

MPs 'cast Gwent police commissioner Ian Johnston as villain'

A police and crime commissioner (PCC) who sacked his chief constable said he did not get a fair hearing when he appeared before a committee of MPs.

Gwent PCC Ian Johnston has been accused of bullying Carmel Napier into retiring in June.

He claimed he was made to look like a villain by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which questioned both of them over what had happened.

The committee said he had a "disdainful attitude" to parliamentary scrutiny.

But Mr Johnston told BBC Wales he believed the MPs had already decided what they were going to write before he appeared in front of them in July.

He said: "I don't think they listened at all to the evidence, I think the way the questioning went they had made their mind up about lots of things.

"If you look at the way that it was done, I was the villain of the piece before I even went in there and Carmel Napier was this poor unfortunate woman who had been bullied by this new police and crime commissioner.

"That was the way they presented it."

In June Mrs Napier announced her retirement with immediate effect after a 30-year career in policing, only for it to emerge that she had been forced out after a series of rows with Mr Johnston.

It was revealed that Mr Johnston ordered Mrs Napier to "retire or be removed" as he believed her managerial style was "unacceptably dismissive, abrupt and unhelpful".

The case highlighted the wide-ranging powers enjoyed by PCCs to dismiss chief constables and prompted an inquiry by the committee.

In her evidence to MPs, Mrs Napier accused Mr Johnston of "menacing and bullying" her out of her job.

She said he came to her office and read out a document issuing an ultimatum - leave or face being forced out.

'Followed procedures'

In a subsequent report, the Gwent PCC was criticised by the committee for what they called "this disdainful attitude towards scrutiny by Parliament, as well as an indication of a clear over-sensitivity to criticism".

They pointed out that Mr Johnston had been elected by less than 8% of voters in Gwent and "had managed to side-step the statutory arrangements for local scrutiny of his decision to sack the chief constable".

However, Mr Johnston said he believes the commissioners are "not accountable to members of Parliament".

He added: "A message back for Keith Vaz [chair of the committee], I did not side-step any procedures, I followed the procedures to the letter of the law."

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