

# Cressida Dick's successor must do more than tackle prejudice

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Peter Csemiczky

As the home secretary searches for a new Metropolitan Police commissioner, whoever takes on Cressida Dick's job must do more than tackle prejudice among officers.

While sexist, racist and discriminatory attitudes characterised many of the scandals that led to Dick's removal, they are symptomatic of a more fundamental problem: the Met increasingly sees itself as separate from the communities it serves.

The force's disconnection from — and resulting misunderstanding of — the rest of society has led it to adopt a form of “we know best” mindset in which destructive behaviour can flourish, and criticism is dismissed.

It is that attitude that allowed officers to feel free to express appalling prejudices on social media and photograph the female murder victims they were supposed to protect. It is also what enabled Dick publicly to state after the conviction of the police officer Wayne Couzens for Sarah Everard's horrific murder, that it was the force that had been betrayed by his actions.

This mindset has also seeped into the way the Met investigates complaints of crime.

My experience as a criminal lawyer is that the Met routinely designates people as perpetrators or victims, not based on evidence, but often on who makes a complaint first. With the characters set, officers seem to consider their role to be to prove an allegation, rather than to investigate impartially and obtain evidence that looks both towards and away from a suspect's guilt. Shifting these prejudices can be an almost impossible task.

It should not be this way. In 2016, Sir Richard Henriques produced an independent review of the Met's handling of non-recent sexual offences investigations, and in particular the Operation Midland scandal. Sir Richard's report made 25 recommendations for improvement, including that the Met should cease automatically believing a complainant's account and stop using the word “victim” until a crime is proved. Henriques reminded the Met that it had a duty enshrined in the statutory oath taken by all officers to investigate objectively and impartially.

The Met's response was lukewarm. According to a 2020 inspectorate report, it only started to act on the recommendations three years later and is yet to fully implement them.

Yes, police work is difficult and is often conducted in stressful circumstances. But unlike people who work in health or education it is frequently difficult to discern in police officers a real commitment to public service.

Whoever takes on Dick's job must help the force to rectify this by instilling a renewed connection with the people it polices. This might be achieved through better training and a greater openness to criticism.

It is only by doing this that the Met can hope to rid itself of the attitude that has poisoned its relationship with the public and runs the risk of corrupting its soul.

**Peter Csemiczky is a partner at Hickman & Rose, a law firm in London**