



Tim Newburn

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Where does the Met go from here?

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The recent review of London's beleaguered police force in the wake of consecutive scandals identified structural and systemic failings and confirmed an internal culture of discrimination and cover-ups. Tim Newburn assesses the report and asks whether the Met is too dysfunctional for reform.

The much-awaited review of the Metropolitan Police undertaken by Baroness Casey has just been published, its regularly trailed coruscating conclusions prompting damning headlines, including: “**racist, misogynist and homophobic**,” “**London's Metropolitan Police is on its 'last chance'**,” and “**Metropolitan Police: it's now or never.**”

The longer-term background was a series of scandals that had further diminished the already tarnished reputation of Britain's oldest and largest force. These included the shocking failure of the investigation into the so-called **Westminster VIP paedophile ring**, the murder of **Sarah Everard by a Metropolitan Police officer** and the subsequent appalling handling of the **Clapham Common**

vigil held in Everard's name, the revelations about bullying and other forms of misconduct at **Charing Cross police station**, a conclusion of "institutional corruption" made in an independent report into the murder of private investigator, Daniel Morgan, together with controversies surrounding the Met's handling of "**partygate**" at 10 Downing St. among many others. As Casey was no doubt in the process of finalising her report, another case arose in which a **Met Officer was found to be a serial rapist**, responsible for over 80 offences over a period of 17 years.

A litany of failings

In the midst of all this, in early 2022 the then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, and the person who commissioned the Casey Review, Dame Cressida Dick, was forced to resign and a new Commissioner and Deputy were appointed with a brief to reform the organisation. On appointment, they acknowledged the size of the task before them. Casey's report now makes the scale of it clear to all.

As the newspaper headlines indicated, Casey didn't pull her punches. She found widespread bullying within the force, particularly against people with protected characteristics. In addition, she observed, there is a deep-seated homophobia within the Met, as well as *routine* sexism and misogyny. Casey reinforced much that had been said by Lord Justice Macpherson a quarter of a century ago in the **Stephen Lawrence Inquiry**, stating clearly that discrimination was often ignored, and that complaints made by Black, Asian and ethnic minority officers were often turned against them, while at the same time "Black Londoners in particular remain over-policed."



Much of what is said, though of great importance, will not come as a surprise to anyone who has been keeping an eye on the Met in recent decades.



The detail that lies behind these findings is extensive and the interpretation often withering in its condemnation of the Met's responses to earlier criticism. Much of what is said, though of great interest and importance, will not come as a surprise to anyone who has been keeping an eye on the Met in recent decades. It is important it has been said and said so explicitly and forcefully. What is of more immediate concern now is what Casey has to say about what should be done.

An internal culture resistant to reform

The starting point, and the main focus of much of the most biting criticism, is the Met's leadership. Casey acknowledges that the sheer scale of the force inevitably means that it is both difficult to control and arguably even more difficult to change. The problem, she notes, however, "is not its size but its inadequate management." In what way inadequate? In its adoption of a "we know best" attitude, Casey says. In its tendency to dismiss external views and criticisms, to move on as quickly as possible from all bad news, to blame "bad apples" rather than considering the structural and systemic issues raised and – a classic in policing circles – to talk about future reform actions as if they had already been implemented.

More specifically, and again damningly, Casey notes that the force is too vague where its ethical standards are concerned, that it has no adequate systems in place to ensure officers and staff adhere to the appropriate ethical standards, and no clear consequences for those that fail to abide by them. Indeed, it appears all too easy to avoid responsibility.

She then turns to the wider context. The bigger picture drawn by Casey is of an institution that too often is unaccountable, both to political representatives and to the public. As a consequence of the failures of management highlighted earlier and exacerbated by what she describes as the disfiguring consequences of austerity, Casey's report describes the policing of the capital as one in which "Londoners have been put last". The Met, she says, "has become unanchored from the principles of policing by consent".

Real change remains a distant prospect

So, what is to be done? Here the report is by turns ambitious and thought-provoking, but occasionally too predictable and somewhat clichéd. There is much in its recommendations to be welcomed. Major changes to staff vetting, misconduct proceedings, together with the disbanding or rethinking of some of the most problematic specialist units in the force. Long overdue specialist services dealing with rape and sexual violence are considered vital, radical reform of the use of stop and search powers is necessary, a children's strategy should be introduced, and neighbourhood policing reinvigorated. There are few in the policing world who would demur from most of these – though one can expect pushback on any proposal to restrict stop and search.



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Where the report is less satisfying is on accountability and the idea of “policing by consent”. The somewhat dysfunctional relationship between the Met and the Mayor’s Office is rightly noted, as is the odd position of the Met with its mixture of local and national responsibilities. What is left largely undealt with is what appropriate systems of accountability would look like – both at citywide and more local levels. Casey’s idea of a policing board – akin to London’s governance system for transport – is deeply uninspiring. Those looking for solutions to the Met’s democratic deficit will not find them here.

Finally, there’s the subject of plummeting public trust and confidence and the threat this is held to pose to “policing by consent”. It is here, unfortunately, that the report is at its most hackneyed, talking credulously of a system of policing that is alleged to be admired and copied around the world, yet failing to specify what this is. The closest it comes is in invoking “Peelian principles”, the alleged

foundations of the Met in the early 19th century. Leaving aside that these might reasonably be seen at best as idealistic imaginaries rather than practical realities (let alone an ideological tool for legitimising police power) at the very least these principles, not surprisingly, are desperately in need of modernisation.

But to talk of the threat to “policing by consent” in this generalised way is to miss a wider point. For many, not least London’s minority communities, policing has *never* been by consent. But rarely have the concerns of these communities been treated as being serious enough to warrant radical change. But it is surely this that is now required. A “reset”, to use the report’s language, is hardly the solution, but something much more dramatic has to happen. Quite what this looks like remains frustratingly vague. What is clear, however, is that failure to respond radically will undoubtedly bring calls to “defund the police” one step closer.

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About the author



Tim Newburn

Tim Newburn has been Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at the LSE since 2002. He is the author of over 40 books, most recently: *The Official History of Criminal Justice, vol. IV: Politics of Law and Order* (Routledge, November 2022, with David Downes).

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