



policebeat

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The News Magazine of The Police Federation for Northern Ireland

We wish all our readers a
Happy Christmas and a
peaceful New Year



also inside this issue

Christmas Messages • In the News • Response to Pension Consultation • Menopause Annual Report

CHAIRMAN'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

It has been a tough ten months and we face into 2021 with little prospect of a respite or let-up in the spread of Covid-19. Sadly, we have lost one Officer Part Time to the disease with hundreds from every region self-isolating.

It is heartening to hear how the development of vaccines has made astonishing progress. Normally, it takes years to deliver effective vaccines, but global pharmaceutical companies are working at breakneck speed to counter this life-threatening Coronavirus.

This Christmas will be strange and like no other we have experienced. Our High Streets and hospitality sectors have been decimated. Normally vibrant, bustling and festive city and town centres are virtually deserted - ghost towns as restrictions to suppress the 'R' rate remain in force.

Our officers are no different from the communities they serve. They are worried about the safety and well-being of their children and other family members. They fear contracting the virus and are taking every precaution to keep it at bay. In our close contact profession, the risks are obvious.

Against this backcloth, officers as far as possible continue to provide a professional service. We know our interventions in emergency situations are appreciated. Our work in thwarting terrorist actions, much of it unseen, continues. Countering drug dealers, human traffickers along with investigating everyday crime are some of the workstreams that are maintained.

Our colleagues face enormous pressures, made all the more acute by the pandemic. Sometimes, those pressures create challenges for some officers which necessitates the

intervention and help of their PFNI reps. Your reps work tirelessly to resolve many issues. They engage on behalf of members; provide guidance and advice; interpret Regulations and represent the views of the rank and file in discussions with senior officers. Much of this work goes unseen.

They are a 'safety net' for officers who need a helping hand or for those who face disciplinary actions or welfare support. Their commitment is undoubted, and I would like to thank them for their willingness to step up to the plate. The work they do is essential with results that deliver for individual members.

We are about to hold triennial elections when new reps and Regional Boards will be elected. They are at the heart of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland and I would encourage you to consider standing for election. Our workload isn't getting any lighter and we need people who care to represent their colleagues.

This Christmas will be challenging for each and every one of us. We have to make the best of a difficult situation caused by the pandemic and remain positive. Together as a Police Service and a community we will get through this awful I want to wish each and every one of you, and your families, a very Happy Christmas, and A New Year that brings us all some respite and the prospect of a better tomorrow.

**Mark Lindsay, Chair,
Police Federation for Northern Ireland**



CHIEF CONSTABLE'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Well what a year, where not for the first time, we have seen history made before our eyes.

I don't want to say too much about the awful effects of the pandemic – there's time for that elsewhere – save to say a huge thank you for your service, adaptability and our stoic leadership.

What does shine through and is worthy of mention is our sense of pride for a job well done. Whether it's answering and responding to a call for help, a foot patrol, a crime investigation or fitting out a new car – the list could go on.

But day and daily we are here for the communities we all joined to serve.

So a year of real achievements

- Investing in front line policing
- Investing in digital policing
- Our biggest terrorism investigation in a decade

All possible because we pulled together and worked as a great team.

But now a thought of a different Christmas with loved ones, friends and colleagues. Bubbles and social distancing will still remain part of a daily routine, but when you can, enjoy precious time as best you can. For those at work at this unique time thank you again, take care and let's all hope that 2021 is more optimistic than this historic year.

**Chief Constable Simon Byrne,
Police Service of Northern Ireland**



EDITORIAL

20 years on, Police Ombudsman has nothing to celebrate

The Office of the Police Ombudsman is nothing if not ambitious. Despite a litany of mistakes and quite appalling treatment of officers, PONI wants more powers. More powers without checks and balances. More powers with little accountability; more powers to make life more difficult for officers in a headlong rush to grab a headline.

In the twenty years the Police Ombudsman has been in operation, this Federation's relationship was tepid, at best, and fractious for most of the time. Relationships hit an all time low during the tenure of the previous Ombudsman. We had countless meetings where, with conviction, we sought to present the legitimate concerns of officers who felt they were being treated unfairly. These were frank exchanges but, sadly, what the Federation had to say fell on deaf ears.

There is a new Ombudsman at the helm, Mrs Marie Anderson, who holds the corporate mantra of: *"This Office provides an independent, impartial system for the handling of complaints about the conduct of police officers. We will deal with those*

complaints in a manner which is free from any police, governmental or sectional community interest and which is of the highest standard."

Lofty, it may be, but nowhere is fairness or objectivity mentioned and that omission fuels the suspicion officers justifiably feel towards PONI. Twenty years on, it seems the Ombudsman's Office still has a lot to learn.

Officers are not afraid of oversight or accountability. All they ask is to be treated with the same professionalism as they do with members of the public and to have the same investigative standards applied to investigations. Understandably, and in spite of what PONI says, officer confidence in the Office never climbs higher than 'low' in real terms.

Instead of seeking additional powers around decisions in police misconduct cases or to compel retired officers to co-operate, it might have been productive if the Ombudsman had set out what her office intended to do about vexatious and malicious complaints against officers. Or how she intended to fix basic investigative processes which aren't followed and have been criticised by the Courts.

There is a human cost that is often overlooked. Vexatious complaints can affect officers' livelihoods and reputations. The 'scars' stemming from a poor Ombudsman's investigation can run deep, long after an investigation is closed. Shortcomings and errors have been identified, yet, twenty years on, there seems an unwillingness to address the faults.

We make no apology for again calling for an independent authority to deal with complaints against the Ombudsman's Office. At present, there is no mechanism in place to impose sanction or censure and that is wrong.

The Justice Minister and her colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive must realise this is a glaring deficiency in the process. They should move to address this obvious weakness to ensure officers, too, can have adequate protection and a route to seek redress.

The Office of the Police Ombudsman must be held to account for its actions, as every other public body is. In this, its 20th year, it's time for the Ombudsman to set new standards and build confidence that the office is fair and objective. Now, that really would be something worth celebrating.



A first for PoliceBeat

A little bit of history is made with this edition of Police Beat.

For quite some time, we have published the magazine in hard copy and online. This is the first time we are going exclusively with the digital edition of the magazine.

Taking Police Beat online eliminates handling during this pandemic with the obvious spin-off of cutting down on print and distribution costs.

This first all-digital edition will have all the usual features and articles. It will also deal with the topical issues of the day that affect our rank-and-file.

Looking ahead to 2021, we plan to continue with the online version, at least until we emerge from this Covid-19 health crisis.

Many other organisations have abandoned hard-copy editions of their publications and this may well be our direction of travel too.

In the meantime, please enjoy our Christmas 2020 edition, and stay safe.