



policebeat

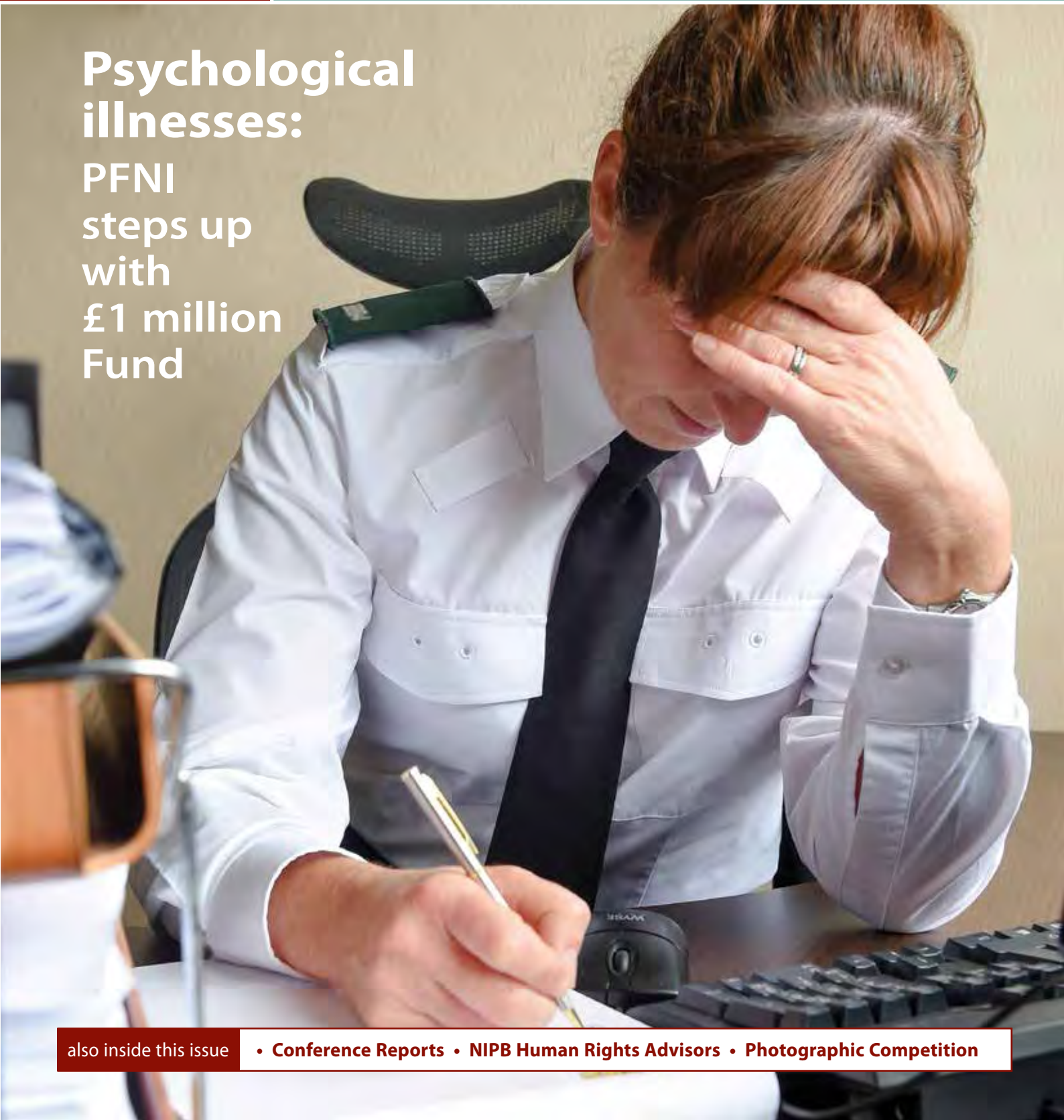
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Psychological illnesses:

PFNI
steps up
with
£1 million
Fund



also inside this issue

• Conference Reports • NIPB Human Rights Advisors • Photographic Competition

EDITORIAL

Psychological Wellbeing Fund should be viewed as a start

Hundreds of Officers are having to cope with a range of psychological illnesses because of the work they do. A large proportion of them suffer in silence.

Those who are aware of certain symptoms and realise that something is awry very often go to the next stage and seek professional help to cope with their particular condition.

That's where the chokepoint becomes acute. Waiting lists are a horrible fact of life, and the longer it takes to get professionally assessed, the harder it will be on the individual to bring their lives back to an even keel.

The example used by the Chairman of this Staff Association at our Annual Conference deserves a second mention. An Officer reported sick on the 9th October last year and requested a referral for stress-related illness. Nineteen weeks and one day later, he received his first counselling session. He isn't unique by any means as his plight is one that many sufferers can relate to all too readily. Treatment is often too little, too late.

There are shortcomings and failings in the system. Most noticeably, there are insufficient resources, too few professionals, a dreadful lack of awareness and a certain indifference.

A change in mind-set is also required. Management has to acknowledge that there is a serious and worsening problem within the ranks because of the job Officers do, day and daily. A response that reduces an Officer trying to deal with a long-term psychological illness to half-pay or no-pay is not what is required.

Instead, the Service has an obligation to prove by its actions that it really does care for the people who are grappling with quite dreadful conditions. Officers attend crises, witness appalling scenes, live with the constant threat of a terrorist attack and, generally, function as if nothing is out of the ordinary. For some, the burden is too much. We see people with PTSD, stress, anxiety and depression and the caseload is not getting any lighter. They deserve better.

Conference heard that treatment is complex, costly and takes time. However, the resources that are required are pitiful and wholly inadequate.

The PFNI has become the first Police Federation in the country to step up to the plate by delivering a £1 million Psychological Wellbeing Fund over a three-year period.

The Fund will lead to additional therapists and psychologists to increase capacity to deal with a worsening situation and to accelerate rapid access to those who need it urgently. It will also be used to raise awareness and help better inform and educate.

The aim is to make significant inroads into the problem, a breathing space to allow statutory bodies to catch up and commit adequate funding to address the challenges.

This Fund will be administered by the PFNI, through our partner agencies, but it is not replacing the obligation on the employer, the PSNI, and the Department of Justice. Both have responsibilities which we will not allow them to abdicate in the future.

This Organisation knows it can make a positive difference to the lives of scores of our colleagues.

The Federation has started the ball rolling and provided a pathway to remedy this crisis. Now, it's over to Senior Command and the Department of Justice to pick up the baton.

PFNI sets up £1 million fund to deal with psychological illnesses

Conference '16 was dominated with news of the setting up of a special £1 million Fund to help officers suffering from a range of work-related psychological illnesses.

Federation Representatives heard how there was 'a crying need' for action to address debilitating conditions with PTSD, stress, anxiety and depression.

The Federation said the problem was getting steadily worse and that last year, 37,674 days were lost - a jump of 60% since 2013.

The Chairman of the PFNI, Mark Lindsay, called for a sea-change in the way psychological illnesses are addressed by the Service and the Government.

Mr Lindsay said Officers waiting for treatment should not be penalised financially by being reduced to half-pay and then no-pay for being on long-term sick leave.

Addressing the 44th Annual Conference, he said the new Psychological Wellbeing Fund, the first of its kind to be introduced by any Federation in the United Kingdom, should serve as a catalyst for statutory agencies to step up to the mark.

Mr Lindsay told Conference: "The caseload isn't getting any lighter. Yet, resources are pitiful and wholly inadequate to deal with the issue. Waiting times are unacceptably long.

"Many are left to their own devices unaware of the signs and symptoms of stress. They are sufferers of psychological illnesses, who are also victims because of the job they do.

"This problem needs this urgent intervention. Whole families are suffering because those hurting are falling through the cracks.

"That, colleagues, is a crying shame and a professional scandal. They need a lifeline." The Fund will be administered by PFNI, through partner agencies over the next three years. The intention is to provide additional therapists and psychologists to increase the capacity to deal with these issues.

Mr Lindsay added: "We want to accelerate rapid access to those who need it urgently and are being failed by the current system."

The fund will involve education and prevention through raising awareness of the issues. It will also aim to improve resilience by providing officers with the tools and strategies to cope with the strain of their demanding roles.

Mr Lindsay continued: "What we're doing is providing a breathing space to allow the statutory bodies to catch up and put adequate funding in place to address this issue.

"There is a statutory role, a statutory duty, to deliver professional services, but the bodies charged with delivery are finding it difficult to meet demand.

"In response to this severe issue, this Federation decided it would take the initiative.

"We are not replacing the obligation on the PSNI and the DoJ to address and adequately fund the issues. Nor in the future will we allow them to abdicate their responsibilities.

"We know we can make a positive difference to the lives of scores of our colleagues."

Elsewhere, in a wide-ranging address, Mr Lindsay repeated calls for increased resources to expand Officer numbers and also focused on issues over working conditions and the on-going 'severe' threat that was posed by dissident republicans.

