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## **“RECLAIM THE STREETS” PLEA BY NEW THINK-TANK REPORT**

*Major shift in police culture needed to allay fears about yobbish behaviour*

Police officers should be instructed to reclaim the streets for the law-abiding majority by waging a concerted campaign against anti-social behaviour, according to a landmark new report from the think-tank set up by the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

The Centre for Social Justice report, produced by a working group chaired by Ray Mallon, an elected mayor and former senior policeman, cites new polling showing that the public regard confronting rowdy and abusive behaviour as the top priority for law enforcement officers.

They also overwhelmingly support a greater and more visible police presence on the streets.

According to an exclusive YouGov poll commissioned by the CSJ working group, 76 per cent of people think that the police are intervening “too little” against antisocial behaviour.

And 72 per cent think “it is never acceptable” for an on-duty police officer not to intervene when they have observed a crime or a threat to public safety.

Yet the rules of engagement for most of Britain’s 140,000 police officers stop them exercising their judgement about when to intervene to bring troublemakers to heel. The so-called “arrest or ignore” culture prevalent in modern policing and a suffocating and time-consuming level of bureaucracy mean that officers frequently walk on by rather than act to curb unruly youths.

An arrest typically takes a constable away from the beat for seven hours and the average full-time police officer is on patrol for only seven hours a week. In order for

the police to add one full-time officer to street patrol, five new officers need to be employed.

The report *A Force to be Reckoned With* says that police should once again be granted the discretion to issue a metaphorical slap on the wrist to wrongdoers guilty of minor but intimidating infringements such as street drinking, begging, dropping litter, and petty vandalism.

It says that police should be organised into “Interventionist Neighbourhood Teams” and placed under a duty to act whenever they observe a crime or antisocial behaviour, though not always to make an arrest.

The report also endorses a “crackdown and consolidation” approach to law enforcement in high crime areas.

“In areas characterised by social breakdown (with prevalent drug and alcohol misuse, high rates of family breakdown and concentration of at-risk children,) short-term police crackdowns can create space for other agencies to move in and address the problems underlying crime,” it says.

In the wake of public outrage over incidents where police officers have cited health and safety rules as a justification for failing to act in life-threatening situations, the report says they should be under orders to put themselves “in harm’s way” if the safety of the public is at risk. The report commends Surrey police for instituting such a policy and says it should be implemented across the country.

Ray Mallon, the elected independent mayor of Middlesbrough, who has 28 years experience as a police officer and who reached the rank of detective superintendent, chaired the eight-strong working group who produced the report. The group includes two former chief constables, Steve Green of Nottinghamshire, and Sir Charles Pollard of Thames Valley.

As detective inspector in Hartlepool in the mid-1990s – one of Cleveland’s four policing divisions, his brand of “Here and Now” policing based on the four principles of education, prevention, punishment and rehabilitation, led to a 43 per cent fall in overall crime and led to him being christened “Robocop” by the national media.

Mr Mallon said: “The British public want the police to reclaim the streets for the law-abiding majority. All our polling shows that. Serious crime, such as robbery, burglary and violence is far too high and must be addressed further. However, what people really worry about is anti-social behaviour. That affects everyone almost every day across large parts of the country, whereas serious crime intrudes far less often.”

“But we will not make any headway in restoring order and civility to our streets without a fundamental change in the culture of policing. Officers should be trusted once more to decide if a breach of the law merits a firm word with a troublemaker or whether an arrest is necessary. Centrally-determined targets are not the way to determine the course of 21<sup>st</sup> century policing.”

“Above all, I want the police to become a force to be reckoned with.”

Mr Duncan Smith said: “I want us to learn from New York, where active neighbourhood policing has made such a spectacular difference. We want to get the police out on the streets, where they’re needed.”

“It’s a complete waste for them to be in the office...We need police who aren’t afraid of policing the streets – a police culture that treats the streets as their office. Police need to know they can take the necessary risks and use their discretion, and that they’ll be supported by politicians and the public if things go wrong.”

Other key recommendations in the report include:

- \* Scrapping most of the national police targets which have distorted police priorities and led to the situation where officers often fail to respond to public concerns about crime and low-level disorder.
- \* Restore to the police the right to prosecute for minor crimes.
- \* Greater operational independence of chief constables – for instance they should no longer be subject to fixed-term appointments.

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blight parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published Breakthrough Britain- Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain and to reduce the £102bn financial cost of social breakdown.