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Dear Sir David,

Recent statements by the Prime Minister and others on police funding

I wished to seek clarity from you with regard to recent statements by the Prime Minister and the Home Office on the funding settlement in the Police Grant Report 2018/19.

In his statement accompanying the Police Grant Report, the Policing Minister stated that the proposals put forward could “increase total investment in the police system by up to £450m year on year in 2018/19”.

But he was clear that the Government itself was only providing a flat-cash settlement:

“In 2018/19, we will provide each Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) with the same amount of core Government grant funding as in 2017/18”.
Nick Hurd, Hansard, Police Funding HCWS439, 31 January 2018,
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-01-31/HCWS439/>

The ministers goes on to point that there is potential for PCCs “to increase their funding by up to around £270m next year” by raising local precepts themselves by up to £12.

He then claims that those PCCs who decided to do so would maintain “their funding in real terms”, adding that “Most PCCs are intending to use the new precept flexibility”.

The rest of the “up to £450m” would be achieved by adding in £130m in top-slicing of police budgets for national policing priorities and a further £50m in counter-terrorism funding.

The Government itself is only protecting its funding in cash terms, therefore cutting its direct grant to the police in real-terms.

However, if all PCCs chose to use the potential flexibility they have to increase their precept (something the Policing Minister acknowledges is not guaranteed) then this may amount to a flat real-terms settlement when compared to the previous year. The Policing Minister was clear about this:

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“The combination of flat grant and rising precept in 2018-19 means that all PCCs can maintain their funding in real terms next year if they use the new council tax flexibility.”

Nick Hurd, *Hansard, Police Grant Report, 7 February 2018, c. 1514*,
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-02-07/debates/7FC16F39-C7E6-4023-9301-B209F518D560/PoliceGrantReport>

And yet at PMQs at the beginning of the month, the Prime Minister asserted that not only had the Government protected police budgets, but it was actually increasing them by “an extra £450m”.

“The right hon. Gentleman cannot get away from the fact that the Government are protecting police budgets. In fact, we are not just protecting police budgets, but increasing them with an extra £450 million.”

Theresa May, *Hansard, PMQs, 7 February 2018, c. 1484*,
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-02-07/debates/184887F5-C856-4751-B0D9-456A1A65F1B9/OralAnswersToQuestions>

And again at PMQs this week, the Prime Minister said that the funding settlement for police forces represented “extra money” from the Government to PCCs who would then “decide how that money is spent”.

“More money is going to policing ... the funding settlement for next year provide extra money for policing”

Theresa May, PMQs, 21 February 2018

“We are providing extra funding for police forces .. It’s no good Labour Members shaking their heads and saying ‘no you not’, because we are providing extra funding for police forces. And of course it is then up to the PCCs to decide how that money is spent”.

Theresa May, PMQs, 21 February 2018

So despite the Policing Minister making clear that the Government was only providing a flat-cash settlement and claiming that real-terms protection would be achieved if PCCs increased precepts, the Prime Minister seems to be suggesting that (a) the Government is providing all of the potential £450m and (b) that this represents investment above and beyond either cash-terms or real-terms protection.

And it isn’t just the Prime Minister who claims that a guaranteed £450m in funding for policing is coming directly from the Government in 2018/19.

When the Police Grant Report was voted on in Parliament the Home Office tweeted “This year the government is providing a £450 million boost to #police funding”

(Home Office, Twitter, 7 February 2018,
<https://twitter.com/ukhomeoffice/status/961275867950231552>)

But even the Conservative Party’s own Twitter account did not make such a claim, stating only that there was to the potential to “deliver up to an additional £450 million investment in policing” and not attempting to claim that this would come directly from Government (Conservatives, Twitter, 7 February 2018,

<https://twitter.com/Conservatives/status/961283170120454144>).

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Meanwhile, messages from other senior members of the Government on police funding in the coming year appear to be even more misleading. The Leader of the House recently stated that “the police funding settlement will increase by up to £450m cross the police system for 2018/19” before going on to assert that “We are also enabling PCCs to increase funding for local policing by up to £270m next year” (Andrea Leadsom, letter to Holly Lynch MP, 19 February 2018, <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DWeN-k-WAAA1WgT.jpg>).

Given the strain police forces across the country are under thanks to year after year of real-terms cuts to their funding under this Conservative Government, this is an extremely topical issue which receives widespread coverage in the media.

That being the case, I wonder if you could advise on whether the way in which the funding settlement for 2018/19 has been communicated by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House, and the Home Office in recent weeks runs the risk of giving the public a false impression of extra investment where there is none?

Given the public interest in the matter, I am releasing this letter to the media.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Haigh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Louise Haigh MP, Shadow Policing and Crime Minister

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