

**Hansard**  
**House of Lords**  
**24 May 2016**

[6.24 pm](#)

- [Baroness Harris of Richmond \(LD\)](#)

My Lords, I begin by reminding your Lordships of my register of interests, many of which revolve around policing and have done so for many years, including chairing my police authority in North Yorkshire.

The gracious Speech promised us a new Policing and Crime Bill, which is in fact a carry-over Bill. However, nothing was mentioned about the reform of the Police Federation, the body which purports to look after the interests of its members—the constables, who comprise the greatest number of members and therefore the greatest funders of the federation, the sergeants, the inspectors and chief inspectors.

In her speech to the Police Federation conference last week, the Home Secretary congratulated the leadership of the federation on their hard work in progressing the reform agenda, which was initiated two years ago, but criticised them for not achieving speedier results. Of the 36 recommendations for reform, 24 have not been delivered. I suggest to your Lordships that it is actually 25.

I reported to the Home Secretary in January that the Independent Reference Group, recommended by Sir David Normington, had been successfully set up and was about to start the work of acting as a critical friend, upholding the public interest, advising and helping the Police Federation with its reform programme. This group had grown out of a previous group, known as the Constables Advisory Panel, which was created over two years ago and which had been working hard and harmoniously with the constables of the Police Federation but was recognised as being of benefit to all ranks of police officers. It was agreed that that body was the right basis for the Independent Reference Group, as envisaged by Sir David Normington. The IRG currently consists of three Members of your Lordships' House, with around 100 years of policing experience between us, a specialist adviser, and two further members who were chosen by public advertisement to bring wider expertise to help us. Thus we appeared on the Police Federation's website.

Since our inception as the new IRG, however, obstacles have constantly been put in our way that have prevented us fulfilling our role. The present leadership of the federation has made no secret of the fact that they do not need or want parliamentarians on their IRG at all. However, we were appointed by the leadership in place last year under the procedures specified by the federation's own rules and regulations. We have tried hard to get some answers to our questions about how we should be set up, what our remit should be, what our terms of reference were, what our aims and objectives were, and what our budget should look like. All these questions have gone unanswered and it has been a deeply frustrating and debilitating experience. So, it was with some consternation that I read the Home Secretary's remarks about us having,

“not in any way lived up to the spirit of what Normington prescribed”.

Who on earth told her that? Could it be someone in the Home Office not letting her know what was happening? Or was it the Police Federation itself? One can only speculate. Had she come to me as chair, she would have heard a very different story.

The Police Federation has suspended us. It will gather again in June and decide who it wants to be on its Independent Reference Group. It has already asked the two recently chosen members to stay on while it gets rid of the pesky parliamentarians. How very “independent” of it. The mission of the IRG is not to engage Parliament on behalf of the federation; it is to help the federation reform itself. How insulting to the Members of your Lordships’ House who are on the IRG to infer that we are neither independent nor knowledgeable enough to undertake this task. No, I fear that nothing much has changed at its headquarters and the people running the organisation do not appear to have the best interests of their members at the forefront of their deliberations—it is more a case of settling old scores and hoping that their chief constables do not recall them, I suspect.

The Home Secretary spoke a lot about her dismay at the amount of money that branches of the Police Federation are keeping for themselves and spending with profligacy. It is their money: it belongs to them. Perhaps some of them are retaining it because they are unhappy about how their money is being spent by the centre. I was told that the cost of reforming the Police Federation so far is over £6 million and rising. Our group, which hoped to help the Police Federation, is suspended; the federation appears to be shooting itself in the foot by wanting to get rid of the section of the IRG it does not like. The police need all the friends they can get now, after the revelations of the past few weeks. After years of working with police officers, the majority of whom are truly excellent, we have been told that we are not needed to help them in the reform programme they are undertaking. Oh dear; I wonder what the future of the Police Federation will look like.

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