

Direct Entry for Chief Officers

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Towards the end of 1944, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, a career civil servant by the name of Mr (later Sir) Harold Scott, was busily engaged seven days a week on behalf of his Secretary of State, Sir Stafford Cripps. All the problems associated with manufacturing, supplying and maintaining the thousands of aircraft that the Royal Air Force needed to fight a war in Europe and the Far East landed on Scott's desk. In no small measure, the success of the air war against Germany had been due as much to the diligence of this anonymous civil servant as it had to the bravery and sacrifice of the aircrews. Scott was convinced that he had a job to do that would take him beyond the end of the war and into peacetime, as the role of the RAF changed with the introduction of jet aircraft, and the new military challenges that the nation would face in a post-war world. He was therefore extremely surprised one morning to receive a telephone call from the private secretary to Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, asking him to 'pop along Whitehall' to see the minister.

Scott had absolutely no idea why he was being summoned to see such an august figure as Morrison. He had joined the civil service in 1911 after coming down from Cambridge and for a short period in those days before the First World War had worked in the Home Office police policy department, before moving to the Prisons Commission, and thence to other Whitehall departments. He knew Morrison from their time together in the early years of the war when they had both served at the Ministry of Home Security, and assumed that the Home Secretary wanted to discuss some aspect of civil defence planning. In his autobiography published in 1954, Scott describes their meeting,

"Mr Morrison, who has a sense of humour, may have been aware of what was in my mind and wished to take me by surprise, for his first question to me was, 'Can you ride a horse?' Somewhat disconcerted, I replied that I had never been much of a horseman and had not ridden for many years; but I said I had no doubt I could ride well enough not to disgrace myself. The Home Secretary then immediately invited me to accept the position of Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as soon as the war was over."¹

¹ Page 11 'Scotland Yard' Sir Harold Scott, (pub. Andre Deutsch (1954))

Such was the way that senior appointments were made in those far distant days. No advertising of the vacancy in the Sunday broadsheets, no recruitment consultants, no long list or shortlist, not even an interview, just “Can you ride a horse?” and an immediate offer of the most important job in policing.

However, Sir Harold Scott served with great distinction as Commissioner of the Met from 1945 until 1953, and was held in the highest regard by everyone in the force, from the newest constable up to and including his senior team at Scotland Yard. To this day he remains the only civilian with no previous police background to hold the post since the Second World War, one of just fifteen Commissioners to serve as head of the Met in that time.

Scott was a resounding success; he stands out as someone who really made a difference, along with perhaps only one other in the almost seventy years since he retired. He steered the Met from war to peace and crushed the petty corruption that existed in the police in austerity Britain. Because of his background in technical ministries where scientific innovation had been the impetus for beneficial development, he introduced technological change and promoted individuals who showed an aptitude for intellectual enquiry – something that was almost unheard of in the late 1940's when police promotion was almost exclusively based on seniority. His greatest contribution however was in terms of the status of policing and the ‘behind the scenes’ lobbying that he did to improve conditions of service and pay. His legacy was a stronger, more effective, and more self-confident Met that acted as an exemplar to other forces throughout the nineteen-fifties and beyond. Scott's commissionership gives the lie to those who would claim that only senior officers who have spent their entire career in the police can be entrusted with the top jobs and that such individuals must have operated as police officers before they can truly understand the business of policing. In fact, Scott provides the perfect example of someone who already had an established track-record of excellence in an unrelated field, with transferable skills that could be applied to something new and different.

Sadly, most of the other Commissioners who followed Scott, along with the vast majority of provincial Chief Constables, came and went barely leaving a ripple on the surface of public life or a lasting impression on policing. Who now remembers Sir John Nott-Bower in the mid nineteen-fifties, or Sir David McNee in the seventies? A few were brought low by allowing unmerited confidence in their own ability to cloud their better judgement when confronted with operational challenges. At least one Met commissioner was simply not up to the job. With the possible exception of

Sir Robert Mark, a principled and cerebral man, it is difficult if not impossible to name a post-war Commissioner or Chief Constable who excelled in the art of leadership. When one looks across today's police landscape littered with examples of chief officers who have 'crashed and burned' on a depressingly regular basis, it is tempting to suggest that if the concept of direct entry worked so well with an individual such as Scott, drawn from the civil service, why should it not work today with a similarly skilled man or woman from business or industry?

Interestingly, today's generation of Chief Officers, along with the NPCC and the College of Policing, leave no doubt that they are four-square behind direct entry as the way forward for twenty-first century policing – but not for officers of their exalted rank. Senior figures such as Sara Thornton, formerly president of the NPCC, and Francis Habgood, formerly the Chief Constable of Thames Valley, stand shoulder to shoulder with Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe and the CEO of the College of Policing to sing hymns of praise in support of direct entry as a concept.

Interestingly, before retiring as a Chief Constable, Habgood was quoted as saying that the police service must "stop closing its eyes if it is to recruit and maintain the best people", should "stop doing things the way we have always done them", and should welcome, "initiatives such as direct entry". There is refreshing unanimity amongst Chief Officers in support of direct entry at the rank of Superintendent and Inspector, for clearly this is 'an idea whose time has come'. However, there is deafening silence from the NPCC, the Home Office, Police and Crime Commissioners, and all the 'movers and shakers' about the most compelling model of direct entry which would have a profound impact on the future of policing as we move through next few decades. I refer of course to direct entry at Chief Officer level, which in turn raises the question – why do Chief Constables and Commissioners need to be police officers at all?

Viewed dispassionately, the skill set required by a Chief Officer is actually quite limited - but nonetheless requires sophistication and imagination of a high order. Such individuals must demonstrate finely honed management skills, the ability to negotiate, and strategic sensibility at a premium level. Operational policing skills per se actually have a very low degree of importance in the grand scheme of things (unlike for direct entry superintendents and inspectors), certainly at the level at which these individuals could and should operate. It would be arrant nonsense to suggest that the requisite skills of Chief Officers are unique and are only to be found in a vanishingly small cadre who are career police officers. In fact, experience of the wider world demonstrates the reverse to be true. These core skills, coupled

with innate leadership ability, define the vast majority of senior leaders in commerce, the military and industry, who in addition can also demonstrate high level competence, rarely seen in policing, in niche areas such as entrepreneurship, marketing and business acumen.

It seems clear that direct entry at Superintendent and Inspector has been welcomed, (albeit in a somewhat lacklustre fashion), by the senior echelons of the service, largely on the grounds that it adds value to policing at middle tier level. Common sense dictates that the NPCC and those defining policy in the soaring uplands of policing must now recognize that all the arguments that make direct entry relevant to middle management, are even more compelling when applied at Chief Officer level. Perhaps one or two of this new breed of directly appointed Chief Officers, if exceptionally skilled, might be drawn from the ranks of serving Chief Constables, but it need not necessarily be so. Individuals of outstanding quality and potential from the upper echelons of the civil service, the private sector, or even the military, would undoubtedly be in the front rank as excellent candidates for the posts.

So, I throw down the gauntlet to the NPCC, the College of Policing, HMIC, Police and Crime Commissioners and all those involved in charting the direction of travel of the police service, for the benefit of the workforce and the public. The police workforce and the public at large must be confident that those in leadership roles in policing are drawn from a wide and deep reservoir of talent. How many more Chief Officer scandals such as Avon and Somerset, Cleveland or the Metropolitan Police – see table below, (with others bubbling in the background), will it take before radical action is forced upon those at the helm of 21st century policing? We must challenge orthodoxies and as Francis Habgood said, “stop doing things the way we have always done them”. The argument for direct entry at Chief Officer level is compelling and would allow for a long overdue revitalisation of police leadership, the abandonment of ‘clone’ culture and might offer the long-suffering rank and file the chance to follow leaders worthy of the name.

Continued silence on the subject is not an option.

Nick Gargan Chief Constable	Avon and Somerset Police	<u>October 2015</u> . Forced to resign after being found guilty of eight misconduct counts, including sending, receiving, and storing intimate images of a sexual nature on his police phone of a woman he was in a relationship with.
Sean Price Chief Constable	Cleveland Police	<u>October 2012</u> . Dismissed for gross misconduct by intimidating and bullying staff. Lied to investigators during confidential investigation and instructed junior staff to lie.
Derek Bonnard Deputy Chief Constable	Cleveland Police	<u>March 2013</u> . Dismissed on eight counts of gross misconduct. Accepted inappropriate hospitality, misused a corporate credit card, misused public funds relating to a charity bike ride and failed to follow proper policy over a redundancy matter. He also inappropriately hired a vehicle through Cleveland Police for personal reasons, before crashing it into a canopy and using public funds to cover the majority of the costs.
Ali Dizaei Commander (<i>Metropolitan Police equivalent rank to Assistant Chief Constable</i>)	Metropolitan Police	<u>February 2012</u> . Convicted of Misconduct in public office and attempting to pervert the justice in a criminal trial. Sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and dismissed.
Marcus Beale Assistant Chief Constable and Head of West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit.	West Midlands Police	<u>April 2018</u> . Dismissed for gross misconduct, by neglect, by allowing top-secret documents to be stolen from his possession.
Jeremy Burton Deputy Chief Constable	Surrey Police	<u>January 2020</u> . Required to resign for having 'inappropriate relationship' with member of staff.

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