ANDREW MARR:  
Now was Andrew Mitchell stitched up? That’s the question being asked at Westminster with MPs of all parties now concerned that the former Conservative Chief Whip at the centre of the Plebgate affair may have been the victim of a police conspiracy. The story has taken some pretty extraordinary twists and turns over the past year or so, but what does it all say about the force at large? In simple terms, can we trust our police? I’m joined now by the Policing Minister, Damien Green. Welcome.

DAMIAN GREEN:  
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:  
Do you believe that there was a conspiracy in all of this?

DAMIAN GREEN:  
Well the actual conspiracy is still being investigated (if there is one) by the Crown Prosecution Service …

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed.

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
… so we don’t know yet and we will see what they say.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yeah.

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
Clearly what happened when those three police federation reps came out of his meeting in Sutton Coldfield and, to put it mildly, said things that don’t seem to be borne out by the transcript of the meeting - that’s disturbing.

**ANDREW MARR:**
If Andrew Mitchell hadn’t listened to his wife and taped that meeting with serving police officers, he would be still hung out to dry. I mean that’s a very, very worrying thing for a lot of people. If it can happen to him, it could happen to anyone. As he himself says, it could happen to a kid in Handsworth.

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
I mean I think that’s the key point -

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yeah.

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
… we all want to have confidence in the police. Andrew Mitchell clearly can command the resources that other people might not be able to, to prove that what the police or what individual police officers said about him wasn’t true, so that’s the key underlying issue.

**ANDREW MARR:**
We know that. We also seem to know that their chief constables then changed the
reports, so that didn’t come out, so there was a cover-up of the cover-up. If it turns out that that’s true, can those chief constables survive?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
Well let’s see what the chief constables have to say. We haven’t yet …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* They’re coming to Parliament …

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
*(over)* … heard their side of the story. They’re appearing before a select committee on Wednesday, so let’s see what happens then and we can all judge on what they say. I think … I mean there is … One of the key points to make is that if police officers behave badly, then it is really serious for confidence in the police, but it is a very, very small minority that do behave badly. By and large the police do their job well, crime is falling. And I was at the Police Bravery Awards last Thursday where you heard story after story of everyday heroism.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Lots of great police. Some bad apples though. And if chief constables are engaged in cover-ups, that’s particularly serious, isn’t it?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
Well at all levels it’s serious. We all want to have confidence in the police.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Do you think there’s a crisis of confidence in the police as a result of this and other …Hillsborough and so many other things too?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
*(over)* Well I’m interested in … Absolutely, I mean this is one incident among many. Ian Tomlinson, as you say, Hillsborough. And what’s interesting is that even today, earlier on in the programme you pointed out the poll in today’s Sunday Times which shows that 66 per cent of people still have trust in the police. That’s quite a high
number and it ought to be. It’s lower than it used to be. So what needs to be done are practical measures to make sure that the relatively small, the very small minority who do behave badly can be dealt with properly.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So there is a worry out there. Is there anything you can do to address that worry, that … Not crisis of confidence - that’s perhaps putting it too strongly - but ebbing confidence in the police?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
Yes there is and that’s what we are doing. I think one of the key changes we need to make is to stop the police investigating serious and sensitive complaints against them. Clearly the Andrew Mitchell affair would fall under this. So what we’re doing is increasing the powers of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, and increasingly the resources for it, so that it can do much more work independently of the police, so you don’t have the police looking at the ?? complaints.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* So the IPCC is not working properly at the moment, you feel?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
The IPCC needs more powers, it needs more resources. We’re giving them both because I think it’s that independent investigation of complaints that’s key.

**ANDREW MARR:**
What about the culture inside the police, towards the top of the police - the institutional cultures. Is there anything you can do to tackle that?

**DAMIAN GREEN:**
There are two big things we’re doing to change that because, you’re right, it’s not just a question of following rules; it’s a question of having a culture of honesty and openness and transparency. The two big things we’re doing there are introducing direct entry at senior levels, at superintendent and inspector levels as well as potentially at chief constable level.
ANDREW MARR:
To whom? Opening it to whom - to anyone or …?

DAMIAN GREEN:
To anyone. So that …So if you are …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So I could go off and be a chief constable?

DAMIAN GREEN:
Well, yes, if …

ANDREW MARR:
You’re nicked, Damian Green.

DAMIAN GREEN:
Absolutely…

ANDREW MARR:
As you have been before, of course.

DAMIAN GREEN:
… well I’ve had that in the past as well in another less than glorious episode for the police.

ANDREW MARR:
Indeed.

DAMIAN GREEN:
So what we want is people to come who have not had to start on the beat as a police constable and work their way up for 25 years, so that people who’ve got the relevant skills can enter at various levels of the profession.
ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Business people, former head teachers from schools …

DAMIAN GREEN:
Former army officers.

ANDREW MARR:
… even, dare I say it, journalists could become chief police officers?

DAMIAN GREEN:
If journalists had the relevant skill set, which you may wish to discuss.

ANDREW MARR:
*(laughs)* If.

DAMIAN GREEN:
There’s a big if there. But in all seriousness, the fact that people will bring a new attitude and a new background, I think that will help the police service a lot because it will open it up. And people will come in and ask that basic question everyone does in a new organisation of “Why do you do it that way?” and when they hear the response, “That’s the way we’ve always done it”, then they will question it.

ANDREW MARR:
Very interesting. What about looking again at the police code of ethics and freshening that up?

DAMIAN GREEN:
Well that’s happening. The new College of Policing, which is one of our reforms that I think doesn’t get enough attention because it’s a very big change, the college is there to set standards and improve standards throughout the police. One of the first things they’re doing is consulting on a new code of ethics. They’ll be announcing it in a few weeks time. It’ll be very, very timely. And that will not only set out very clearly how police officers should operate. One of the key changes is that every time they’re promoted, they will have to show that it’s still ingrained in them. That’s done in other
organisations like the military. It’s not been done in the police before.

ANDREW MARR:
And so do you have any simple message to people watching who will simply say if
the police can tell untruths about a senior Conservative politician and then hide what
has happened, distort the evidence, it could happen to anyone, it could happen to me, I
no longer trust the police? What do you say to them - overall message?

DAMIAN GREEN:
My simple message is twofold, if you like. That the vast majority of the police are
honest, decent people doing a dangerous job very well and that we are improving the
system so that those few who break the rules will be much better controlled, will be
inspected independently, will have to sign up to a code of ethics, and that we’re
changing a culture inside the police so that it’s much less inward looking than it used
to be.

ANDREW MARR:
Is Andrew Mitchell going to get an apology from anybody?

DAMIAN GREEN:
I hope so. He deserves an apology.

ANDREW MARR:
From whom?

DAMIAN GREEN:
Well let’s start with the people who left his office and said things that, if you read the
transcript, were palpably untrue.

ANDREW MARR:
So those three police officers should apologise?

DAMIAN GREEN:
Those … Absolutely those three should apologise.
ANDREW MARR:
What about the person who kicked him out of his job in the first place? Should he apologise? I’m thinking of a guy called David Cameron.

DAMIAN GREEN:
Well he didn’t because Andrew Mitchell resigned. David Cameron…

ANDREW MARR:
Ish-ish.

DAMIAN GREEN:
Well no, he …

ANDREW MARR:
He was resigned.

DAMIAN GREEN:
No, I don’t think so. He resigned. But you know let’s do this in order. Let’s find out what the facts are, what the CPS say, whether there was a criminal conspiracy, whether there’s more police disciplinary action to be taken against those at the gates of Downing Street. All those questions need to be answered first.

ANDREW MARR:
There’ll be a whole plethora of apologies after that. Damian Green, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS