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Written by [Tom Clougherty](#) [2] | Wednesday 14 November 2007



According to a [six-month review](#) [3] carried out by the Police Federation, detectives are being taken off serious cases to clear up minor crimes so that government targets can be met. Members of the public are being advised to report missing items as 'lost' rather than 'stolen' in order to keep theft figures low. Police are forced to focus on 'easily solvable' crimes rather than serving the public interest.

Why am I not surprised?

Whenever a public service is controlled by politicians, it will be run for political purposes ? to provide good headlines and statistics for the government to show off about. As long as the service remains under political control there is no way around that ? it's the nature of politics.

What's the answer? Since policing cannot easily be privatized, the best option is to make the police directly accountable to the communities they serve. Directly elect police commissioners in each constabulary and give them control of the police budget, directing operations and setting priorities.

With accountability at such a local level, the police would quickly stop persecuting motorists and start focusing on the crimes people really care about. The Conservatives' [police reform commission](#) [4], to their credit, proposed just such a scheme earlier this year.

Another problem highlighted by the police federation is the amount of paperwork with which the police are burdened. Much of it can surely be eliminated but why not employ civilian staff to do what remains? It seems ridiculous to have untrained special constables patrolling the streets while real police officers sit inside doing paperwork.

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