**Check against delivery**

**05/06/2019**

**Address by the Chair of the Police Federation for Northern, Mark Lindsay**

Baroness Harris, Shadow Secretary of State, Chief Constable distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I extend a warm welcome to each of you to this, our 47th Annual Conference.

Within the past five days, dissident republican terrorists attempted to murder one of our colleagues at Shandon Park Golf club.

Here was an off-duty officer….a family man….singled out by people intent on causing anguish and pain and, of course, instilling fear amongst our colleagues and the wider community.

I’m sure you will join with me in conveying our best wishes to him and his family, over this traumatic and contemptable act.

The people who planned this attack….

The people who made the device….

Who planted it….

Stole the vehicles….then set them on fire and helped manage their escape, have absolutely nothing to offer.

They are bankrupt, heartless, maniacs. Politically irrelevant and deserving only of our condemnation.

They must be apprehended and for that, I appeal from this platform today for an all-out effort by this community to give them up. To rid us once and for all of this scourge that continues to blight this island.

**Year of Change**

2019 will be characterised as a year of change in policing in Northern Ireland. The current Chief Constable is counting down the days to his retirement.

Waiting to step into the post is the former Chief Constable of Cheshire, Simon Byrne.

Mr Byrne has a wealth of policing experience behind him and we look forward to working with him to deliver what’s best for the wider community and our officers who serve the public.

To our current Chief Constable, on behalf of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, I want to extend to you and your family our best wishes for the future. Our relationship was always constructive, sometimes challenging, but at all times in the best interests of our officers, and I wish you well.

In the absence of a Justice Minister, the Secretary of State recently announced the appointment of Marie Anderson as the new Police Ombudsman.

We have had a strained relationship with the current Ombudsman, where we consistently highlighted a biased viewpoint towards serving and retired officers.

We accept the office of the Ombudsman has to have the confidence of the public but, crucially, also of police officers. It is not an unreasonable expectation that PONI investigations are conducted thoroughly and impartially. Colleagues, in the past, confidence that this has been done has been in very short supply.

We will engage with Mrs Anderson in a constructive manner and sincerely hope that the relationship with that office can be improved.

So, the policing landscape is changing and will change some more in coming months. There are significant issues to confront and address, all of them requiring clear leadership and direction.

**Wellbeing**

Another area that continues to impact on our officers is workplace wellbeing.

Our Wellbeing Project is now in its third year and the results have been heartening and, at the same time, underline the need for intervention.

We all acknowledge the simple fact that we have a problem, and it’s a challenge we must confront without further delay.

Recently, Police Care UK commissioned the University of Cambridge to carry out research and the results confirmed our worst fears.

Their survey found that 90% of those employed in policing in the United Kingdom were exposed to trauma. One in five of these reported symptoms of PTSD.

From our own workforce survey, PSNI officers scored lower for mental health wellbeing relative to the Northern Ireland population.

Our £1 million Wellbeing initiative is well received and welcomed by our members – filling a void that existed because of a lack of funding and is now being rectified by the recruitment of 20 Mental Health professionals by PSNI.

Preventative measures, early intervention and individual support are key goals. But we must also see improvements in workplace wellbeing which show that it is “OK not to be OK”. Immediate action is required on the big issues – issues of workforce size, resilience, demand and adequate rest and recuperation.

Our people, who suffer from conditions such as PTSD, need to know the help is there and will be delivered in a timely, professional and caring manner without the excruciating stranglehold of bureaucracy.

**Pay**

One element linked to wellbeing is pay.

I told you last year that there were shortcomings and failings in the pay review processes and once again these independent recommendations have been ignored by the Home Office and the Department of Justice.

Colleagues, what is the point in going to the trouble of compiling and then submitting evidence in relation to pay when it is cast aside like this?

Even though our fact-based case is agreed by the Pay Review Body, the only test or criteria that is applied by Government is one of affordability.

Not surprisingly, we are now at the point where we lack confidence in a process that is anything but consistent.

Our officers have now experienced two consecutive years where we had significant delays in the implementation of their pay awards. Delays of seven and five months are unacceptable.

Whether it’s the absence of a Justice Minister, or Executive, foot-dragging has to stop. It tells officers they are not properly valued and it has a direct negative impact on morale.

In our most recent Workforce survey, nine out of ten officers pointed to the damage this was doing to their morale. More than six out of ten said the delay had a negative financial impact for them.

Given the unwavering commitment our officer’s give to serving society on a daily basis, this sorry state of affairs reflects badly on those who control the purse strings.

Furthermore, I take no pleasure in saying that, with the on-going political stalemate in NI, it is possible that this same problem will be encountered for a third year in a row.

We have asked for contingency plans to be put in place now to ensure this does not happen but, frankly, I wouldn’t be optimistic of that happening.

The retention of the CRTP allowance is the only bright spot on the horizon. It’s just one example of how the PSNI and this Federation can work together to solve areas of mutual concern. We have to thank all those on the PSNI side for having the foresight to see how such an allowance would enable them to tackle management issues within the Service whilst valuing their officers.

**Workforce Survey**

The needs and challenges of our members featured in our second very detailed Workforce Survey, where our men and women reported what would be regarded anywhere else as intolerable workplace pressures.

Almost 3/4 of those who took part in our survey said that when the pressure builds, they are expected to work faster, even if it meant taking shortcuts and also said there were insufficient numbers in their team or unit for them to do their job properly.

Over 80% insisted they didn’t have enough officers to manage all the demands made on them as a team.

59% said they were unable to meet the conflicting demands on their time.

The knock-on effects on officer morale and PSNI efficiency are obvious.

92% believed that morale across the PSNI was low.

Colleagues, there are consequences when people have to consistently work under such unrelenting pressures, with the very real threat of punitive disciplinary action being taken if, and when, they get it wrong, never far from their minds.

This feedback from the coalface is disturbing and worrying. In any other organisation or enterprise, this would set alarm bells ringing. Yet, for some inexplicable reason, the silence is deafening in some Government departments.

Without urgent investment, further decline in service will be inevitable. We will see more officers under stress and reporting sick. More being injured on duty and more leaving for less demanding jobs.

As if this isn’t bad enough, officers continue to be assaulted whilst doing their jobs. There was an increase in the number of assaults against officers last year.

626 officers were injured, which is about six times the number of people in this conference venue!

All of us have to get real about this problem. It’s no longer good enough to say ‘its just part of the job’.

It’s not part of the job to have broken bones, a detached retina, nightmares or PTSD.

The only effective way of dealing with this appalling problem is for the Courts to hand down realistic sentences to people who assault police officers.

Sentences must serve as a deterrent. Make the would-be attacker think twice. Make him, or her, realise that a minimum jail term is the most likely outcome.

For too long, police officers perceive that the courts have been far too lenient with offenders. It’s time to give police officers the protection they deserve. That’s the very least society can deliver for the people who go the extra mile to protect them.

As if that isn’t bad enough, to add to the burden, we have officers dealing with more than 20,000 cases a-year involving people with mental health issues.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office recently reported how this figure had more than doubled.

Gaps in health care are being plugged by officers, with many taken off normal duties for hours on end to help vulnerable people.

We are already under-strength and being the service of last resort – the ‘safety net’ for unwell and vulnerable individuals - is taking a heavy toll.

There is a clear need for a long overdue debate on mental health provision, the role of appropriately qualified health care professionals, financial resources and the unrealistic expectations that are placed on officers.

A robust review that seriously addresses this growing challenge has to be pushed up the agenda.

**Legacy**

One such issue is legacy and how we, as a society, deal with the past.

There is a determined and concerted effort underway to re-write the past …

to demonise the security services …

to downplay the actions of the killers …

and pretend their deeds were somehow legitimate or justified.

They most certainly were not! They could never be anything other than barbaric and we will never tire of defending the good name and reputation of men and women, like you, who prevented all-out anarchy and mayhem and delivered the conditions for peace.

As if to prove relevance today, too often, some of our politicians eulogise the cowardly actions of the past. To commemorate events such as the murder of two police officers 100 years ago in County Tipperary, only helps radicalise a new generation.

Whether a murder took place 100 years ago, 40 years ago or 10 years ago, it was all wrong and politicians need to be mindful of the message they send out to society.

Politicians and civic leaders need to be more mindful of the rhetoric they use when describing the past. Praising the actions of terrorists who murdered our colleagues does nothing to instil confidence in policing the here-and-now or, indeed, the future.

Your words have a direct impact on the lives of our officers and more care should be taken when celebrating the illegal actions of terrorist groups.

This Federation has made its position on legacy well known. We are ever mindful of the pain and suffering inflicted on the families of hundreds of our colleagues who were murdered, and the thousands left with often appalling physical injuries and psychological illnesses.

It will come as no surprise to you to hear me say that in some quarters the position we adopted was met with a mixture of silence, indifference or, in a few instances, hostility.

As police officers, both serving and retired, we have never sought to be treated any differently than other sections of our communities. A crime is a crime no matter who committed it.

However, there is a clear and concerted effort, by some, to lay **ALL** the blame for atrocities carried out by terrorist groupings at the door of the police and military.

We stated in our submission that this is totally unacceptable.

They worked tirelessly to create the space for peace to become a reality.

The proposed legislation on legacy institutions is flawed and in need of radical review.

If it proceeds as currently envisaged, there will be many cases where there will be an absence of hard evidence and investigations will be based on conjecture, rumour and perception. Looking at terrible times from over 30 years ago through the prism of modern-day policing is not the way to bring closure to the families of victims from whatever quarter.

It is perverse to set up institutions which will seek to investigate retired officers, whilst we have already agreed to release terrorists from prison, grant pardons and issue comfort letters.

Let’s not forget also, that decommissioning legislation enabled terrorist groups to destroy ballistic and forensic evidence.

The hypocrisy of this is lost on no-one in this room today.

When we add all this together, it is obvious that the focus of funding and investigations will be to hound retired and serving officers, in the vain hope that widespread criminality will be found.

There cannot be two different evidential thresholds. Those who caused the bloodshed and mayhem must not be allowed to escape justice simply because their actions are weighed against a less rigorous legal test.

Vast sums of money will be ploughed into a process that will not guarantee closure for families and will only pose more questions than answers.

In the interim, the proposed offence of “non-criminal police misconduct”, will lay the blame for procedural error at the feet of individuals who served their community with distinction and no doubt open the door to further legal processes.

To placate some, there is the very real prospect that those who defended the state and worked day and daily to defeat terrorism will be abandoned.

We also run the risk of creating a new community of victims – former police officers – who will have to delve into their pensions and savings to mount their own legal defences.

The imbalance of the accuser getting seemingly unlimited legal aid, while the accused former officer is left to his or her own devices is not lost on anyone at this conference.

That is wrong on every level. Blatant discrimination.

Colleagues, this is fundamentally unfair and we call on the Government to confine non-criminal police misconduct to the bin and provide funding for those accused, to be able to avail of early and adequate legal indemnity.

The spectre of legacy surrounds everything we do as a police service today but I am a realist and have to recognise how the overhang of the past is a brake on local politics. As a society, we will have to find a path that takes us through this political maze, if public confidence is to be maintained.

**Terrorism**

You don’t need me to tell you that Loyalist and Republican terrorism continues to blight our communities.

We have had the appalling murders of Ian Ogle and Lyra McKee at the hands Loyalist and Republican terrorists which caused widespread revulsion.

These tragic and needless murders led to an outpouring of disgust and justifiable anger.

Lyra was a young journalist, simply doing her job, covering disorder in the Creggan as police searched for weapons. A masked gunman appeared from the shadows and attempted to murder our colleagues.

Let’s be clear: The thousands of people who attended vigils and protests across the Province, spoke more pointedly than any words I could offer.

These murders have led to unprecedented community unification. People united to say ‘not in our name’ and when communities deliver a message as powerful as that, terrorism and its apologists should be dealt a devastating blow.

All of us – you, me, our colleagues and the community we serve – want to see an end to ALL terrorist groups.

Policing, on its own, cannot deal with paramilitary gangs. We need the support of communities and, of course, realistic resourcing levels to enable policing to be visible and work effectively in partnership.

As we hopefully move to better days, it’s crucial the Government maintains the level of security funding that’s ring-fenced to deal with Northern Ireland related terrorism.

This funding is essential to counter and prevent further terrorist attacks and is necessary to enable the PSNI to keep the lid on the activities of these parasites.

There is no disputing the fact that lives continue to be saved because these resources are available.

But we need to put more officers back into communities. It is at this neighbourhood level that policing is most effective and adequate cognisance of this should be taken.

By doing this we will be better equipped to work collaboratively with local communities to tackle crime and terrorism. There needs to be significant investment in this area of policing, in order that we can see the tangible benefits of community confidence in the police and the improved social conditions this will bring.

**Politics**

As the Chair of this staff association, I have to register my deep concern at the absence of a working Assembly and Executive.

We have just had Local Government and European elections. Talks began but progress could once again appear elusive.

Stormont collapsed two and a half years ago in a well documented blame game. Since then a state of paralysis has prevailed.

We have no Programme for Government. No one to fight our corner for increased numbers and adequate resources.

It is a disgraceful state of affairs. Two and a half years in ‘cold storage’ has led to drift and indecision.

The job of repairing fences and getting back to legislating and running Northern Ireland should trump all else.

If politicians are to rebuild public trust and confidence, then they will have to move from their narrow, sectional demands and instead consider the greater societal good.

For the sake of the entire community, I would appeal to our politicians to re-establish the Executive as quickly as possible.

Settle your differences inside Stormont and not outside it. It’s time to end shrill megaphone voices for what passes as local political engagement. Deliver what people want and what policing and society needs.

**Conclusion**

The vast majority of the men and women I represent want to do the best they can and to the highest standard for this community.

They are the first to step up whenever asked. The first to intervene to help. The first to put tiredness, exhaustion, fatigue and injury behind them to prevent the Service from keeling over.

Their commitment is not in question. It is not too much to demand that same level of commitment from Government.

As we face into a new era for policing, we have an opportunity to review how we do things and, in a policing world that is constantly evolving, look for new ideas, new people-friendly, people-centric ways of delivering policing that places our workforce front and centre.

We can and must re-define things. It’s time to re-style the workplace and put in place a new norm, a new arrangement, that puts our rank and file at the heart of the organisation.

An organisation that can be tough in tacking crime and terrorism, as well as caring and respectful of its people in this, the most challenging job of all.

Thank you.