



policebeat

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The News Magazine of The Police Federation for Northern Ireland

Happy
Christmas
to all



also inside this issue

Christmas Messages • Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Submission • Golf Results • Sports Awards

CHAIRMAN'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

For many of our colleagues, this has been a tough year as we grappled with the household budget.

Some are suffering more than most. I have heard some heart-rending stories of financial hardship of families dealing with the double whammy of low pay and rampant, seemingly uncontrollable price rises. It's all the more acute in some homes where the sole wage-earner is a police officer on inadequate pay who is expected to perform the magic of the alchemist by turning lead into gold.

This Christmas will be a trying and challenging time for those in greatest need. Economies will have to be made with some of the gloss taken off the season of goodwill and sharing.

We will rally round to support friends and colleagues who find themselves in a bind. We can help with the material things, but there must also be a lifeline extended to colleagues who are experiencing psychological stresses as they do their best to cope.

This Christmas, I want to direct my main message to colleagues who feel under pressure. Our colleagues should not feel isolated or alone. And my appeal to all of you is to reach out to those who are under pressure. Engaging

with colleagues and encouraging them to talk about their predicament is one small way of showing empathy and support.

We're working with the PSNI on the practical steps we can take to signpost help to deal with harsh economic challenges. What we are doing won't be a 'magic bullet', but it will go some small way towards assisting colleagues.

Our more fortunate colleagues are also watching their outgoings; they know the festive season won't be easy, but their position is less precarious than others.

I don't wish to be a killjoy or sound overly pessimistic, but I feel it's important to tell it as it is and not shy away from the harsh realities of being a police officer who has seen pay eroded by more than 20% in ten years.

To all of you – those who are working and those who are getting a break at home – I wish to extend a very Happy Christmas and a less stressful and more financially fulfilling 2023.

**Liam Kelly, Chair,
Police Federation for Northern Ireland**



CHIEF CONSTABLE'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

As we end a tumultuous year, may I wish you all and your families a Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2023. Hopefully, you will all enjoy some precious time with your loved ones.

Looking back we have coped with Summer parades and big events, predominantly of course, and sadly, the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. These, alongside the day to day response to many policing issues, reflected our best traits and values and make me proud to be part of an organisation with such a commitment to protecting the public we serve.

Of course, recent events show that the threat of terrorism remains a reality for us to deal with, but our determined, resilient response has defined us in terms of pace and professionalism, and also garnered public support.

We continue to adapt and change as an organisation, investing in new technology to help reduce bureaucracy and

speed up how we work. Next year will be tough again.

Financially and operationally we will begin a fundamental redesign of how we deliver policing. Crucial to this will be your ideas and your involvement as we are investing in your future.

At the same time, we have all had to come to terms with budget cuts and managing the uncertainty that this creates. And of course the cost of living crisis looms large. As I write this, frustratingly, we still await news of any pay or increment announcement. Hopefully, this may become clearer as Christmas draws closer.

Finally, take care and thank you from all of us in the Service Executive Team.

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



EDITORIAL

Westminster Select Committee hears our anger and frustration over pay

There has been no let-up in the expressions of outright disgust over the failure to sign off on an annual pay award.

The devolved institutions are in the 'deep freeze'. Decision-making is the can that is kicked down the road. Permanent Secretaries have been given greater discretionary powers. Yet, there has been no discernible progress on police pay in Northern Ireland. This has been exacerbated by the Government coupling the main pay award with incremental pay progression.

It is an insult to treat officers in such a dismissive manner especially when many of them are having sleepless nights wondering how they are meant to balance the household budget. It is baffling as to why officers should languish at the back of the queue waiting for a pay award.

An increase of £1,900, which is what counterparts in England and Wales received, would ease the pain a little, but even that is far short of what's needed to address inflation at 11.1% and eye-watering increases in foodstuffs. The treatment meted out to our officers is shoddy, mean-spirited and incomprehensible. Their anger is palpable.

We have been failed by ministers and we have been failed by devolution.

This isn't the first time officer pay has been delayed by months. It has been an unwelcome pattern for several years even when we had a functioning Executive.

Dithering, 'red tape' and needless buck-passing have characterised the tortuous process of police pay.

The Federation set out its position on devolution and police pay in a Submission made to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.

First of all, the Federation fully acknowledges the benefits that have been delivered by the Agreement. Stop-start devolved government, political upheaval and an inability to implement commitments and promises have undermined the international treaty.

The Federation focused on police pay and broken promises on officer numbers. We called for a simplified system to 'sign off' on pay awards to replace the current intolerable situation. We said: 'It is a process that is driven by excessive bureaucracy for no good or obvious reason.'

The Federation made several suggestions including the immediate ratification of PRRB pay recommendations; reduced bureaucracy and full implementation of pay awards at the appointed start date.

MPs from all sides of the House of Commons were left in no doubt as to the depth of feeling over pay. This is a problem that can and should be fixed. The time for excuses when families are bearing the brunt of excessive inflation is over.

Expect officer retention to become an issue when our men and women look to more rewarding employment options outside the Service. Pay scales, too, are in urgent need of an overhaul, particularly for Probationers and officers who are only in the early years of their service.

Our commitment to never lose an opportunity to make the case on officers' behalf will remain undiminished. There will be no easing up in our efforts until we get decision-makers to acknowledge the enormous disservice to our rank and file and get them to see sense.



Federation tells MPs that devolved pay process needs urgent overhaul

The Federation has made a Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) at Westminster highlighting its frustration over the long-drawn-out pay process in Northern Ireland.

The Committee invited views ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement next April and, in its Submission, the PFNI stated its belief that devolution has failed policing. The devolved system that deals with officer pay has led to unacceptable delays and excessive bureaucracy for no good or obvious reason.

The Federation called for an urgent overhaul of the Northern Ireland pay process.

Here's the Submission in full:

Introduction

The Police Federation for Northern Ireland (PFNI) represents all ranks from Constable to Chief Inspector within the Police Service

of Northern Ireland (PSNI). It came into being in 1971 with a remit set out in statute which allows it to provide a comprehensive range of welfare services for members who subscribe to the Voluntary Fund but is prevented by law from taking industrial action.

The Agreement

The Belfast Good Friday Agreement (GFA) delivered on its core political objectives and led directly to the creation of power-sharing devolved institutions at Stormont. Crucially, support from the main paramilitary protagonists in the 'Troubles' created the climate for a political game-changer which delivered an imperfect peace.

The Agreement meant major changes for individual police officers and the organisation as a whole. The impartial, professional services provided by the police remained the same, but the climate in which police operated underwent a transformation.

As part of the overall package, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), incorporating the RUC GC, came into existence in November 2001.

The pay process 'is not fit-for-purpose and takes no account of individual needs at a time of rising inflation and a deepening cost-of-living crisis.'

It was envisaged that the Service would have a new, peacetime officer complement of 7,500. This was primarily based on the population figure at that time. Given the increase in the population of Northern Ireland to 1.9 million, the PSNI should today have a total officer cadre of 8,500. This means that the Service is currently operating with an officer shortfall of some 1,800.

On officer numbers alone, the structures set up under the GFA have failed to deliver for policing and, by extension, the entire community.

Failures

As a vital Public Sector organisation, policing has been allowed to become the 'Cinderella' service.

Structures are cumbersome and whilst there is accountability through the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB), there is a distinct failure to champion the undoubted needs of the organisation.

It is of particular concern that not enough attention is paid to the welfare and wellbeing of officers.

Not for the first time has police pay been caught up in a bureaucratic 'maze' resulting in inordinate delays in implementing pay awards. For example, in line with our colleagues in England and Wales the most recent pay award was due to appear in payslips in September 2022, yet there is no clarity on what the award will be, when the increase will be 'signed off' or if the award will be backdated. To further complicate matters, the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) has notified the PFNI of their intention to formally engage with us on the next pay round for 2023/2024 despite their previous recommendations not being ratified or indeed communicated to us. This is totally unfair and perverse and makes a total mockery of the process.

Devolved institutions have created layers of unnecessary 'red tape' which hamper delivery in a timely and business-like manner and lead to dissatisfaction and frustration. The Northern Ireland Executive – the administration generally – has done more to erode confidence in local government by its failure to take decisions and act expeditiously.

We accept that the current political impasse has hampered the delivery of a Programme for Government (PfG) based on an agreed Budget. That said, even when the Executive was functioning, annual police pay awards lagged by several months. In one particular year, the delay exceeded eight months.

Police core pay spines in Northern Ireland are historically linked directly to whatever

the PRRB recommends for colleagues in England and Wales.

Any new award requires a full business case from the employer, the PSNI, after which the proposed settlement moves back and forward with the Department of Justice (DoJ).

From there, civil servants in the DoJ then refer to their counterparts in the Department of Finance (DoF). The back and forward process then resumes again between DoF, DoJ and PSNI. In what should be a straight-forward matter then becomes bogged down is tedious, time-consuming bureaucratic box-ticking which results in excessive delay in resolving the pay awards.

The PFNI finds this an intolerable situation. The process is far from user-friendly and needs to be urgently overhauled. It is not fit-for-purpose and takes no account of individual needs at a time of rising inflation and a deepening cost-of- living crisis. It is a process that is driven by excessive bureaucracy for no good or obvious reason.

Fixes

The Northern Ireland Executive will face formidable challenges if and when it is restored.

Police pay and the budget that is awarded to the PSNI are two elements that will have to be addressed.

Decreasing numbers of officers will see

the Service plummet to 6,000 within three years unless there is a reversal of disastrous economic measures. This will be the lowest number of officers since the inception of the PSNI twenty-one years ago and calls into serious question the ability to deliver the full range of services the public has a right to expect.

On pay specifically, we recommend a simplified system that involves:

1. Immediate ratification of PRRB recommendations by the Justice Minister
2. Reduced bureaucracy and collaborative working between PSNI, DoJ and DoF to cut down on the current unacceptable delays.
3. Full implementation of pay awards at the appointed start date.

Conclusion

Like many other public and private sector organisations in Northern Ireland, the PFNI has lost faith in a system of government that operates in such a dysfunctional manner.

We acknowledge that countless lives have been saved because of the GFA and that must be the uppermost consideration.

However, from a purely PFNI perspective on day-to-day governance, it has failed to deliver on the promise of the GFA. It has, therefore, failed its people. Stop-start politics have hampered devolution and led to missed opportunities to deliver good government.

