



policebeat

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#UnderAttack

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EDITORIAL

PONI in eye of the storm

First and foremost, our thoughts are with the victims of Islamist extremists who attacked Manchester and London. They are brainwashed sadists whose mission is to instil terror in ordinary people going about their everyday lives.

Against them, are our professional, well-trained and dedicated colleagues. The night before the callous London attack, we were joined in Belfast by leaders of the Metropolitan Police Federation, City of London Federation and British Transport Police Federation.

They were our guests at the annual RUC GC and PSNI Benevolent Fund Gala Dinner, a night when we are joined by members of our police family, many of whom were so cruelly bereaved with loved ones who lost their lives protecting this entire community.

The tangible and generous support extended by our sister Federations is given without question each year, and is a powerful statement of empathy and collectivity for which we are immeasurably grateful.

Less than twenty-four hours after this dinner, our guests and their members, were dealing with the aftermath of the carnage on the streets of the capital. Unarmed officers, and an off-duty colleague, did their best to thwart the attack. Four were injured.

Two weeks earlier, in Manchester, the death toll was twenty-two including off-duty Cheshire Detective Constable, Elaine McIver.

In March, Constable Keith Palmer from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection unit was killed protecting the Palace of Westminster during a terrorist attack. Keith and four others were murdered. The four terrorists who carried out the attacks in March, May and June were shot dead by armed Officers.

The issue of resources and numerical strength was dragged onto the political stage in the middle of the General Election. The same concerns were expressed at the PFNI's Annual Conference. Although so far spared the actions of the crazed suicide bomber or knife-wielding Jihadist, Northern Ireland continues to deal with a threat level rated 'severe' from dissident republicans, where the targets for attack are Police Officers, Prison Officers and our military colleagues.

Conference delegates discussed this lethal dissident challenge, but we also voiced concerns in relation to pay erosion, budget cuts, downsizing, the need for the introduction of spitguards, the operation of the office of PONI, along with the extent to which Officers are subjected to verbal and physical assaults. Everything that needed to be said was said during our annual conference.

Our annual gathering is an opportunity to air our views in a candid, forthright and honest manner. If there are shortcomings in aspects of the operation of the PSNI, we will speak our mind.

If we believe that the Department of Justice, or Ministers generally, are failing our Officers, we will tell it as it is. And if our men and women are being let down by the PONI or the PPS, we have a duty to state our case.

The Ombudsman took our criticism particularly badly and issued a press statement in response, a few days later, the Northern Ireland Retired Police Officers Association described our criticism as 'well-founded, accurate and timely'.

Furthermore, it said that significant weight was added to the situation when both former and serving Officers of all ranks shared similar levels of unease and disquiet. It was clear that the entire police family was speaking as one, and it called on the Government to intervene as a matter of urgency.

The PFNI is not opposed to oversight. It is opposed to Officers being hung out to dry without the benefit of an appeal process. Arguing the case for an independent avenue of appeal, the PFNI bluntly stated that 'reform is not so much desirable as essential'.

This Staff Association isn't naïve. It's aware of the wider political arena in which policing operates. Instant results are unlikely. That said, the PFNI has once again registered its objections and legitimate views, and it is now over to the Government to do what's required to instil Officer confidence in a process in need of fixing.

Keynote address at a glance

Federation highlights high assault rates on officers and calls for immediate introduction of spitguards

The Police Federation for Northern Ireland says eight out of ten officers were the victims of a physical or verbal assault in a twelve-month period.

Revealing details of a survey of Officers, the Federation said violence was widespread with 91% of those assaulted reporting unarmed physical assaults including wrestling, hitting and kicking.

Almost half (47%) of those who took part in the on-line survey said they had to deal with being threatened or assaulted with an offensive weapon such as a stick or bottle, and 13% assaulted with a deadly weapon including a firearm.

The Chairman of the PFNI, Mark Lindsay, said the level of assault was unacceptably high and he called for measures to be introduced to protect officers.

Nearly three-quarters of Officers highlighted the disgusting act of being spat at while they did their job.

Addressing assembled delegates attending the 45th Annual Conference of the PFNI, Mr. Lindsay, said they'd long campaigned for the introduction of spitguards to counter this sickening practice.

Mr Lindsay said: "We demand the immediate introduction of spitguards to afford adequate protection to Officers....

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