

**Chair:** Okay, so you are standing by the position you took at the time of the publication.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes.



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**Q549 Chair:** Okay. I just want to ask you a couple of questions before I move on to colleagues. This morning, the Home Secretary is making a speech, I believe, about the return to common-sense policing at a back to basics think-tank. I think she is claiming that policing is too woke. At this time, we are obviously discussing the shocking findings of Baroness Casey's report and, as we have just been talking about, the institutionalised racism, sexism and homophobia in the largest police force in the country. Can you explain to the Committee how you manage to balance a common-sense culture in policing, where effective and robust operational policing is possible, with tackling those deep-seated institutional racism, sexism and homophobic problems, and other prejudices that we have seen, which clearly undermine effective frontline policing? How do you do that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not sure I accept that there is a tension between the two. Officers are inherently practical in what they do—it is a very practical profession—and day in, day out, we have officers going out across London, looking to make a difference, being practical, determined and courageous and supporting victims. One of the challenges I see as part of our reform programme in the Met is an over-complexity of policy that sometimes slows officers down and a lack of equipment, which Louise Casey calls out. Something we are looking at is the way our frontline officers do not feel set up to succeed. They do not feel that they have the equipment or the resources and there are many examples in her report to that effect. There are lots of practical things we need to do to help officers succeed. Some of that is buried in policy, but I do not see a tension about common sense meets success; I do not see a problem in it at all.

**Q550 Chair:** Right, so do you think the police are too woke?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** No.

**Chair:** No, you don't think that at all?

**Sir Mark Rowley** *indicated dissent.*

**Q551 Chair:** Okay. Finally, as the most senior police officer in the country, would you ever allow concerns about being branded racist to prevent the sanctioning of police investigations into issues such as grooming gangs?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** No. Our cornerstone is "without fear or favour" and that does not mean we have always got that right, but that is absolutely what we stand for. We should be prepared to go after anybody regardless of their position, any position of power, race, faith, creed, anything at all—it should not make any difference at all. For the vast majority of time in policing, it hasn't done. There may be occasional examples of where we have slipped up in that regard, but it should not be a factor.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you very much. James Daly.

**Q552 James Daly:** Sir Mark, I am genuinely staggered by what you have just said. I will tell you a label for the Metropolitan police and certainly its management: incompetent—and that is the nice version. The idea is that you have had a string of good people coming in who have been working



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hard. Well, every single one of them has failed, because the situation in which you find yourself in this organisation is a national disgrace—and that is without being open and saying, “We are at a stage where this organisation is just not functioning.” Let us discuss one example. Can you tell me how many police officers accused of domestic or sexual violence are currently serving on the frontline in the Metropolitan police?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There are two different parts there. I need to challenge you on your first point, which suggests that the whole organisation—everyone in it—is rotten.

**James Daly:** I think they are incompetent.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Well that’s just not accurate, is it? What we have to do now is have a serious conversation about police reform. If that becomes pillory of the good majority of people, that will not help anybody. There are big challenges. There are definitely leadership failings. There are hundreds of people in the organisation who should not be there. There are all those problems, which I completely accept, but, if our debate about police reform and police priorities becomes one of pillorying everybody, that does not serve the public.

Q553 **James Daly:** It is time that politicians called out the management of organisations like yours for what it is: a complete and utter mess. It has been a complete and utter mess for a long time. Senior police officers must have turned a blind eye to what was going on because we could have been asking you questions 10 years ago on the same issues that we are dealing with here today. How many police officers who have been convicted or who are under investigation for sexual or domestic violence offences are serving in a frontline capacity today?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not going to pluck an exact number out of the air. We are doing the biggest doubling down on standards in policing for 50 years. We have more than doubled the numbers being sacked. We have far more officers suspended. We have far more cases going to gross misconduct hearings. We are looking at a different way of doing vetting procedures to help us remove people from the organisation who are not fit for purpose. I have been asking the Home Secretary and they are doing a review for powers that make it easier to deal with misconduct. We are doing an awful lot about this. We have done reviews looking back and we have data, which has been put into the public domain, about the number of officers where we have had allegations of sexual offending or domestic abuse.

**James Daly:** You are the Commissioner. I am asking you: how many officers who have been convicted of those matters are serving in frontline positions today?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** You can pick 100 questions with different numbers that I am not going to answer here today. I can come back on detailed numbers afterwards.

**James Daly:** But I thought you would know that, Sir Mark. Is that not a



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basic thing—that you would be concerned that you are sending out officers who are guilty of sexual offending to deal with the most vulnerable situations? That does not seem to bother anybody in the organisation.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is not true at all.

**James Daly:** Well, tell me the number and tell me what you are doing about it, then.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not going to pluck a number out of the air. We have been really clear. We have done Operation Onyx, which is a review of all those who have had allegations. Those allegations have previously been investigated and found to have no case to answer. We are concerned about history, because mistakes have been made. There are about 1,130 cases in that. For a little shy of 250 of them, we found no problem. For a little shy of 200 of them, we have concerns and they are going into a vetting review process. For the other 600 or so, there were missed lines of inquiry, or new lines of inquiry that are being followed through on. We are doubling down on these standards issues, but I am not going to accept pillory of the majority of people in the organisation.

Q554 **James Daly:** You are just making an excuse. I am asking you specific questions about the problems that are leading to people being treated in the most appalling manner, and you are simply coming here and saying, “I am not going to answer this because it tars everyone.” That is not the point. There are lots of good police officers in the Metropolitan police. Those good police officers have been let down by your predecessors and the senior management of the police.

Before you came back, you served in a senior position in the Metropolitan police. That was what—2018? You must have seen these problems at that stage. I cannot find any statements from you, Sir Mark, from back in 2018 when you were a Deputy Commissioner, saying that it is outrageous that we have got police officers that should not be serving in the organisation. You seem to be typical of a senior police officer at the Metropolitan police who has just gone along with negligence and incompetence, and turned a blind eye. That is why we are here today, and I have real concerns about that.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We have made much progress over the last few decades, as the Chair said at the start, but it is not enough, and we are doubling down on standards more ferociously than has been done for five decades. We are removing people faster, and we are tackling these issues. But the vast majority of our people are good people, and a debate that turns this into pillory of the police root and branch is not something I am going to accept, because we have men and women going out there today determined to protect Londoners, being brave and compassionate, and they need your support as much as they need my support while we tackle the fundamental systemic issues that have let them down and let the public down.

Q555 **James Daly:** If a Metropolitan police officer is convicted of a criminal offence or there is sufficient evidence to find that sexual violence or



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sexually inappropriate behaviour has been undertaken by that officer, is there a process to sack them on the spot, and do you agree that you should?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I would love to have the power to do so.

**James Daly:** You do have the power to do that.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is not true. Most police misconduct is dealt with by independent lawyers. I do not have the last say on who is a police officer. We have people who have been sacked by senior police officers and then reinstated by independent legally qualified chairs or police appeals tribunals that put them back in the organisation. There is a complex system where I do not have the final say on who is in the organisation. That is one of the changes I have asked for.

We also have police regulations that have no explicit power to remove an officer who fails vetting. Commissioners have been lobbying for this for over 20 years, and politicians have not been prepared to move the rules.

**James Daly:** Again, I do not accept that for a second. Yours is the only organisation in the country—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It is true—it is a fact.

**James Daly:** Yours is the only organisation in the country that can tolerate people who have indulged in behaviour of the most serious nature—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not tolerating it at all.

**James Daly:** Well, they are still serving in your organisation, and they are still on the frontline today.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not tolerating it at all.

Q556 **James Daly:** You are telling us today that, whatever the process that comes after it, you and your organisation will sack those people immediately if they are convicted of a criminal offence or found guilty of sexually inappropriate behaviour or domestic violence.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Of course.

**James Daly:** They will immediately be sacked by you.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is illegal. I am not allowed to sack them myself. That is—

**James Daly:** Gross misconduct.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes, but misconduct processes are not in the hands of police chiefs; they are in the hands of independent legally qualified chairs. That is one of the changes in the rules I am asking for. I will do everything I can to remove them from the organisation, but it is not always my



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decision, and we have many cases where they have been reinstated outwith our power. My intention is absolutely to do that.

Q557 **Chair:** Have you had any indication from the Home Secretary when she is likely to make any announcement about changes to misconduct regulations?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am expecting it in the next few weeks.

**Chair:** Within a few weeks?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes.

Q558 **Simon Fell:** Thank you, Sir Mark, for joining us. You rattled through some figures on Operation Onyx when talking to my colleague a few minutes ago. Could you update us on where you are with the review, which I think was due to close at the end of last month, in terms of officers facing dismissal and those facing criminal investigation?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** To recap, if you look at cases like Couzens and Carrick, you see that there are missed opportunities to deal with some of the most awful individuals. Because of that, I ordered a review of 10 years of cases where allegations have been made against officers that are either of sexual criminality or domestic abuse. That identified just over 1,100 individuals—I can find the numbers in a minute, if you want; it is in the public domain, in a letter I wrote to the Home Secretary and the Mayor. We did not just look at those cases. We looked at those individuals in the round, beyond those cases, and this was a first stage of triage and review. There were 13 datasets, and an awful lot of analysis, research and reviewing of evidence was done.

As I say, around 250 were found to have no problems. There were another 600-odd where either the investigators felt there were missed investigative opportunities in the original cases, so we need to have a fresh look at them, or, because of taking a wider look at that individual, there were new investigative lines of inquiry. So there were over 600 cases where we wanted to look further, and that work is now happening. There were just shy of 200 where there were some residual concerns, and we are putting them into a vetting review process. We went through that process and the next stages of work are taking place. I know the numbers are deeply concerning.

One thing we are doing differently is bringing outside experts in. We have experts from sexual abuse charities, domestic abuse charities, victim support organisations and so on. They are looking over our shoulder and at all our decisions. We are looking again at this with a fresh pair of eyes and with a more assertive approach, and also asking others to make sure that we are marking the homework appropriately. I am sure we will be doing fresh investigations or removing officers for vetting failures in many of these cases. That is what we are working through at the moment.

Q559 **Simon Fell:** Thank you. You are right that those are large numbers and they will be of concern. Do you have a timeframe for the 600 that you are





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taking a fresh look at and the 200-ish that you have genuine concerns about? How long will that process take?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It will take several months to work through all those cases and investigations. Because we have shaken the tree so vigorously, we have more reports of misconduct coming in and more officers standing up and saying, "I'm worried about X or Y." We have more of that coming in.

We have two things that I am dealing with. One is what I might call legacy cases where we look back and say, "We know we've made mistakes when our misconduct processes have not been strong enough." When we look back at key issues, we will find problems that were missed, and we have to deal with those individuals.

Secondly, we are shaking the tree and getting more allegations from officers and from the public, which is positive, and that is generating a bigger case load going forward. Balancing those two case loads is challenging. We have put over 200 new officers into that environment. On short-term measures, as I have said publicly, we have recently been tasking officers from counterterrorism and specialist crime commands to support them, and that has helped greatly. I have been encouraged by the number of officers volunteering to help out. The vast majority get that this is critical for us, and they want to make a difference.

Q560 **Simon Fell:** While the investigation is going on, what is the status of those individuals who are being looked at? Do they still have warrant cards? Are they still serving?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** The majority of them do because they have been investigated in the past and found to have no case to answer, and now we are picking over those cases again. As soon as we find something of deep concern, their status will be reviewed and they might be restricted or suspended.

**Simon Fell:** Are they restricted in what they are doing now?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Not the majority of them, no.

**Simon Fell:** So if there is a concern around sexual assault or something like that, they can still work on cases like that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I divide this into two things. A fresh allegation of domestic abuse that is being investigated criminally is likely to lead to a restriction or probably a suspension. In cases that have been historically dealt with and closed, and no fault has been found in the initial investigation, we are re-looking at those. If any of those get to a stage where we decide we are seriously concerned about the officer, clearly, restriction or suspension is likely.

Let me try to give a sense of why these cases are not all straightforward and why some are not concerning. Within these cases you will have, for example, someone suffering a mental health crisis who has been in police



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custody and alleges everyone in custody raped her; they have been sectioned shortly after, and the whole of the custody block is videoed. The evidence is that there is no concern here; it is just a sad case that is very powerful. You get a range from the sad and malicious to the deeply worrying, and sifting through that is not always straightforward, but that is what we are doing.

Q561 **Simon Fell:** I appreciate that, but one of the issues that Baroness Casey raised was public perception and the concern there, but also, in her words, whether the Met is able to “police itself”. For those 250 cases that fall into the bracket that you have just described, what external check is there to reassure the public that your dismissal of them is robust and that the public can have confidence in these officers?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is why we have the independent advisory group. They are looking through all these cases and double-checking our thinking. That will provide us with that third eye that is really helpful when you say, “Well, I think this is what it looks like, but maybe that’s a blinkered view.” You have somebody else providing that. Also, it provides it for the public. Independent experts have looked at these cases and said, “We agree with the police decision on that.” Those independent experts are working through those cases at the moment.

Q562 **Simon Fell:** One of Baroness Casey’s other findings—she was very powerful when she was in front of us—was essentially “reform or die”. If you don’t get this right or land this right, the Met should not exist in its current form. I am keen to hear your thoughts on that and what an answer to that might look like, if you cannot land this process properly and regain the public’s confidence.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We will succeed in reform.

**Simon Fell:** I thought you might say that.

**Chair:** By when?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** This is not an overnight matter. This is several years’ work, but you will see progress quarter by quarter—I absolutely promise that. Look at big organisations in any sector that get into a situation where they are heading in the wrong direction; there is never a silver bullet solution. You have to come up with the right plan—for a big organisation there will be multiple parts to that, and we can talk about the turnaround plan that we published and the work we are doing to reform—and then it just comes down to relentless delivery and improving step by step. When any big organisations reach for some creative silver bullet solution, it never works.

Q563 **Chair:** I think we have some questions about how we will be able to monitor progress. Can I just ask you a couple of things? First, do you have any serving police officers at the moment who have criminal convictions?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes.



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Q564 **Chair:** And what are you doing about that? I think the public would be shocked to know that a serving police officer has a criminal conviction.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** If we can make it not completely binary, I think there will be a small number of cases that none of us would be worried about—for example, someone who at 14 gets a caution for something very minor and at 28, having had a work history and so on, joins the police. I don't think people would be concerned about some of those cases. But serious crime and/or crime committed as a police officer have no place in policing; I absolutely agree with you completely. We have too many cases where that is true.

Q565 **Chair:** How many police officers do you have who have had a conviction while they have been a serving police officer?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Those numbers are in the letter that we put publicly to the Mayor and the Home Secretary. I can't pull it out of the back of my head; I can't remember it, but the number is in the public domain. We have too many of them.

Q566 **Chair:** Are they suspended from duty? What has happened to them?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** This is why I want legal change to the current regulations.

**Chair:** What has happened to them? What are they doing today?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Let me talk through the process. They have gone to court and got a criminal conviction. They then go to a misconduct panel.

**Chair:** I understand all that. I am just wondering: today, are they serving officers with a warrant card doing public-facing duties?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Then they are reinstated, often against our will. We then have a police officer who we do not think should be a police officer—someone we have concerns about—so we put restrictions on them. We have to have them in the workplace because that's the decision, so depending on what the conviction is for, we might have restrictions on them. We have officers in the organisation who are restricted from, for example, getting involved in evidence, or officers who are restricted from having public contact. It is completely ridiculous.

Q567 **Chair:** Okay. Is the letter you wrote to the Mayor and the Home Secretary available to the public?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes, that was publicised two or three weeks ago.

**Chair:** Does that have the numbers in it?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It has the numbers in it, yes.

**Chair:** That is the letter of 3 April.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That's the one, yes.

**Chair:** I will bring in Carolyn Harris, and then I have one more question



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before going to Lee Anderson.

**Q568 Carolyn Harris:** Very quickly, Sir Mark—if you are a dinner lady, a school governor or want to work with certain vulnerable people, you have to have a DBS check on a regular basis. If you are a police officer and you fail a DBS check, how can it be justified that you remain in post?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I agree with you. We are under different employment law from most people—something called police regulations, as opposed to normal employment law. Police regulations prescribe all the processes for misconduct and for unsatisfactory performance, and they are complex and byzantine. I do not think they are right at all, which is why I have been asking for their reform. That creates a situation in policing where very simple issues—cases where, under normal employment law, you would be saying goodbye to somebody—become quite complex issues and often do not produce that result, and it is not acceptable. Commissioners have been asking for change on this for more than 20 years, but those lobbying to keep these rules have won. That is why I am asking for it.

**Carolyn Harris:** Thank you.

**Q569 Chair:** I am just looking at the letter and it says that 161 police officers in the Met have a criminal conviction. I think it also says that the majority—70%—of the 161 had a conviction before they became an officer. It then goes on to say that eight officers committed their offence while in the Met and remain serving and a further 49 officers have convictions for crimes of dishonesty or violence.

**James Daly:** How is that possible?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It is unacceptable, isn't it?

**Chair:** I think that is quite shocking, actually.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I agree with you.

**Chair:** Okay.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not defending this. There is a small number of people who you would say fit in that “minor, historic young people” box. However, the majority of it is completely unacceptable.

**Q570 Chair:** Yes and we heard about the case of the police officer who was masturbating on a train, got a conviction and, as I understand it, is still serving in the Metropolitan police today.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes, there are many cases—not many, but tens of cases—that are completely unacceptable. It is disgraceful.

**Q571 Chair:** Just before I come to Lee Anderson, I wanted to ask: the Uplift data figures have been published. One force, the Metropolitan Police Service, did not meet its total Uplift allocation. The force missed its allocation of 4,557 additional officers by 1,089. That is 23.9%. What do you say about that? It was obviously a Government priority to get the Uplift figure to 20,000.



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**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes. We are 1,000 officers light of our target. I wish we had hit it but we haven't.

**Chair:** Why haven't you?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There is a range of factors in this. We have recruited over the last three years more than 9,000 officers, which is, I think, the most ever in such a short period. We have not hit the target. Obviously, we are striving to maintain the quality; that is really important. There are factors that include both that the reputation of the organisation at the moment does not help with recruiting and that the employment market and the pay situation is really challenging. The employment market in London, as you will know, is very hot and very difficult. Frontline officer pay points have gone down 17% in real terms in a decade. We are paying new recruits less in the hottest part of the employment market in the country. I think that is a factor as well and I hope that the Police Remuneration Review Body and this year's settlement go some way towards addressing that.

**Chair:** Okay. Thank you for answering our questions.

Q572 **Lee Anderson:** Thank you for coming and for taking these questions. Can you give the Committee examples of cases of racism, misogyny and sexism that you personally witnessed while serving as a police officer and tell us what you did about them?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I have always been tough on standards in the organisation.

**Lee Anderson:** I did not ask that. I asked you to give me examples of sexism, racism and misogynistic behaviour that you have actually witnessed while being a police officer.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I can't remember any immediately.

**Lee Anderson:** You can't remember any.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** No, I can't.

**Lee Anderson:** I find that very difficult to believe. I think everybody watching this would find that difficult to believe: that you are in charge of cleaning up the Met force—really, it is your responsibility—but you cannot actually remember any. Do you seriously expect the Committee to believe that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** As a senior officer, I have sat on many misconduct panels. I have pretty much dismissed everybody who has come in front of me on those panels. I have always been very tough on that.

**Lee Anderson:** I asked you what you had actually witnessed yourself. I find it pretty hard to believe that a police officer with years and years of service in an organisation has not witnessed any of this when we know it goes on, because if you haven't, you must have been walking around with your eyes closed.



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**Sir Mark Rowley:** There are many officers in the organisation. When you look at the Casey report and all the issues, there are officers in the organisation who are angry and upset because they recognise this and they have had those experiences and there are officers who haven't seen it and don't recognise it. People have different experiences in the organisation.

Q573 **Lee Anderson:** Have you actually witnessed it—racism? Sexism?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I have seen nothing like that in the Met, no. However, I have only worked in the Met for six years as a very senior officer. It doesn't come across your desk in that way.

**Lee Anderson:** Have you seen it in the time you have been in the police?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not going to try to test my memory to go back to the 1980s.

**Lee Anderson:** Right, okay. I think that sort of answers my question. It would appear that you are in denial, that your answers here—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not in denial at all; I have been more forthright about the need to reform and the need to confront standards in policing than any Commissioner for decades.

**Lee Anderson:** I would imagine that anybody else in any other industry who has witnessed this type of behaviour would admit to it and say, "Yes, it does exist; it has happened. I have witnessed it." I think you are probably the only person I have ever met that would say they can't remember.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not going to get into a case-by-case discussion. I am—

**Lee Anderson:** Just one case, then. Just one case.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** No, I am not going to get into a case-by-case discussion. I am absolutely determined to tackle the issues in the organisation. I have always been tough on standards and I will continue to be. We are going to reform the issues that need tackling. I need the support of politicians in dealing with this; I need the regulations to change; and I need the help to build on the work—

**Lee Anderson:** If you want the support of politicians, Commissioner, you have got to be honest. To sit there and say you can't remember when you have witnessed these incidents—I don't think that's very honest at all.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** People don't misbehave in front of senior officers in that way. That is an unrealistic question.

**Lee Anderson:** Have you always been a senior officer?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Of course I haven't. I joined policing in 1987.



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**Lee Anderson:** Well then, when you weren't a senior officer, did you witness any?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** The behaviour in the '80s and '90s was very different to today; of course it was.

**Lee Anderson:** I didn't ask you that; I said: did you witness it?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Of course I have seen things that weren't fit for today's standards, but I am not going to get into detail about that. Today, we are about reforming policing, and we need the support of politicians to do that, to help us with the right regulations. We have already doubled down on standards, as I said. We are sacking officers at twice the rate. We are having the biggest look at professional standards that has been done in 50 years. That is a sign of our absolute commitment. We started that from day one of my time as Commissioner. And I am grateful the Home Secretary is looking to help us by changing the regulations.

Q574 **Lee Anderson:** Well, I think you're going to wriggle out of that one, Commissioner, so I'll try another question. We have seen protesters once again in Parliament Square—setting up some sort of Glastonbury-on-Thames gazebo with some pretty poor artists, if my memory serves me right. Do you agree with the recommendations by, I think, Policy Exchange that there should be zero tolerance of these sorts of events and we shouldn't be putting up with antisocial behaviour? Just this morning, we have seen protestors on Whitehall and around Parliament Square—probably as you were coming into the building. Don't you think it's time that you left your ivory tower and got out there on Whitehall and sorted these people out? The people of London, the tourists, the people who work at this place, the taxi drivers, the bus drivers—they're getting fed up of it and you're just letting it happen. You've got the powers now to do this.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** The current Bill bouncing around Parliament hasn't come in yet, so those powers aren't in existence yet.

**Lee Anderson:** That is not strictly true, is it? You can move these people on. They are obstructing the highway.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We could have a long conversation about public order law—

**Lee Anderson:** I don't want a long conversation; I'm just asking you why you're not moving them on.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Well, you are—

**Lee Anderson:** I don't want a long conversation. Why aren't you moving them on?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** You are making selective comments, based on a partial understanding of the law. I do not want Londoners disrupted any more than anybody else does, but the law is very clear that protest is disruptive



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and to a certain extent that is allowed. That is what the law says at the moment. Now, you might not like that, but I have to work to the law rather than whim.

**Tim Loughton:** That's not right.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It is right.

**Lee Anderson:** It's not, Commissioner—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** You might want to believe that the law says that no disruption whatsoever is allowed through protest, but that is not the case.

Q575 **Lee Anderson:** I think you might want to believe that you are doing your job correctly, Commissioner, but I don't think you are. But I am just going to ask one more question, or make one more statement, because I feel like I'm wasting my time with you, to be honest. You say you took five years out of the force. There are probably people listening to this today that wish it was a lot longer, and I'm one of them. Do you think you have got the confidence of the public?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not going to sit here when— If people want to be personally offensive, then write it in newspapers, but I am not going to answer those questions.

Q576 **Chair:** I don't think we want to be personally offensive; I think we are trying to get to what the problems are in the Met and how you are going to tackle them. Can I just ask a question about the issue of the protest? Is what is happening out in Parliament Square the reason why this week we saw the Prime Minister being driven down Whitehall with a whole number of police officers on bicycles and then a whole number of police officers running alongside the entourage?

**Tim Loughton:** Like North Korea!

**Chair:** Is that now how policing has to protect the Prime Minister, because of the protests out in Parliament Square?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There was a large planned protest in Parliament Square. The Prime Minister was returning to his office for some urgent business and so we dealt with those two conflicting pressures to get the Prime Minister back into his office.

**Chair:** I have never seen so many police officers on bicycles or running at great speed trying to keep up with a car. It is rather reminiscent of American Presidents and the way they operate.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** You won't often see a protected person being taken through a large protest, but on that occasion it was necessary, so that is why you saw some unusual tactics.

**Chair:** So that was a one-off. We are not going to see that again.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is not the routine, no.





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**Chair:** Okay. Those officers looked a bit out of puff, actually, as they were running down Whitehall.

Q577 **Carolyn Harris:** Baroness Casey pointed to Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection as being particularly bad. Why is that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There is a range of reasons in there. She also pointed out that there are cultural challenges across our firearms commands, so it was not just about Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection.

In Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection, there is a range of things that we need to do. We changed the leadership, and a third of the sergeants have changed recently. It is an unusual role. You see it around here—it is static protection. It has not appealed historically to that many officers, so we have had a very static workforce, which has not helped. The working arrangements have been designed over the years in a way that has reduced the ability of supervisors to supervise because of the way people are on post and the way it has been funded and organised, and some of the facilities they operate in have not helped. A range of factors has created a unit that looks and works very differently from other policing units, and some bad cultures have got a hold there. That is not acceptable

Q578 **Carolyn Harris:** I think it has been termed by some police officers as an overtime operation, and it has attracted police officers who may want to carry a gun. Is there no accountability for those who were in charge of that particular unit—the management and the senior personnel responsible for bringing order into that unit?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** The challenges—the overtime issue, for example—are not for lack of trying. We struggle to recruit as many firearms officers in London as we need across the different commands. That means that in not just that operation but other operations, we have officers doing a lot of overtime to cover posts that we could not recruit people into. Some of those things do not come out of mismanagement; they come out of management trying to stretch limited resources to cover more posts than is ideal. Some of those issues are part of it. Of course, if we find individuals who knew about bad behaviour and did not tackle it, we will tackle them too.

Q579 **Carolyn Harris:** Did you not have responsibility for this unit at one point?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** When I was responsible for the national approach to counter-terrorism, the protection commands were part of my responsibilities. As national lead for counter-terrorism, I had 10,000 people across the country in different roles, including the protection commands.

Q580 **Carolyn Harris:** Given that that unit has access to some of the most important people in the country and some of the most important visitors to the country, isn't it even more important that they are highly scrutinised so that you and we can have confidence that we are not exposing people to people who may not be behaving in an acceptable manner?



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**Sir Mark Rowley:** I completely agree with that. What all these reviews show is that the vetting standards, the way we have done professional standards investigations to tackle those issues, and the systems we have relied on have not been as strong as they need to be, and that has caused all these problems. I completely agree with you.

Q581 **Carolyn Harris:** Yes. Operation Leven is going to be doing a root-and-branch investigation into this. It seems really strange to me that what should be one of the most respected services in the United Kingdom needs to be having a root-and-branch investigation into how its officers are working. We should be respecting the police, not expecting them to investigate themselves. How is the operation coming along?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Starting with changes in Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection, the senior leadership team has all changed, and a third of the sergeants have changed. We are using different recruiting approaches to get in younger officers, and a more diverse mix of officers. You will start to see those changes coming through around you in Parliament. It is making progress. Across our firearms commands, as Louise Casey points out, some more fundamental reforms are required. We are looking to get in a senior officer who has not spent time in the Met to help lead that work. That will develop over the next year.

Q582 **Carolyn Harris:** I get the sense that Louise Casey was actually saying that it needs to be completely disbanded, and that you have to start all over again. Would you agree with that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** She used the phrase “effectively disband”. She absolutely understands that we cannot disband it overnight because Parliament, Downing Street and embassies need protecting. We need to create as much churn in it as possible—change how it works, change how it supervises, change how all the firearms commands work—but disbanding something does not work if you have a job to do tomorrow.

Q583 **Carolyn Harris:** But Sir Mark, how confident are you? I completely understand that all those organisations and people that we need to protect should be protected, but are we actually protecting them by exposing them to people that a review that you conducted into their behaviour yourselves would indicate are not the kind of people that we should have in the job in the first place?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I think we shouldn’t use it in the general term. That does not mean they are all not the kind of people we should have in the job—

**Carolyn Harris:** No, not all.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There are lots of good people there. That is why the big approach on professional standards, the tougher approach on vetting, the investigations we are doing, the reviewing of old cases—all of that work is happening so that, across the Met, including in these specialist areas, we can get rid of the people who should not be here.

Q584 **Chair:** You told the Committee that you would be swapping out at least



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eight of the top 14 officer posts in the Met to create a leadership team that can succeed for the future. I think you have already started to do that. I just wanted to check: do you have similar plans for the Met's senior civilian leadership team? There have been some stories about some of the people who have been in the Met for a long time, in civilian posts—in staff posts—who are still there. Are you managing to change those people as well, or are you just carrying on with the people who were there before?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We have several senior posts being advertised at the moment, so, yes, there is a lot of change taking place at senior levels.

**Chair:** So your plan is to overhaul the staff roles as well as the officer roles.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We have two board-level posts open for advert at the moment, and several posts at the level below that. And they are going outside. We will take the best person. Sometimes the best person might come from inside, sometimes from outside, but a large proportion will definitely come from outside.

Q585 **Chair:** Just remind me, do you have any independent scrutiny when you are appointing people? Do you have independent people who are not part of the Met on your selection boards?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** For the most senior posts, yes, we sometimes involve City Hall, and we have non-executive directors—independent people—on our board who help us with some of these processes as well. For the most senior posts, we always have somebody different there.

**Chair:** And that is for the staff posts as well.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Q586 **Tim Loughton:** Sir Mark, can I be less diplomatic than Mr Anderson? When I came in this morning, there were 10 police officers shadowing 10 rather shabby looking eco-terrorists, with their banners, bringing the whole of the traffic around Parliament Square to a standstill.

When we asked you about this subject in a previous hearing, you acknowledged that the terms of the traffic Act nineteen-eighty-whatever-it-was would apply to anybody who was obstructing the highway and not allowing people to go about their legitimate business. Those protesters were in breach of that Act. Why were they not stopped, or moved to another place on the very wide pavement that is available around Parliament, where they could have held their protest peacefully without disrupting people trying to go about their business?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is not an accurate reflection of what I said when I was here before. We have to allow some highway obstruction before it becomes so unreasonable for us to be able to intervene, because of people's rights to protest. That is the legal framework created. I am not



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saying that is right or wrong, in terms of how it should be, but that is how it is.

What officers are always balancing is allowing a reasonable amount of protest but not allowing it to become seriously disruptive. There is no definition in law of serious disruption. Parliament is currently working on that, and I think that the Bill has been doing ping-pong between the Lords and the Commons on that. The clarity that that definition will bring will make it easier for us to intervene.

**Tim Loughton:** They clearly obstructed the highway; that is under the existing law of the Highways Act. There was an alternative: for them to carry on at their protest statically, or even marching slowly up and down the pavement, which the police could have redirected them to. That would not have been unreasonable unless they had permission to bring Parliament Square to a standstill. I gather that, as we speak, they are doing a similar exercise up and down Whitehall. They have broken the law. You have not arrested them or moved them on.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is incorrect. As I have said, it is not simply about the breach of the obstruction of the highway; there is plenty of case law that says that that is permitted for protest.

We are having to work in a very uncertain legal framework, which is why I am grateful that the Prime Minister and Home Secretary have responded to our ask and a Bill is going through Parliament at the moment that tries to define serious disruption. That is what we have to wrestle with. It is not as straightforward as saying that you can immediately arrest somebody for obstructing the highway if they are protesting.

**Tim Loughton:** I am not even suggesting that you arrest them.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Or move them on—okay.

**Tim Loughton:** I am suggesting that you gently nudge them towards a very convenient pavement space that would not cause inconvenience to the public and our constituents.

I see that we are not going to agree on how we define existing legislation. If the new legislation going through Parliament now does become law in anything like its current form, would that protest this morning therefore not have happened?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I would need to see it. I have not seen the video that perhaps you have seen, but from your description of it I think it is a lot less likely that that would be legal.

Q587 **Tim Loughton:** What would you have done? There are 10 demonstrators with their banners across several highways of Parliament Square walking very, very slowly so that no traffic, except for bicycles, could pass. That is disrupting the traffic and the people going about their business. This is very clear; you know what the new legislation is going to say. Surely, under the new legislation, the minute they got their banners out and



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stood in the middle of the road, you would have moved them on, or arrested them if they refused to be moved on. Yes?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Under the new legislation, which I think talks about serious disruption being anything that causes more than a minor inconvenience to others, that would seem to be in breach and therefore would lead to a police intervention.

Q588 **Tim Loughton:** “Seems to” is a bit worrying, given that this is quite controversial new legislation to deal with precisely that sort of thing.

Let us get back to the case in hand. All this brings me to the subject of public confidence. If the public cannot have confidence that you know how to use new laws, which are clearly intended to stop demonstrations such as this morning’s from causing havoc to ordinary law-abiding taxpayers, it is not surprising that they are rapidly losing confidence in police generally and in the Met particularly.

Yesterday, the Minister was here with officials from the Home Office to discuss this subject. We were talking about the Met. Apparently, you are now required to write a weekly letter to the Home Secretary on the progress you are making.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not required to. We do that routinely, but it is not a requirement.

**Tim Loughton:** You have offered to do that.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Yes.

Q589 **Tim Loughton:** So the “Dear Suella” letter is weekly winging its way to the Home Office. Is there any problem with that letter being made public?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It is very operationally sensitive and has a lot of current cases in it, so yes there is a problem with that.

Q590 **Tim Loughton:** Do you think you should do a version that could be made public, to give some confidence to the public that you have taken your mission seriously and are making progress, or not?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** There are lots of ways in which we do public communication. Doing a weekly letter to London is probably not a way I would choose to do it, but we will do regular public updates on big issues. We have lots of releases going out through the media with big themes like the update on misconduct and standards—that letter was publicised on 3 or 4 April. We will routinely put material out there to show the progress that we are making, but I am not sure that a weekly letter is the way I would do it.

Q591 **Tim Loughton:** But the Mayor, apparently, is going to be holding regular interviews with you, along with Greater London members—again, to scrutinise this progress. We are not sure what form they will take because they have not started yet. Would you be amenable to those taking place in public?



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**Sir Mark Rowley:** That is a choice for the Mayor, but I am relaxed about that.

**Tim Loughton:** So you will be very happy to be held accountable by the Mayor and London councillors in a public forum.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** By the Mayor. The law says that I am accountable to the Mayor because he is the police and crime commissioner for London.

**Tim Loughton:** Right, but you are perfectly comfortable if these proposed interviews, which you will be appearing at regularly, are in a public forum.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** If that is what the Mayor seeks, that is fine.

Q592 **Tim Loughton:** Fine, good. That, hopefully, will go into our report as a recommendation to the Mayor.

When we last visited Scotland Yard, we had a meeting with the professional standards managers, who are obviously an important part of delving through officers who have perhaps not been as closely scrutinised in the past as they should have been when it comes to remaining as serving officers. That work, obviously, is highly desirable.

Unfortunately, we ran out of time at that meeting, because the room was booked for some other important body within Scotland Yard. We were turfed out, so we did not quite have the time to finish our questioning. One of the areas where I certainly suggest there might be improvements is that, at the moment, you are moving more serving police officers into the professional standards boards to oversee the potential misdemeanours of other police officers—the police marking their own homework. Do you not think there is now an overriding case for the professional standards board to consist of a number of very experienced people from bodies outside the police, to scrutinise the conduct of the police and the records that they are going through at the moment?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We are bringing outside experts to oversee our work, and I think that is really important. Of course, the most serious cases are already dealt with by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. If we are going to reform the organisation, though, leaders need to have the ability to deal with the standards issues. The more you take it out of the organisation, the harder you make it. One of the consequences of legally qualified chairs taking over misconduct panels from senior police officers over the last six or seven years is that those independent lawyers sack fewer people. The further people are away from it, the more forgiving they are of the behaviour—that is what I have seen. I want the powers to be able to deal with this.

Q593 **Tim Loughton:** I am not talking about misconduct panels. There are serious problems with the IOPC, as you know and as this Committee has reported on—not least that its chief executive and joint chairman is currently under investigation and has left the post, so there is only an acting chief executive there at the moment. What we suggested is that the people overseeing investigations and directing how thorough those



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investigations should be and the sort of thresholds that they should meet before further action is required against police officers, should include an element of outside professionals—those from the Army, for example, who seem to be much better at rooting out people who are not appropriate for the Army—as part of the department in order to advise. What is wrong with that?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** As I said, we have some independent advisers already helping us with some of our work. I think having external advisers is really helpful, and we are doing more and more of that.

**Tim Loughton:** They are consultants; they are not sitting alongside serving police officers, giving views and making judgments on how to take cases further, or not. It seems to me to be a box-ticking exercise. If you seriously want to restore public confidence—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** It is not a box-ticking exercise at all.

**Tim Loughton:** Effectively, that is what we were told when we went to see Scotland Yard, because they are not—

**Sir Mark Rowley:** They are not a box-ticking exercise.

**Tim Loughton:** They are not at the top table.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** They are having full access, looking at the decision making and advising on whether we are getting decision making right on some of the trickiest cases. It is not box ticking; it is really substantial work.

Q594 **Tim Loughton:** On a few individual, high-profile cases, you may have had some outside advice. You are looking at over 1,000 officers, or even more. The thresholds on which they are judged, and the criteria that now need to be applied to them, are being designed almost exclusively by serving police officers. The view of this Committee—and the impression I got from some people in the Department, who said, “That’s a good idea, isn’t it?”—is that you would benefit from having a completely different perspective and a fresh set of eyes, so that people from other agencies, who have no flag or whatever for the police, can apply some of their own disciplines, which have worked quite well in other organisations but have singularly failed in the Met so far. I just don’t see what the problem is with bringing them in at the top table properly, which they are not at the moment.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I am not sure I fully understand your point. We are bringing external advisers in. We are always open to recruiting people from outside the organisation. It may be something we will adopt in the future, but it is just not something I am going to commit to now. At the moment, given the different legal framework from people in other walks of life—we have the police regulations—having people who are expert in that is quite important. I think that using the team we have at the moment—enhanced as it is, and hopefully with new regulations—can make the bulk of the difference, as long as we have some of that external eye over some



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of our most critical decisions, to make sure that we are not tipping it in the wrong direction.

**Q595 Tim Loughton:** We understand that there will be new checks and balances about ongoing professional scrutiny in the future, which is a good thing, but of course that does not apply to all those with historical misdemeanours who are being looked at by the police themselves. Are you convinced that there is sufficient rigour in ongoing professional practice scrutiny for those people who have been with the police historically, as well as those new people coming in who will hopefully be subject to higher thresholds of suitability?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** We are six months into my commissionership, and there is a lot more rigour than there was six months ago. I am sure we will be increasing it further.

**Q596 Chair:** Okay. We will have to conclude at this point, but before you go, I just want to ask if you could write to the Committee on two issues.

First, we have been told that the Met has the worst record for the quality of files passed to the CPS. I think only 38% to 40% of files submitted reach the standard expected by the CPS. Do you think you could write to me about what you are doing to sort that out?

The other issue is that we were told by the chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board that she believes there needs to be more communication and join-up between London's local race action plan and the national police race action plan. Could you write to us about how you are engaging with the national plan to ensure that the Met will deliver it, and so that it complements the work of the London local plan as well?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** On the second one, we are adopting the national race action plan. That is our approach. It has not been historically; we have changed that on my watch. Rather than having our own plan that reflects it gently, we are adopting it fully.

**Chair:** Okay. I am raising the quite recent concerns of the chair. Is that a decision that you have made recently?

**Sir Mark Rowley:** In the last two or three months, yes.

**Q597 Chair:** In the last two or three months, okay. Thank you for telling me that, because that is not what the chair of independent scrutiny and oversight board told us.

Thank you very much for your time this morning. You have had some robust questioning, but we feel that this is such an important issue. We are hoping that you will be able to come back before the Committee in the months and years to come to show how the Met is changing.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** I would be very keen to do that. Can I make one final comment?

**Chair:** Please do.





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**Sir Mark Rowley:** Of course, it is important that when a big organisation is failing in many respects that you are robust in your challenge of us, but could I ask you to think about the tens of thousands of men and women who come to work to protect London and give of their best, day in, day out? I do not mind how tough you are with me or how robust the language is about the people who should not be in the organisation, but they desperately need your support if we are going to succeed. If we can ensure that that is part of the conversation, that would be really helpful.

**Chair:** Well, I think that is reflected in the fact that the Committee has spent the last few months on the inquiry into policing priorities to ensure that the police are actually providing the level of service and focusing on the things that the public want. Please rest assured that this Committee is very focused on getting the very best out of our police forces and supporting the many excellent police officers that we have serving in police forces all around the country. We thank you for your time today.

**Sir Mark Rowley:** Thank you very much.