

## Home Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: [The work of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, HC 23](#)

Tuesday 11 May 2021

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Simon Fell; Tim Loughton; Stuart C McDonald.

Questions 56 – 117

#### Witnesses

I: Dame Cressida Dick DBE QPM, Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service; Louisa Rolfe OBE, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service.

[Correspondence from the Commissioner](#)



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Cressida Dick and Louisa Rolfe.

Q56 **Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session of the Home Affairs Select Committee, and we welcome to give evidence to us today Dame Cressida Dick, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, and Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe. Thank you very much for joining us as part of our intermittent evidence sessions on the work of the Commissioner. We are very grateful for your time this afternoon.

You will be aware that we are conducting an inquiry into the IOPC and the police complaints and conduct system at the moment. We wanted to begin by asking you particularly about some of the issues the Metropolitan Police has faced and in particular Operation Midland. How far have you now implemented the recommendations of the Henriques report?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you for having us here this afternoon. I would like to start by saying, again, how very, very sorry I am at the awful and horrible impact that Midland had on a number of individuals. I have apologised personally to Lord Bramall and Lady Brittan. I have listened to their testament, if you like, and I know Lady Brittan was here in front of this Committee not long ago. It is hard to hear what they say.

There were many mistakes made in Midland. My job as Commissioner has been to make sure that we reduce, as far as we possibly can, the risk of any similar mistakes in the future. I am very pleased with the progress that we have made. You may possibly be aware—I do not expect you to have absorbed it—that in the public domain as of yesterday is comprehensive detail on all the recommendations in Sir Richard’s report, where we have got to with those and, indeed, where we have got to with the Her Majesty’s Inspectorate report and the Independent Office for Police Conduct report.

I can say with some confidence that I believe we have transformed the way we deal with a number of different issues in the Met. I set up an operation called Larimar under a Deputy Assistant Commissioner and they have, with a team, really driven forward a huge change in the way in which we deal with search warrants, in terms of applications and, indeed, the execution of warrants. Critically, we have changed a number of our processes in relation to how we work with the media and that very important point about identifying people, particularly people with a high public profile. We have implemented some significant changes in the way in which we investigate and go about investigations into historic child sexual abuse and associated investigations. We have changed the way we communicate with people who are regarded at that point as possible or actual suspects.



A very important point that you will be aware of is that we have made it extremely clear to all our staff what we expect from them when they take a report from an individual victim of such a crime. You may know that this is agreed nationally. It is very similar to the phrases that I used when I became Commissioner. We will believe a victim such that we record the crime allegation. From that point on, we will investigate impartially and with an open mind to establish the facts.

We have made some very substantial changes. We have made some massive progress in implementing all the recommendations. I hope that will go some way to reassure people—undoubtedly, many people were very concerned about what happened, in the public, in the judiciary and, very importantly, those people who were most impacted by this—that they can and should have confidence in the way the Met would work today and would deal with a similar allegation in the future.

**Q57 Tim Loughton:** Commissioner, you have just said that you published yesterday your responses to the Henriques recommendations and that we may be aware of that. I was not aware of that. Is it a coincidence that they were published the day before you were due to appear in front of this Committee where the subject was going to come up, given that it is now more than five years since Henriques was commissioned to make that report by your predecessor?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Of course, this is not the first time we have published updates. Indeed, there has been a publicly available set of updates for some time on our websites, but the Home Office yesterday published my letter to Sir Richard, which was in response to a letter from the Home Secretary, I believe, the Home Secretary having given some commitments at this Committee. That explains that bit of timing. My point is that this is simply the latest-latest, and it was published yesterday. It is very, very comprehensive.

**Q58 Tim Loughton:** Alas, I and other members of the Committee have not seen it.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I am sorry.

**Tim Loughton:** That leaves us at something of a disadvantage. You will have seen the evidence given by Lady Brittan and others, which is deeply alarming. What was your role in Operation Midland? That has not been clear.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** As you know, Operation Midland started in 2014. I was the Assistant Commissioner for specialist crime and operations until the end of 2014. The lead for Operation Midland, as you know, was Deputy Assistant Commissioner Steve Rodhouse, and in the period before I left the Met, just at the beginning of 2015, I was his line manager.

**Q59 Tim Loughton:** The operation was set up in March 2014, at which point you were the Assistant Commissioner in charge of specialist crime and operations. Were you integral in the setting up of Operation Midland?



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**Dame Cressida Dick:** I was fully aware that some allegations had been made, and I appointed Steve Rodhouse, having consulted with the Commissioner of the day, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe. At that point, I appointed him to lead in relation to these allegations and a whole series of other historic child sexual abuse allegations.

Q60 **Tim Loughton:** How closely did DAC Rodhouse report to you, then, while you were in that position?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Midland itself was launched later in the year. DAC Rodhouse kept me periodically updated throughout the period in which I was there. As I say, I was his line manager, but he was a very senior officer and he was in overall charge of all these matters.

Q61 **Tim Loughton:** He still reported to you, so you had oversight of it all.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, absolutely.

Q62 **Tim Loughton:** Were you in post when Carl Beech was first interviewed?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** When he was first interviewed in the Met, no, I was not. Hang on. I need to double-check, actually. I am sorry. When the first allegations came in, I certainly was. There would have been ongoing interviews. I was around when the first allegations came in.

Q63 **Tim Loughton:** You were in that position when Carl Beech was first interviewed, and presumably DAC Rodhouse would have reported back to you, given that this was such a high-profile case.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, indeed.

Q64 **Tim Loughton:** So you were aware of the Beech interviews and the allegation that Beech was making.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes.

Q65 **Tim Loughton:** Therefore, you raised no concerns when another senior officer described those allegations as credible and true.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I was aware. I was not involved in the planning of the press conference when that was said, but I was fully aware of the allegations, absolutely.

Q66 **Tim Loughton:** So you agreed that they were credible and true.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** No. I supported the launch of Operation Midland. I believed that these matters did need investigating, and I still believe that they needed investigating. I am sure you will be aware that Sir Richard Henriques also believed that they needed investigating, and so did Lord Bramall. I believed that they needed investigating at that point in the autumn of 2014.

Q67 **Tim Loughton:** That is not the answer that I am after. Were the allegations credible and true? You are later reported as saying that you winced when you heard the words "credible and true".



**Dame Cressida Dick:** I did wince when they were said. If anybody were to read the transcripts or see the interviews, they would agree that Carl Beech was a very, very, very accomplished liar in many respects. Sir Richard agrees with that. He was able to lie in a credible manner. I knew that the officers who had first spoken to him felt that, in their first impressions from their point of view, this was true. Clearly, there were aspects of what was being said that were very hard to believe on one level. Secondly, absolutely, these allegations, these things that he was saying, needed to be tested, and so they should have been.

Q68 **Tim Loughton:** With respect, Commissioner, the police deal quite a lot with people who are incredibly good liars.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** For sure, yes.

Q69 **Tim Loughton:** Many criminals are pretty good at it. Carl Beech seems to have been particularly good at it. That is your business: dealing with people who tell you, "No, it was not me".

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, that is why it needs investigating.

Q70 **Tim Loughton:** Yes, it absolutely needs to be investigated. To bring it up to now, we are seven years on from when you oversaw the setting up of Operation Midland and we are now five years on from when your successor commissioned the Henriques review, which was only recently published. It was suppressed. Then we had the evidence from Lady Brittan, who has suffered, as her late husband did, for all those years. Quite rightly, you say you have apologised. We acknowledge that and we acknowledge the huge hurt that has been caused to those accused and their families.

Yet just a couple of months ago, when she gave evidence and in a very extensive and very personal interview in the *Daily Mail*, Lady Brittan said, to give some quotes, "I've always believed that a strong moral compass is essential to every public body and especially to police forces". "However, it just seems to me the Metropolitan Police has preferred its corporate or personal ambitions to a strong moral compass". "Not a single person in this case has resigned, lost their job, been fired, demoted or disciplined. Nobody whatsoever". "There has been a little bit of hand-wringing which does not amount to a row of beans". "Police appear"—not "appeared"—"to have a culture which is cover up and flick away".

Those are the recent words of Lady Brittan, who has not been reassured by your apologies and your approaches, those of your predecessor or any of the reports that have come out. That is her impression of the police now on your watch. How do you react to that?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Well, you have said a lot of things there. I will focus on Lady Brittan's comments. I do not agree with everything you said before that, but, in terms of Lady Brittan's comments, she is entirely entitled, of course, to her view. I do not believe that we have lost our moral compass, personally. I absolutely do not. I do not believe that



anything has been covered up. Indeed, my predecessor brought in Sir Richard, who did a very extensive piece of work. Then it was referred, as you know, to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which has done another investigation. We have responded strongly to all the recommendations from those three parties.

I will say it again. I cannot possibly put myself in Lady Brittan's shoes. She has been through a terrible, terrible set of experiences. I am very sorry.

**Q71 Tim Loughton:** Commissioner, again, my concern is this. All these years on, we have had all these terrible revelations, reports from Henriques, Her Majesty's Inspectorate and what the Home Office is trying to find out. There still appears to be a degree of denial about what actually went on and whether things are really now fit for purpose.

Richard Henriques, a highly eminent QC, was commissioned by your predecessor to do this report, which you then sat on. As the HMIC report said, senior officers have been preoccupied with restricting access to the Henriques report. They found that the Metropolitan Police, again under your watch, had no plan to enact the reforms, took an "underwhelming approach to learning the lessons" and did almost nothing for three and a half years.

At the same time as Lady Brittan's interview in the *Mail*—thank goodness the *Mail* has uncovered and revealed the full horror of this stuff—Sir Richard Henriques said, "Confidence in our processes has been gravely damaged". "The operation was conducted in a disordered and chaotic manner and was littered with mistakes, all of which could and should have been avoided by officers who were subsequently promoted". "So far as I know not one of my recommendations has either been accepted or rejected by the Metropolitan Police". "It is now over four years and four months since I handed my review to Lord Hogan-Howe. I am dismayed at the delay in acting upon my recommendations". That was less than three months ago. This is not historic stuff.

The person your predecessor commissioned to look into this properly is far from happy that you and your force are really taking these allegations seriously. It is not historic any more. Contemporaneously, you are not really getting it. Who is wrong?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Again, you have made a lot of statements there. I cannot possibly deal with all of them. I do not agree with all of them. If I go to Sir Richard's comments, the evidence is clear, as I have said—and I will not repeat it—that we have thoroughly responded and thoroughly changed our way of doing things. I am extremely confident in our ability now, through a whole variety of things, to give much higher assurance in relation to our applications for search warrants, our execution of search warrants, the way in which we deal with the media and the way in which we would investigate a crime like this.



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I have had a meeting with Sir Richard; I have spoken to him on the phone. At that first meeting in 2019, I ran through with him where we were with our recommendations, and since then there has been, months and months ago, on a publicly available website, an update with where we are on the various recommendations. We have been pushing on. We have made some enormous changes, and we have been transparent about those changes.

In terms of the early criticism, you quoted the HMI there. As I understand it—some of this, of course, precedes me—our take was that, until the Beech trial was finished and the IOPC had finished its work, we needed to be careful about making wholesale changes. Many of the changes we made were dependent on the National Police Chiefs' Council, on the College of Policing or on the Home Office. I would be delighted, as I have offered to Sir Richard recently and previously, and indeed to other parties, for you to come in, have a look and see what we are doing and how we have done it. You will find no shortage of determination to change and to be transparent about that change.

Q72 **Tim Loughton:** I am sure the Committee would like to take up that invitation.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Please do.

Q73 **Tim Loughton:** I am sure the Committee would have liked to have a more detailed list of exactly what has been done before then. I can only go on what those who have been closest to this investigation are saying. Sir Richard Henriques is one of the closest. A matter of weeks ago, he clearly was very unhappy with the attitude still being taken by the police and the progress or lack of it, as he sees it, that was being made.

In an interview in the *Times*, in response to all these allegations, you said that your officers, who led Operation Midland, did their very best. If they did, you have some officers who should not be working for the Met. The concern is that not a single officer has suffered any consequences, any demotion or any sacking; many have been promoted who were clearly culpable in the whole of this.

Sir Richard Henriques particularly pointed to Witnesses A and B, who are currently being investigated, I gather, by Merseyside Police, to which you have referred this for review, but on the Met's own terms. Witnesses A and B, who corroborated Beech's claims when they came forward in September 2015, were clearly lying and clearly, according to Richard Henriques, should be referred for perverting the course of justice. Why has that not happened? Who is responsible for not referring them for criminal charges?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Again, there are a lot of issues there. In relation to officers and nobody having been subject to proceedings, as you know, the Independent Office for Police Conduct conducted a totally independent investigation. We referred those officers to them to do that. They took some time and they did a detailed investigation, and you know



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the result of that. Sir Richard described the officers as having conducted this investigation “in a conscientious manner and with propriety and honesty”. That is a strong statement, and it was obviously what he felt at that time.

**Q74 Tim Loughton:** That is a statement he subsequently regretted having made, because you have used it as an excuse to whitewash all the criticisms he has made, and he has said so.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I cannot speak for what Sir Richard thinks or why he said what he said. It is not appropriate for me to comment any further on that. In relation to A and B, my sense is that a very well-articulated decision was made. We have put something in the public domain about this. However, we have referred this to another force for review, in effect.

**Q75 Tim Loughton:** Who is responsible for A and B not having been referred for prosecution? Does that fall to you as well?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** The reason I am here is that I am the Commissioner, and I am ultimately accountable for what happens in the Met. I am absolutely content to say that, while I cannot remember the exact date that decision was made, I am here because I am the Commissioner.

**Q76 Tim Loughton:** You are defending the decision that you did not ask for Witnesses A and B to be referred for criminal charges on the basis of what their lies have resulted in.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** We should wait for the outcome from the other force.

**Q77 Tim Loughton:** When six former Home Secretaries say that the inquiry—Operation Midland and everything that goes with it—has harmed faith in the police, do you agree with them?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Midland undoubtedly, first of all, had a huge impact on many individuals, as I have said, and I regret that. Secondly, in a number of ways and for many people, yes, it harmed people’s confidence in the police service generally, but in particular in the Met.

That is why I have set about trying to make sure that we never have anything like this again, looking at our systems, our processes, our training and our officers’ understanding right across the board. We have trained nearly 25,000 officers in a completely different and better way to think about search warrants. We have brought in a whole series of different systems. I want the Metropolitan Police to be the most trusted police service in the world. I said that when I arrived. This has damaged people’s trust to some extent, and we need to carry on making sure that nothing like this happens again.

**Q78 Tim Loughton:** I have one last point that I meant to ask you about. You promoted Deputy Assistant Commissioner Matt Horne to be your head of professional standards in the Met despite the fact that, when he was the



Deputy Chief Constable of Essex, he was found guilty of misconduct and bullying and threatening staff. Indeed, there is a CPS decision pending and possible criminal issues with that. Was that a wise choice?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** He was not promoted, but he came to the Met after the hearing that you have talked about. He had been found, as you know, in relation to misconduct. That is not something that should or does impede people's appointment. It depends upon the circumstances, of course, but as a generality it does not impede people moving, having a further appointment or, indeed, potentially being promoted, although I must say that he was not promoted.

He is a very capable man, and he has been doing an excellent job since he has been in the Met.

Q79 **Tim Loughton:** He has left that position now, though, has he not?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, he is working in our transformation directorate.

Q80 **Tim Loughton:** You made him the head of professional standards, which probably needs a higher-than-average level of integrity and reputation. You still do not regret having put somebody in that position with that background, given all the very sensitive issues contemporaneously going on, associated with Operation Midland and the behaviour of other officers under your command.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I say again that he has done an extremely good job. He is a very talented person. Someone found in relation to misconduct does not lose their job. They are entitled to carry on with their job, and they are entitled to carry on delivering and performing. He is somebody who, in my view, has done an extremely good job on behalf of the public of London. I made that decision with my eyes absolutely open, and, yes, I stand by it and I stand by him.

Q81 **Chair:** We may have some further questions on some of the detail in writing once we have had a chance to thoroughly go through the copy of the letter you have sent to Richard Henriques, which has further detail in it. Part of the reason we are keen to pursue this with you is that this was such an awful case and things went so badly wrong, as you have recognised. We have heard from Lady Brittan just how painful and difficult that was, in particular them also not having any further information before Lady Brittan's husband died. There were awful experiences there.

That is what also makes it so shocking that it took so long for any further follow-up action to be taken in implementing the Henriques report. That raises the wider issues for us that have come up time and time again as part of our inquiry. When problems are raised, perhaps through the IOPC or perhaps through the HMIC, there is no system for proper follow-up to make sure that recommendations are implemented in practice.

If you can just take the example of the search warrants, why did it take



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three years, from 2016 to 2019, for proper action to be taken to address the problem with search warrants that Richard Henriques had identified?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** It would be wrong to suggest that no actions had been taken; there had been a number. As I say, people were being cautious, because they did not want to prejudice the trial of Carl Beech and they did not want to prejudge what the IOPC would come up with.

Q82 **Chair:** You will need to explain that to me, because I cannot see why those two things would prevent you putting in place proper training on the application of search warrants. The problem that had been identified was that officers were not getting proper training, and did not properly understand the evidence base and the things they needed to have in place to get a search warrant lawfully. I just do not see why sorting that problem out would somehow prejudice the trial or the IOPC investigation. They seem to be completely unrelated.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** A number of changes were made, including in relation to search warrants. I absolutely acknowledge that the huge change we have made in the last 18 months or two years is a big, big, big step forward. For example, we have brought in a new computerised system for all search warrants, which is linked neatly to the courts.

Q83 **Chair:** Let me interrupt you briefly on that point, then. What is the good reason why that could not have been done in 2016 straight after the Henriques report?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I was not there when it first landed, but my sense, as I say, is that there were these great big other things happening. The IOPC very specifically was looking at the issues of search warrants and how we ought to respond to that. When I arrived as Commissioner, I had a spreadsheet of all the different changes that have been made, but we wanted to see what else they would suggest. That has led to this full-time team, really a large team, going at it right across. We are a big organisation. We are bringing in a new system. It sounds easy; it is not as easy as all that. We are bringing in new training for everybody and new supervision, training up all the inspectors. We have trained thousands of those. We are bringing in whole sets of practice and policy.

Q84 **Chair:** That all sounds very good and sensible, to provide everybody with training in an area where clearly training had been flawed previously and there was a gap in people's knowledge. Again, it is really hard to understand why it would take three years to start training. I completely understand that you might have kept things open, and you might need to further amend things once more information came through.

I appreciate that some of this predates your time and so on. Once you had had this big gap identified, it is very hard for us to understand why police forces, as institutions, do not have systems in place to make sure that, when you have such a big report as the Henriques report, such a big failing as Operation Midland, follow-up action is taken swiftly.



**Dame Cressida Dick:** I do not totally agree with the HMIC report, but I accept that what we have done since has been real systemic change. Although the later changes started before the IOPC report really landed, it was given a huge boost by the HMIC and the IOPC. What we have done has changed national practice. As I said, we have worked really closely with the College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council, and we have led the way with that.

It would be absolutely wrong for me to suggest that nothing was happening before that. Of course there was already training for people in how to do search warrants. There was already a system, a paper-based system. There were already levels of supervision expected. I am just talking about search warrants. There could be a whole series of other things I could talk about. It is not that nothing happened after Sir Richard's report landed. It is just that, once Beech's trial had finished and the IOPC report was about to arrive, it was turbocharged, by me, personally, to say, "This is a matter of public confidence and we really need to show what we are doing here. We need to change things very quickly".

- Q85 **Chair:** If there was a clear recommendation, it was clearly high profile and there was clearly a problem, and it took three years for that turbocharging and serious implementation to take place, what hope can there be that less high-profile reports will be implemented, or that less high-profile recommendations from either the IOPC or the HMIC will ever be implemented in practice? The reason I am pushing you on this is that, time and again, we have heard from cases where reports have been done, recommendations have been made and police forces, not just yours but all across the country, have simply not implemented them and they have sat on a shelf. If such a high-profile report could sit on a shelf, what confidence can we have that other reports and recommendations will be implemented?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I say this again; it is not that nothing happened. I would be delighted to write to you to explain what happened in that interim period. It would be wrong for me to suggest that everybody just sat and waited. No, in relation to every single recommendation we accepted or partially accepted, there was movement, but it has subsequently been turbocharged.

Your point is well made. My strategy as Commissioner is to ensure that we really learn. We learn from the good and the bad. It is a core part of our strategy. I have Helen Ball, you know, my Assistant Commissioner for professionalism, who is in charge of our organisational learning, among other things. We have put in place a whole series of processes to make sure that, where we should, we absolutely get on quickly implementing our recommendations.

You will be aware that we are subject to thousands—I am not exaggerating—of recommendations every year, from coroners, the IOPC, the HMIC and a variety of other bodies, regulatory, accountability and



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sometimes just random bodies, all of which think, "What they need to do is this, this and this". We cannot necessarily do all those things and certainly not all at the same time. Sometimes, we do not agree with the recommendation. We did not agree with all Sir Richard's recommendations.

I absolutely take your point that this was a very important case. You can be assured that things have changed hugely now. You can be assured that we have a process in place to make sure that, when significant recommendations land, we get on to them. The governance that goes right up to me, chairing the management board, is very strong on that.

**Q86 Chair:** Do you have a list of all the IOPC and HMIC reports, and their recommendations, that have come out for the Met, say even over the last two years, and the recommendations you have accepted that have not yet been implemented?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I do not have it with me but I could certainly show you those, yes.

**Q87 Chair:** But there is a list. There is a system that exists, that takes account and has a list of all the different recommendations and whether they have been implemented.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, absolutely. Sorry to talk in boring governance terms, but we have a risk and assurance board whose job it is to make sure we are implementing the key recommendations. As I say, we cannot do all of them. We do not accept all of them and we do not do all of them at the same time, but we keep on top of that. It would include, for example, audit recommendations, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner recommendations and various other things like that. Several of our regulatory bodies have commented on the way in which we govern that kind of thing.

**Q88 Chair:** It would be really helpful to have a list of the reports and the numbers of recommendations that have been either implemented or not implemented, and your monitoring processes for following those. That would be immensely helpful.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** HMIC and IOPC.

**Chair:** Yes, HMIC and IOPC. If there is any other additional significant category that you think should be treated in the same way, that would be really helpful as well.

We wanted to move on to some of the issues raised around the policing of the vigil at Clapham Common.

**Q89 Simon Fell:** Thank you, Commissioner, for joining us and for your time. I would like to start with the policing plan for the vigil on 13 March. Could you describe how you factored the gendered nature of this process into that plan? I am asking in particular because we have had quite a lot of



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evidence, both written and in the sessions we held in person, where people spoke about a good number of male police officers joining the protest and trying to disperse the protest as well. I am interested in your view on that and why there were so many male officers there that evening.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I have a couple of introductory comments about the vigil that you are referring to. We were utterly outraged at the murder of Sarah Everard. We recognised just how upset and angry so many people in London and well beyond were. My colleagues felt betrayed and appalled by what is alleged to have happened.

If you look at our documentation, you can see that there was a real sense of the sensitivities that there would be in relation to this proposed vigil. You will remember we were policing during the pandemic wave 2, tier 4 regulations. You will be aware that those regulations had changed many, many times over the previous year and sometimes had appeared, to members of the public at least, somewhat ambiguous. My officers had been wrestling throughout the year with events, protests and public order matters in those various regulations. As the HMIC report says—and I would commend it to you—we found ourselves in a very complex and, in some senses, invidious position that day.

You will be aware that, for this purpose, tier 4, every day we had been dispersing events and/or protests. We had been issuing tickets occasionally. More than occasionally we had made arrests. We had had officers injured. Sadly, in upholding that law and those regulations in the pandemic, we had had to disperse people at funerals, weddings, wakes, parties and, as you know, a huge number of gatherings of various sorts, unlicensed music events as an example. That very day, we attended two other vigils. One was for a murder victim. We dispersed the people there after they had gathered and come together in a tight crowd for a protracted period. Another was in relation to a Tamil person who had died, where, after the crowd would not disperse, having gone through our three Es, and indeed given some time before that dispersal, we had used enforcement action.

I say all this because I want you to know that my officers take no pleasure in this. It is our job to uphold the law. It is our job to keep people safe. We were, and indeed are, in a pandemic, at a very difficult time. We would much rather not be stopping people having their fun, expressing themselves or gathering for whatever purpose, but that was the job, to be able to uphold the regulations. Nobody wanted the outcome that we saw. I am sure we will answer more questions about the vigil and the HMIC report, no doubt.

In terms of the gendered nature, you may be aware that we had about six hours of people on Clapham Common that afternoon, coming in ones and twos, small household groups, to lay flowers. We had a very low-key police presence there. Those were mostly local neighbourhood officers, but there were a large number of women among them.



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The officers, male and female, who attended and dealt with what eventuated when the peaceful, respectful vigil turned into a very densely packed and large gathering, more like a protest rally than a vigil, have been commended in the HMIC report for their thoughtfulness, their sensibleness, the way in which they took a very proportionate approach, the way they stayed very calm in the face of vile abuse and their patience. Indeed, you will be aware that the HMIC looked at body-worn video extensively and described, under really difficult circumstances, exemplary conduct by the officers and no evidence of heavy-handedness whatsoever, despite watching hours of body-worn video.

It has been suggested since that everything would be better and different if we had had all-female police support units, as we call them, the public order trained officers. I personally considered this the day before and I know my gold commander considered it, although I cannot say exactly when he considered it. There are two issues. First, it is not practical for us to do that, certainly at such short notice. Secondly, it is hugely divisive among my people. I have subsequently taken a straw poll, and men and women alike are not keen on this idea that, when you have a primarily female rally or protest, we will send only women in to deal with that. I know some people might wish to debate that. I can say that it was considered, it was not practical and we did not do it.

It would be wrong to say that there were an unusual number of men there. Far from it: it was proportionate to our public order resources.

**Q90 Simon Fell:** The witnesses we had speak to us spoke about a point in the evening where the tone of the vigil shifted. It went from being a peaceful process, people going in ones and twos, as you say, to a gathering crowd number, where your officers then decided to take action. The people we spoke to who were stood on the bandstand could not identify what the motivating moment was for those officers to come forward and for that action to be taken. I am interested in your view as to what that shift was and why they decided to take action at that point.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I will bring Louisa in, just to save my voice. We are both equally well versed, but Louisa is the Assistant Commissioner for that bit of the business.

**Louisa Rolfe:** HMIC took a detailed look at this point in particular. It described officers for some 90 minutes patiently pleading with people who were on the bandstand, chanting and refusing to leave. The gold commander and the silver commander's log as to decisions made were very clear that there was a strategy of engaging and encouraging people to disperse. Some of that was successful.

When the crowd gathered at just before 6 pm to nearly 1,500, quite tightly packed around the bandstand, a great number of people were receptive to police engagement and encouragement, and did disperse. There were a small number, surrounded by still quite a large crowd, on the bandstand, who, despite nearly 90 minutes, as described by HMIC, of



patiently pleading, did not. It is quite clear, when you look at the decision log of the commanders in charge of the event, that the point was reached where the public could not be kept safe without officers actively removing those individuals.

**Q91 Simon Fell:** I appreciate that. I should say that the report makes that absolutely clear. The last question from me is around communications on the day itself. The report makes clear that there were gaps between what the silver command knew and what the gold command knew, and the messages that were being passed backwards and forwards between them. This was around the number of people at the event and whether there was a PA system on the bandstand. Those feel like essential pieces of information for you to know to be able to police effectively. What lessons have you learned from this? How will you be changing your practice as a result of it?

**Louisa Rolfe:** We take all of that incredibly seriously. As discussed previously on other matters with the Committee, we ensure that we address any HMIC report recommendation effectively. In addition, we are holding a formal debrief of the vigil and the policing of the vigil with our teams, to ensure that any point of learning is logged and we take a very active approach to addressing it in our future operations. HMIC was very clear in its assessment of this. It identified a number of points of learning for us, but all those, in total, were well within the bounds of what goes well or less well in any policing operation. It certainly did not identify that those were matters that would have fundamentally changed the outcome.

**Q92 Ms Abbott:** The Metropolitan Police will be aware that people up and down the country were shocked at the scenes they saw of police handling the women on the vigil. One of the things that stakeholders have said to us is that local stakeholders, notably the local police, believed that the vigil would go ahead anyway and the focus should be on enabling it to go ahead lawfully. I understand that advice was rejected by senior officers at Scotland Yard. Is it true you rejected the advice of local police? Why did you do so?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** No, it is not true. Louisa may want to supplement what I say. You talked about people being shocked by the images. I absolutely understand that some people were upset by them. I would underline again that the HMIC report points out how well the officers conducted themselves at the time, that they were not heavy handed at all and that they took a very proportionate approach. They did not rush in. As Louisa has said, they spent a long time trying to explain, engage and encourage people to behave differently. I understand at one point an independent person asked everybody to leave, and that just resulted in a huge increase in abuse towards the police and a really clear statement from some people on the bandstand that nobody was going anywhere.

It is important to remember that, as far as I am aware, nobody at that event was injured. We had a number of arrests; it is true, but seven were de-arrested very quickly when they gave their names and addresses,



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which they had been asked to give on multiple occasions before, but they had refused. I do not regard it as heavy-handed action, far from it actually.

In terms of going ahead or not, again I would refer you to the HMIC report. They asked the question, "Is there any way that this could have been planned for as a more Covid-friendly event?" In effect, "Could it have gone ahead?" They came to the conclusion that it could not, because once the organisers had publicised hugely the fact that this thing might happen, as they did, we knew that there would be several thousands. Clearly, there were several thousand people intent on coming even the day before, and probably that would have multiplied and multiplied. The focal point was the bandstand.

The individuals who wanted to organise this event did not, in the view of our gold commander, have the capability at all, at such short notice, to ensure that people did not come in together in a large crowd at the bandstand. We knew very early on that there were a small number of groups who were intent on coming who were absolutely not there for the kind of respectful, peaceful and not risky, in so many ways, scenes that we saw earlier on in the afternoon. They would absolutely want to gather people into a large crowd. It was not likely to be practical.

It is worth remembering just how quickly this all happened, in terms of the three days before the vigil. The moment when the local police were informed, as they always would, they contacted the central command to say, "People have come in and asked about doing something like this". I cannot remember the exact words. As they always do, particularly in the time of Covid, they referred that to the central command. They would if it was anything at all complex or different from what they had been dealing with before. All Covid events have been referred to the central command, who came and worked with the local team, and indeed engaged in multiple conversations with Reclaim These Streets.

**Louisa Rolfe:** As the Commissioner said, there was a very short time in which to address this matter. Reclaim These Streets first contacted the local team on the evening of Wednesday 10 March. At that point, their extensive advertising had led to more than 2,000 people expressing an interest in attending. That number increased to nearly 6,000 by the Friday. At that first meeting on Thursday the 11th, local officers raised some concerns about the compatibility of any event with the all-tiers regulations.

You mentioned in particular the perceived difference between the local officers and our HQ. HMIC looked at this specific point and did not consider our central command as unreceptive, un-co-operative or insensitive, but actually faithfully pursuing a policy of consistency, which HMIC broadly supported. Also, when they looked at our decision-making about whether we could allow an event to go ahead, they were very clear that there were clear reasons, as the Commissioner said, why it was not



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a realistic option. They said that, on balance, we acted appropriately in taking as our starting point a desire for consistency.

I am sure you might want to ask about our interpretations of the regulations. They were very clear that we did satisfy all the requirements of considering the all-tier regulations but also articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act. Their conclusion was that our thought processes and actions satisfied all those requirements.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** On a number of occasions, the organisers asked for a guarantee of no prosecution. That is not something that a police service can do before an event happens. It is just not possible. We could not possibly give that guarantee.

Q93 **Ms Abbott:** Did local stakeholders tell you, or did they not, that, whatever happened, there was going to be some sort of vigil on Clapham Common?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I think we all knew that something was likely to eventuate, not least because, by the time the organisers were speaking to us, as Louisa has said, it had been widely advertised. It was quite plausible that some people would still come. Indeed, people came for six hours in the afternoon and laid flowers very respectfully, with no issues at all. We always knew that it was perfectly possible that other people would come in the evening. It was possible that they might gather. We will never know, but my own view is that the organisers deciding on the Saturday morning to say it was not going ahead reduced the numbers hugely and therefore reduced the pandemic risk.

Q94 **Ms Abbott:** It was of course an essentially peaceful vigil. Very many women in London and elsewhere felt very strongly about what had happened to Sarah Everard. The Duchess of Cambridge attended the vigil, which is relatively unusual for a vigil of that nature, which points to its essentially peaceful nature. What steps did you and your senior officers take to engage with the organisers of this peaceful vigil and explain how it could proceed lawfully?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I will ask Louisa to answer that question. Suffice to say, I agree totally with you that, in the afternoon, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people came, over a six-hour period. The police presence was extremely low and there simply to reassure and help people if they needed any help. There were no issues at all. At about 6 pm, there was a massive change, when people brought people together in a large, very densely packed crowd around the bandstand. I will ask Louisa to talk about the engagement with the organisers, which was extensive.

**Louisa Rolfe:** Reclaim These Streets first contacted the police on Wednesday the 10th in the evening. There was a first meeting on Thursday the 11th, where we raised some concerns about the organisation of a vigil and the compatibility with the all-tier regulations.



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The Reclaim These Streets lawyers wrote to us also on the 11th and we responded to them on the 12th. We had another meeting with them on the 12th. You will be aware that, on Friday the 12th, there was a High Court hearing, which started at 3.45 pm. We had a third meeting with them at 7 pm on Friday the 12th. At that point, the written judgment had not been received.

In terms of allowing an event to lawfully go ahead, at the time we were in tier 4 of the regulations. Tier 4 contained a general prohibition on gatherings of more than two people from separate households. Our assessment was that the vigil came within this prohibition, given its scale, timing and location. Tier 4 contained no specified exception for protest. A person attending a gathering in contravention of those regulations could be committing an offence unless they have a reasonable excuse. In terms of the organisers asking us to provide a guarantee of no action, the reasonable excuse is actually for an individual to set out, if they face a criminal prosecution. It is not something the police can set out beforehand.

In considering any event, we always consider whether our actions could lead to an interference with somebody's human rights. Our actions have to be necessary and proportionate. It is not our place to decide if an event itself will be lawful or not. We took into account the Court of Appeal ruling in the case of Dolan, which set out that the regulations are not incompatible with human rights, given that there is the possibility of someone having a reasonable excuse to be involved in a gathering. Actually, that case also said that, in the vast majority of cases, it may be that there is no reasonable excuse. There was a powerful argument that the restrictions, which were there to protect public health, were, in themselves, proportionate. That was our understanding of the law.

As I have said, our thought process concluded that what the organisers were describing as an event to go ahead could not go ahead lawfully at that time. However, we were working with them as much as we could to talk about alternatives, such as lighting a candle on your doorstep or other events that have gone on like Clap for Carers. We tried very hard in the time we had available. On Friday, the numbers we anticipated attending had swelled to nearly 6,000. There was a very limited time available for planning and the fact that our planning would require us to make some assumptions about who might be attending. The organisers had done their level best to identify how they might marshal people and the actions they might take. Our assessment was that, despite their best efforts, it was not anywhere near the scale required for an event of that size.

**Q95 Ms Abbott:** In the court hearing that you spoke about, which took place, I think, on Friday, it is true that the judge did not unequivocally say that the vigil was unlawful.

**Louisa Rolfe:** Reclaim These Streets sought particular declarations from the judge and the judge declined to make those declarations. He



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concluded that it was possible that the outcome of applying the relevant tests in relation to article 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act, so freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, was that a particular protest or demonstration should not go ahead. Reclaim These Streets was seeking from us a guarantee of no enforcement or prosecution. In light of our understanding of the numbers attending, we could not make that guarantee. Our assessment of the High Court judgment was that the judge was saying it is entirely feasible that our assessment might be that a protest or demonstration may not go ahead.

**Q96 Ms Abbott:** It might be. It was not unequivocally the case that this particular vigil was illegal. That is the point.

**Louisa Rolfe:** The point there is that the law is really clear that there is not a blanket ban on any kind of event. The police must take into account people's rights under the Human Rights Act and, therefore, you must consider every event on its merits. You must go through that decision-making process. HMIC looked very carefully at our decision-making, and concluded that our thought processes and actions had satisfied all those requirements and that our conclusion that the event should not go ahead was reasonable.

**Q97 Ms Abbott:** Are you then telling this Committee that the Metropolitan Police did everything it could have done to work with the organisers?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** We did. More than that, and the HMIC report shows this, we had a reasonable, sensible and highly engaged approach. We had our top public order commanders, the most experienced in the country and possibly the world, engaged. The strategy we worked to, the general Covid strategy and the specific on the day, was good. We had a strong team. The planning and engagement with the organisers—and I will come back to that—was good. Both the commanders in their decisions and the officers on the ground, who were subject to vile abuse and hostility, acted really sensibly. Some of the very experienced officers I have spoken to said it was one of the most, if not the most, difficult and unpleasant events they have ever been at, in terms of the verbal abuse they were suffering.

We did not just engage with the organisers. We engaged much more widely, as you might expect. Along with the Deputy Commissioner and two of my commanders, I was personally very heavily engaged on the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, talking to leaders in London, City Hall, the Home Office and, indeed, Ministers at the Home Office about all the events, the terrible death of Sarah and everything that surrounded it. Also, very specifically, we talked about this event on the Saturday.

I put a lot of time into talking to people about how this event might go and what we needed to do so that people could express their absolutely understandable and legitimate outrage, not just about Sarah's murder but about violence against women more generally. How could we channel



that in other ways, in the sort of way that Louisa has said? We were very comprehensive in our engagement approach.

**Q98 Stuart C McDonald:** Thanks to our witnesses. As I understand it, the HMIC report said that police can and should advise on whether enforcement action is likely to be taken. That seems a little bit inconsistent with what has been said earlier. It is not so much a question of whether there can be blanket guarantees of arrests and prosecutions, but advice could have been given about the likelihood of enforcement action. Was that sort of detailed advice given?

**Louisa Rolfe:** HMIC might be referring to our letter. We have a generic letter that we have used to do our best to explain very clearly the all-tier restrictions and regulations as we have gone through the pandemic, to ensure that organisers have information. HMIC gave us feedback to suggest that we might set out in more detail what might constitute a reasonable excuse. We do not necessarily agree with that.

Having considered the law, our view is that there is not an exhaustive list of reasonable excuses. There could be many. Having said that, in terms of our approach to this and ensuring that people have the best advice, our difficulty in working through this with the organisers is that they sought an absolute, watertight guarantee that there would be no action taken against organisers or those present at the vigil. That is something we could not offer because our officers have discretion.

**Q99 Stuart C McDonald:** I get that, but both of you have spent quite a lot of the last few minutes saying that everything was absolutely fine up until a certain point. Was it made known in advance that, for example, families coming to lay flowers would be absolutely fine and no enforcement action would be taken at that stage, but, at the stage of speeches from a bandstand, you would have to consider intervention? Did that sort of discussion take place, or was it a blanket yes or no to the whole day?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** The essential thing to think about here is gatherings and the Covid risk. Rather obviously, these are not our regulations. These are the Government's and Parliament's regulations. As I said, we were, and still are actually, even under the latest set of regulations, going many, many times a day to different parts of London where people have gathered, potentially in contravention of the regulations. That was repeated, probably, dozens and dozens of times a day during tier 4. The officer's job is to assess the situation, to engage with people, to explain and to say, "This is not actually allowed. As far as we can tell, what you are doing is not allowed under the regulations".

**Q100 Stuart C McDonald:** I am absolutely happy to discuss the difficulty with the regulations and the lack of clarity there, but I am getting to the point here. Is there something that could have been done better, in the sense of, rather than just saying, "You are not having an event", having a more detailed discussion? That seems to be what that report was getting at. It is saying, "Up to this point, there is no issue with families coming and



laying flowers, and the police will not intervene, but, if we get to a stage where a speech has been made from a bandstand and crowds are gathering, we may have to intervene". That seems to be what the inspectorate report was getting at.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I will bring Louisa in and she will answer your question. I am trying to say that the officers have to assess things. They then have to make some decisions. If people disperse from what appears to be an unlawful and risky gathering, that is absolutely fine. They have the power to ask people to disperse. In these circumstances, enforcement action is only ever taken where people refuse to disperse. They refuse to move. They are unwilling to stop the gathering. That is what we mean by enforcement in this way, or where they refuse to accept a fixed penalty notice and do not give their names and addresses, in which case they could be arrested.

**Louisa Rolfe:** We can be really clear that we will have explained to the organisers our four Es approach, as the Commissioner has just said. We will have set out that we would always seek to engage, explain and encourage people before any enforcement action is taken. That would have been very clear. Our interpretation of the law is that it is not for us to define the reasonable excuse. There is not an exhaustive list of reasonable excuses for people leaving home and coming. It is a matter for the organisers or those attending to work out what their reasonable excuse is. It is very clear that it is not something for us to predetermine.

Q101 **Stuart C McDonald:** I will leave that there, but all I am doing is flagging up the point. I think I am quoting directly from the report here: "Our position is that the police can and should advise as to whether or not a protest is likely to be subject to enforcement action". Let us say I come to you tomorrow and say, "I want to have a vigil or some form of protest at a different park in London at the start of June", with slightly more notice this time. How do you go about engaging with me? What is it you would need to know from me to decide whether that gathering might be lawful?

**Louisa Rolfe:** If we set aside the pandemic and all-tiers regulations for one moment, with any engagement around an event, we would always do our level best to explain the policing approach we would take. Often, with larger organisations that come regularly to London to protest, we will have an established relationship with our police liaison team. When they have disclosed the intent of their protest, we might set out any concerns we have and the likelihood of us seeking to impose any restrictions. We would always seek to then communicate that very early.

If we were seeking to use sections 12 or 14 of the Public Order Act to impose restrictions on a procession or an assembly, the likelihood is that we would supply those in writing beforehand. We would set out the circumstances in which people might find themselves liable to enforcement action or arrest. As the Commissioner has said, we always



take an approach of seeking to engage, explain and encourage people to comply.

**Q102 Stuart C McDonald:** You put aside the Covid regs for a minute. With them included, how do you go about making an assessment as to whether my colleagues and I would have a reasonable excuse to gather? I want to get at how difficult a decision and how difficult a process this is for you and what we, as legislators, might be able to do to make your position easier.

**Louisa Rolfe:** The challenge there is that the reasonable excuse is for you to determine, not me, beforehand. That is the challenge. However, we would do our best. Because of the complexity of the regulations, throughout the pandemic, we have a letter that is published and available on our website that sets out the impact of the regulations for people seeking to protest or assemble, and what that means. The National Police Chiefs' Council guidance has been published and is accessible and widely available as well. We have tried incredibly hard to be consistent.

It is really important that we would always have a conversation with organisers, but also in our own consideration as to the police involvement. Many protests happen every day that have no requirement for police involvement at all, setting to one side the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions. However, we always consider the human rights element as well, particularly articles 10 and 11. It is really clear in legislation, but also HMIC drew this out in its report, that we must consider every particular event. Any restrictions we feel we should impose or any action we must take should be proportionate and necessary. Those are qualified rights. They are not absolute rights and, therefore, it might be entirely proportionate to restrict those rights.

**Q103 Stuart C McDonald:** For a while, it seemed that the Met's position was essentially that any sort of gathering or protest was not sufficient to justify a reasonable excuse. You are shaking your head. How do you go about that exercise then? How do you decide whether you are going to support a gathering and work with organisers, or not, as was the case here? How did you make that call? What factors were there?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I want to take it back to the tier 4 regulations. As Louisa has said, a gathering of more than two persons is not allowed within the regulations, except for the exhaustive list of exceptions. There are 20 exceptions, all of which have several subsections. Protest is not one of those.

Here, I am trying to emphasise that, for the period of tier 4, tens and tens of thousands of people who wanted events in London have not been able to have them, including people who wanted to protest. Every day, people who wanted to have a protest have not gone ahead with it, because they have realised that it is socially irresponsible and/or that they could find themselves subject to enforcement action. They have not had their protests. A few people have come out occasionally and some of



those have immediately dispersed when we have gone to speak to them. Others have been subject to enforcement action.

I do not know whether any of those have subsequently said, "I had a reasonable excuse" and they are going to claim that at court. That of course is their entitlement, but it is not our job to look ahead and say, "That could be a reasonable excuse" or "That could not be a reasonable excuse". It really is not.

Q104 **Stuart C McDonald:** You are then basically saying that you are still taking the approach that nobody can gather for a protest.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I am saying that, as an example, if you wanted to protest—

Q105 **Stuart C McDonald:** You would say you are not going to co-operate with me as the organiser because it is not allowed under the Covid regulations. You would leave it for me after the event, if I was given a fixed penalty notice or whatever else, to establish whether I had a reasonable excuse.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I am not saying that at all. I am saying, in any circumstances, Covid or otherwise, it is not our job to organise your protest. It is our job to engage with you, to explain the law, to explain how we work and to keep up a communication with you. It is not our job to tell you how to do your event. If you wanted to walk up and down outside Parliament with a placard, by yourself, of course that would, very obviously, be lawful. In my personal view, there are only very limited times when it is likely that any court would find that you had a reasonable excuse for a gathering. When we are thinking about this, we must go through the balancing act of people's rights, and we did.

Q106 **Stuart C McDonald:** What factors do you take into account? That is what I do not have a clue about. What is it you take into account when you are doing that balancing act? By the way, I am as critical of the position that we are putting you in as I am of the actual decisions you have made. That is what I am getting at. What was the source of this problem? I do not understand how you make that decision, this balancing act.

**Louisa Rolfe:** Within the HMIC report, it sets out a critique of the gold commander's balancing act in those and was very supportive of that. Our presumption in policing is that people have the right to assemble. They have a right to express their views and, therefore, we would seek to not inhibit that right or interfere with it. If we are considering any police action that might interfere with it, it should be necessary and proportionate.

One thing we took into account throughout the pandemic was the Court of Appeal case of Dolan, where the court has set out that there was powerful public interest behind the restrictions. There is also a powerful



argument that the restrictions in themselves were a proportionate interference with rights, because they were there to protect public health.

However, we are very clear that it is not our role to ban protests. Whenever people came forward to suggest they wanted to hold a gathering during tiers 1, 2, 3 and 4, we would consider. We would advise that, because there is a general prohibition on gatherings of more than two in tier 4, it would be a matter for you, as organiser, to work out your reasonable excuse and that you might face enforcement action.

**Q107 Stuart C McDonald:** You referred to the role and engagement you had with the Home Office, Ministers and so on. One newspaper report put it like this: "A message was sent to all police chiefs making Patel's position clear. She wanted them to stop people gathering at vigils. She also promised she would personally urge people not to gather—but she never did". What was the engagement with the Home Office? Did the Home Secretary herself ask the police to stop people attending at these vigils?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** As I indicated earlier, there were very extensive conversations between me, the National Police Chiefs' Council at one point and a number of leaders across London, at City Hall and in the Home Office. It is worth pointing out that, in the previous weeks, and indeed the week after, senior politicians of several flavours, if you like, have sent out very helpful messages to people that, in the light of the pandemic, gathering for the purposes of protest is unwise. Sometimes they have gone further than that: "Please do not do it". That has been really helpful for us.

As you say, we are in a difficult position here. We are all trying to keep safe and keep people safe. We know that the people who have brought in the regulations, the Secretary of State herself and the Mayor of London have generally not wanted people to gather for obvious health reasons during tier 4.

**Q108 Stuart C McDonald:** Did the Home Secretary specifically ask police to stop people attending at the vigils?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I genuinely cannot remember what the message was that went out from the National Police Chiefs' Council on the Friday morning. Suffice to say, it is true that there was a conversation on the Friday morning, which on that occasion did not involve the Home Secretary. It is talked about in the HMIC report. There was a sense that Ministers agreed, and later on I had a very strong sense that the Secretary of State agreed, with my desire, which I had been banging on about for a long time. That was to encourage people to find other ways to express their undoubted and completely understandable outrage.

**Q109 Stuart C McDonald:** Surely there is a difference between politicians discouraging people from attending protests and making clear what politicians, particularly a Secretary of State, think the police should do. That infringes on your operational independence, does it not?



**Dame Cressida Dick:** I cannot remember what the National Police Chiefs' Council put out. I absolutely cannot, nor would I ever actually discuss the private conversations I personally have had. In my case, I am accountable to the Mayor and I am his policing adviser. In some ways, I am also accountable to the Home Secretary. I do not discuss the details of those conversations. Absolutely, it would be wrong for any elected politician to tell the police how to police a particular event.

That is why I was so very concerned by the way in which many senior politicians, not the Secretary of State, jumped to conclusions, without knowing the facts, afterwards. They judged the way the police had acted very hastily, in a way that could be—and in some of the conversations I had with people actually was—designed to say, “For this sort of cause, forgive me, but forget your job, which is to uphold the law impartially, proportionately and where necessary. Forget your job about being impartial. You need to let a group like this do whatever they like. On the other hand, I would not like you do that with a group over there”. That is not the British model of policing and it really concerns me.

It is great for policing to have the support of the Secretary of State or the Mayor in what we are trying to achieve. It absolutely is. They should not direct us operationally.

Q110 **Chair:** Can I ask some quick follow-up questions? You said earlier that the deployment of male officers was proportionate to your public order resources. What is the male-female officer split in your public order teams?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I will have to come back to you to give you an accurate answer. I do not know, I am afraid.

Q111 **Chair:** Do you have a sense of roughly ballpark?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I do not know. I have asked that question—whether we had an unusual number of either—and I think it was about normal, but I would need to come back to you, unless Louisa knows.

**Louisa Rolfe:** No, I am afraid I do not know.

Q112 **Chair:** The reason I ask is that, as Simon Fell raised earlier, a lot of the concerns raised with us were about the impact of having a large number of male police officers in a gathering that was predominantly women. As part of your plan, did you recognise that, if you chose to take enforcement action, that would mean you might well need to send predominantly male officers into what had started as a vigil with predominantly women there? This was in a context where the vigil or the protest was about violence against women and the awful circumstances not just of Sarah Everard's death but of the arrest of a police officer. Therefore, the context of deploying police officers for enforcement would be a much more sensitive one and potentially a counterproductive one.



**Dame Cressida Dick:** I was not in command on the day. As you know, that is not our model. Absolutely, this is something we discussed the day before. I am very proud of my male and female officers. I understand the sensitivities. I also understand that the images in that context looked very powerful to people. Public order policing, however restrained they are, which they were, or however professional, which they were, can be quite messy. We are hands-on when we arrest people, sometimes with multiple numbers of people, in order to keep them safe. Absolutely, it was considered, but I have already told you that we and I decided that it was not appropriate for us to put all female or try to put extra female in there.

Q113 **Chair:** I understand that in terms of the practicalities of your policing decisions. I am interested in whether that was taken into account in terms of the decision about the proportionality and the effectiveness of enforcement decisions during that period, when those things are being weighed up in the balance. The concerns that are being raised with us were not about whether there should be a particular approach to one group rather than another, or whether they were preferred. There was something about this particular context and a police officer having been arrested that would make you, as a force, take a different approach because of that context. It is not because of it being a favoured or unfavoured group, but simply because the context involving the arrest of a police officer would make those enforcement decisions and the consequences of them more sensitive.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** Yes, absolutely. We were deeply aware of that. I have spoken to many officers who were there, some of whom will tell you just how upset, angry, appalled and betrayed they felt by the events, Sarah's death. They were absolutely not looking forward to policing this protest and they really did not want to have to take enforcement action. If you look in the gold commander's log, and the silver's log, it is very clear that we set out to say, "We will do everything we can to explain, engage and encourage people. We will be very slow to move to enforcement action".

That is very different from, for example, a group of protestors who are, maybe hypothetically, here every week, encounter the police very often, know all the rules and are actually waiting to get arrested. We would move through it much more quickly. Because of the sensitivities, we were highly sensitive to these circumstances.

Q114 **Chair:** Do you recognise the perception from many of the people who gave evidence to us that, often, many people felt that that sensitivity was not fully being taken into account. For example, Helen Lewis, a journalist, describes, "I really do want to stress for anyone who wasn't there tonight: the mood really turned when the police decided to move in and disperse the crowd, particularly when they formed a ring around the bandstand. It was freezing cold, people would've drifted off home otherwise, I think."



Separately, in the HMIC report itself, there is a description that the bronze 3 commander deployed further officers to the bandstand to bolster numbers and to have a greater capacity to employ the three Es. At that point, that was the attempt to engage, explain and encourage, but it says that, when these officers went into the crowd, they met verbal resistance and were prevented from doing so. That verbal resistance is clearly not acceptable or justified. Nevertheless, I am trying to get at whether you would recognise the concerns raised with us that the nature of that intervention, even that attempt to put in large numbers of officers in that way, to do the engagement, explaining and encouraging, in that context could end up being counterproductive and interpreted in a very different way, regardless of the intentions of the policing decisions.

**Dame Cressida Dick:** You have put your finger on the challenge of public order policing. In very dynamic circumstances, commanders have to work out what is the best way to achieve a safe outcome. My own view, and I think it is HMIC's view, is that they made good and sensible decisions. They had thought through some of the impact of potential decisions. I am certain that, if they had not gone in, that rally, which it was, would have gone on longer, with a tightly packed crowd and a greater Covid risk. That is my view.

The officers went in to try to, as I think you are indicating, do a rational thing, to try to talk to people on the bandstand, who are the ones keeping people there, encouraging people, having speeches, completely different from the peaceful vigil earlier on in the afternoon. They tried to engage with them. That was a rational thing to do, but we absolutely know that going into a crowd can cause some people to get upset. Other people began to leave, when they saw the police going in.

Q115 **Chair:** Yes, indeed. I am not questioning your point earlier about your operational issues, in terms of male and female officers. Given that what the impact was going to be was deploying a lot of male officers in those circumstances and in that context, do you understand the way a lot of people felt deeply concerned, watching what was happening, and the way it could increase distress?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I absolutely accept that some people may have been concerned about that. I also know that many other people who were on perhaps the further reaches of the crowd left when the officers went in, because they realised, "It is time to finish". Many, many, many women came up to my officers and thanked them for the way they had conducted themselves. Many women and people who were there were appalled by the behaviours of other people—I do not know, but perhaps some of the people you are talking about who were aggressive and hostile to the officers. It is an extremely hard thing to second-guess when you are looking back at it, but I am proud of the way they responded and I think they took these issues into account.

Q116 **Chair:** May I ask you a very quick final question? I do not know if you are able to give me a very quick answer on this, because I am conscious of



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and grateful for your time. These are points we have raised with you in previous evidence sessions. Do you have a figure for the current proportion of new recruits who are black and ethnic minority? What proportion within that are black officers?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** I do. You may be aware that I have set a very ambitious aspiration for the next recruiting year, not this one but starting in 2022, which is that we aim to have then 40% of our new recruits to be from, crudely—forgive me—black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. We are forecasting that, for the first quarter of this year, we will be at 30%, which is a big hike up, as you know. We are currently recruiting about 6% in total only who are black, and for this current year I am looking for 8%. I can give you more, but I hope that is roughly what you are talking about.

Q117 **Chair:** I would be grateful if you could write to us perhaps. Any further detail would be very welcome. There was an extensive HMIC report into stop and search. Has the Met implemented all the recommendations in the HMIC report?

**Dame Cressida Dick:** We either have or are at a very advanced stage of doing so. The same is true of the IOPC report. Indeed, many of the recommendations of both we had either already done or were just about to finish when the report came out. We have accepted all the ones that apply to us and are a very long way down the road in the various things in terms of training, de-escalation training, community involvement in training, a whole new way of training people to work with stop and search in terms of scrutiny and accountability. We are already very strong, but we are doing more. We have the community involved in our work in a much more active way.

This all forms part of my Deputy Commissioner's delivery group. He has an action plan that is 50 strong. It includes the Mayor's action plan and those two reports. I am very confident with where we are going with that.

**Chair:** If there is any further information you or one of your team could provide us with as to the progress on the implementation on the HMIC report, that would be hugely welcome as well. Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, we are very grateful for your time this afternoon. Thank you very much for joining us.