



policebeat

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The News Magazine of The Police Federation for Northern Ireland

CRISIS

Relentless.
Painful.
No end in sight.

Telling it as it is

SPECIAL EDITION

EDITORIAL

Telling it as it is

We are caught in the vice-like grip of the worst cost-of-living fiasco in living memory. Inflation has eaten into the value of earnings. Pay is failing to keep up with day-to-day bills.

We are calling it a crisis. It is relentless. Painful. And there is no end in sight.

We are not scare-mongering or sensationalising. We are telling it as it is in this special edition of 'Police Beat' – giving individual officers at different levels in their police careers the chance to tell their stories.

Their stories make harrowing reading. They are a mere handful of real experiences, a snapshot of the hardships that are causing our men and women sleepless nights as they try to balance the household budget.

As we move into a new year, there is no end in sight to the economic 'tsunami'.

According to the research and data-driven personal finance site, NimbleFins, a family of four (two adults, two younger children) spends £129 on the weekly food shop or £6,708 a year. That last figure jumps to £178 per week when takeaway and restaurant meals are added. In this case, the yearly figure is £9,256.

Irrespective of whether its £6,708 or £9,256, the food bill has to be added to all the other inflation-busting costs such as rent or mortgage, light, heat, vehicle running costs and clothing. You don't have to be Einstein to work out that there's precious left in the household kitty if you're a Year Three Constable on a basic of £27,030 or a Year Five on just over £30,400.

The Federation is saying emphatically and loudly to our political masters that such is the extent of the economic squeeze that direct and urgent intervention is required to halt a 'brain drain' from the PSNI. We are losing officers at a frightening rate and it will have serious consequences for the wider community.

In ten years, according to PSNI figures gleaned under a Freedom of Information request, 199 probationers walked away from their police careers during their probationary period. In 2021/22 alone, the figure was 49 resignations – one of the highest ever yearly totals!

The exodus has a huge cost burden for the organisation. In the case of the 199 who left, it meant almost £4.5 million spent on training was money down the drain.

The burden is a heavy one for the employer, but it's an intolerable and constant drain on the individual officer and their family. Many things are having to be sacrificed. The few luxuries that were once affordable are no more. Replacing or upgrading the car is no longer an option. Foreign holidays are a thing of the past. With monthly income pared right back, the household disposable budget has rapidly evaporated.

There is no wriggle room. No give in the budget. Needless to say, the financial pressures stress and strain.

Although 174 officers who left during their probationary period from 2015 until

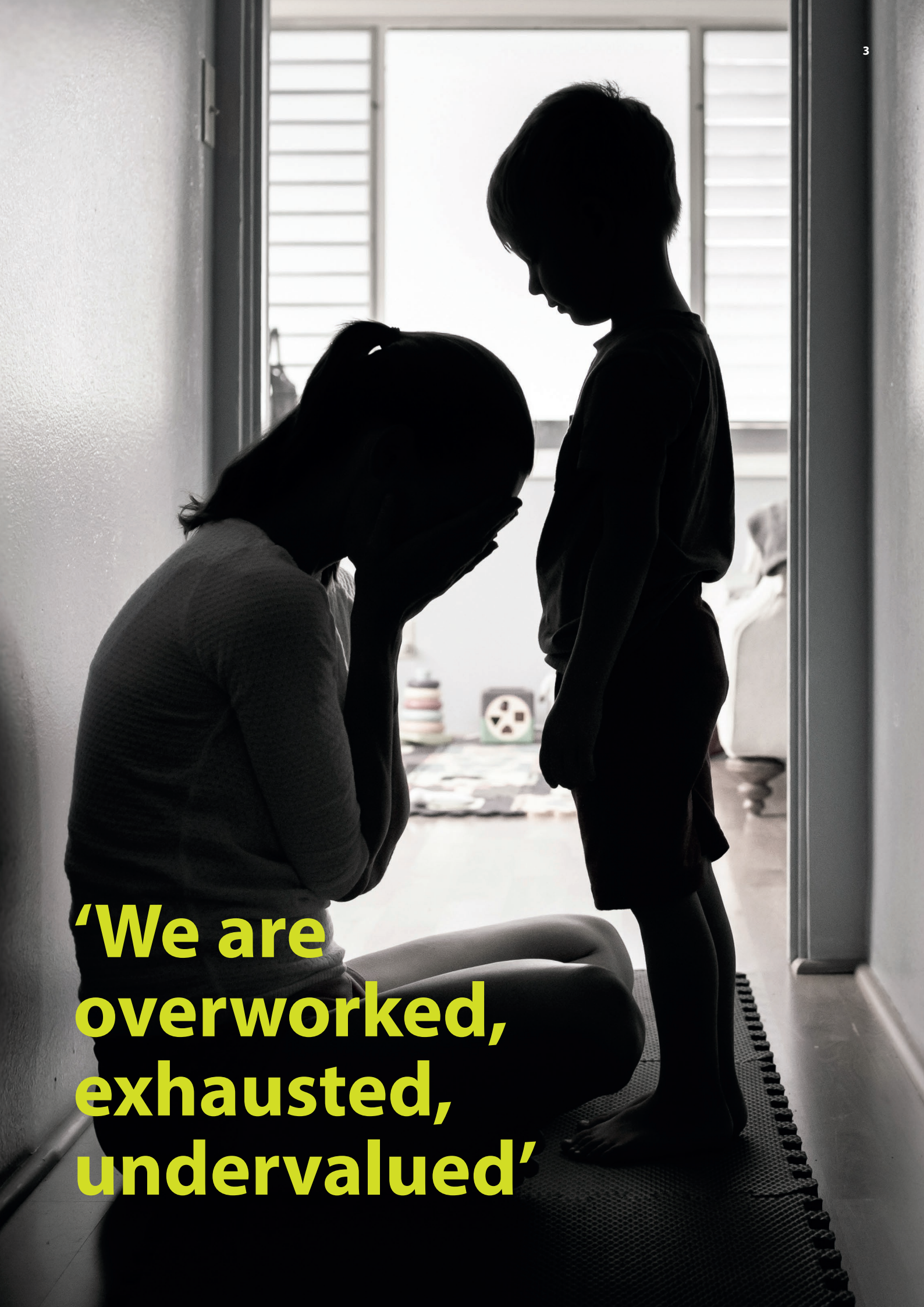
July 2022 said their resignations were 'at their own request', there's little doubt that making ends meet was a significant factor. Anecdotally, they left for other employment where the financial rewards are greater and the daily pressures considerably less.

It's now an imperative to get a review without delay of what officers are paid. The reality is the current pay scales are unfit for purpose and woefully out of date. They fail to give particularly the young in service officer a reasonable standard of living that they have a right to expect. It is not commensurate with the often thankless and dangerous job they do on behalf of society generally.

We know they money's tight and that the devolved Departments are in severe difficulty. We also know that unless we get pay properly and seriously addressed, more officers with invaluable experience will head for the exit. Under the law, we are prevented from taking industrial action, but the danger is that our men and women will vote with their feet.

Our political masters and those who advise them, whether here or in London, must address this situation with speed and sincerity. Far from crying wolf, this Federation believes it's time for urgent and meaningful steps to be taken to address this real-time crisis.





**'We are
overworked,
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‘We are overworked, exhausted, undervalued’

An experienced officer who is passionate about the job he and his colleagues do has summed up the frustration that is being felt over the funding crisis.

He addressed the challenges in this candid contribution:

“I think it is important to outline that all police officers are wanting to do their best for the community and uphold the rule of law, be that putting away drug dealers, burglars, domestic or sexual offenders or those who take the law into their own hands and drive dangerously on our roads.

“We are more than a police service. We are the social workers after hours who deal with missing persons who abscond from children’s homes or troubled households.

“We are the crisis care team who prevent people taking their own lives through suicide and we are the accompanying person who escorts those who are a danger to themselves or others to hospital.

“The lack of funding does not deter us from doing the right thing and doing what is required to protect our local communities. We will often ask ourselves ‘if this was a member of my family, how would I expect them to be treated?’

“The numbers of police officers continues to fall significantly as the job is no longer seen as attractive to either young or those middle aged seeking a change in career.

“Some rural areas have a virtually non-existent police force. Our PSNI Senior Team know it, the community know it, the politicians know it and, more concerning, is that the criminals know it and are using it to their advantage terrorising our streets.

“Pay awards are one thing but proper funding to enable Police officers to do their job is vitally important also. I have been a PFNI rep for several years now and I have been inundated with concerns from officers regarding how the PSNI’s financial position is impacting on serious crime investigations.

“These are complex and protracted, lengthy investigations, the type of investigations that you will see in the media encouraging the community to come forward and assist the police and provide the information to enable us to tackle serious and organised crime.

“We are doing our best but at times it feels like our best just isn’t good enough for the communities and families we serve.

“We are overworked, exhausted, undervalued and whilst the families we deal with on a daily basis support and appreciate the work we do, we at times question if the same sentiment shared by our politicians.”

A Constable reflects on the day-to-day struggle

‘Fear of being a single parent and not being financially resilient causes many a sleepless night’

“I didn’t join the PSNI to be a millionaire. I primarily joined because I wanted to somehow make a difference.

“I knew I would start on a low salary, but that this would change with years of service. What I naively didn’t foresee was that our salary would not at any stage take into consideration the cost of living increases.

“Unfortunately, now due to the vastly increased cost of living Pay Point 5 is

essentially like being back on Pay Point two.

“Since joining the PSNI just under six years ago, rent has increased twice. Now with electricity, oil, diesel and food shopping, I live off very little per month.

“As a single parent I run a house on my own and cover full time childcare costs by myself.

“In just over a year I will reach top Constables wage but this will now not be the salary that I joined the job for in relation to the cost of living.

“Car mileage rates have remained the same in the organisation for years, yet fuel has steadily gone up and now taken a huge leap. The non-liveried fleet has depleted, so when you have to travel for work to court, training, specialist duties and OHW, you cannot obtain a vehicle.

“There is huge embarrassment having to communicate to someone you cannot afford to take your own car but now, more often than not, you are forced to. When you do take your own car, it’s at least a month or two, depending on the date you incurred the trip, before this is refunded.

“The fear of being a single parent and not being financially resilient causes many a sleepless night.

“It’s easy to understand how people get into debt.

“If the organisation does not take our job seriously and pay us a deserving salary, how can the public take us seriously and what type of work ethic will the PSNI receive.

“Let’s not forget this role requires us to check under our cars each day.”

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“ Husband and wife take on extra jobs

Increasingly, officers are turning to second jobs to supplement their incomes.

One officer and his wife have both got additional employment as they struggle with their monthly household outgoings.

John – not his real name – tells his story.

“I always wanted to be a police officer. I applied six or seven times to get in and was delighted when I was eventually accepted.

“I loved the job. That said, over the last twelve months or so, I’ve been disheartened with the job and the leadership. They talk a lot about a police ‘family’, but it doesn’t feel like that at all.

“I recently got a second job and you had to jump through hoops to get it agreed. What you go for has to be compatible with your police role, and the PSNI can say ‘no’. Your life outside of the job is restricted because of

what we do and your hands are heavily tied when you’re in the police.

“In the end, I managed to get a part-time job. The extra cash has been a welcome buffer, but if things (the economic squeeze) gets worse, we’ll have to think about using credit cards to get by for a while.

“The extra money’s important, but it takes its toll. I work probably fifty hours a-week (not taking travel time into account) and that means I miss a fair bit of family time. For example, I don’t get to see the kids going to their clubs, and I don’t get to do things together and that’s not the way it should be.

“I changed roles recently. Before that I was in uniform and was able to use overtime for things like a family holiday but that’s no longer an option.

“Balancing the books is a challenge. I do worry about my family and how we’re going to get through all of this.

“It’s sad and its worrying. You’re supposed to be in a good job and be able to provide for your family. Our pay hasn’t keep pace. I don’t know how quickly this going to be resolved, but something has to happen soon.

“The government needs to get the finger out. Officers are leaving in higher numbers. The number of resignations among probationers is astounding. Compared

to Scotland, the difference in pay is staggering. If there’s not going to be any recruitment, they’d need to retain the people who’ve come through, and they’re not doing that.

“Colleagues are all in a similar position. A friend and colleague is considering leaving because of the short-term impact on pay or rather the lack of it. He, too, loves the job. He’s in about four years and is badly hit by pay by the failure to get what’s due.

“The pay award was due in September and there isn’t even incremental pay progression. That’s really hurting everyone.”

‘John’ says he has dealt with a mortgage hike and increase in oil from £240 for 1,000 litres around 2 and a half years ago to £425 for 500 litres today. Electricity bills, fuel costs and food prices have rocketed.

The pressure is so great that ‘John’ is considering leaving the Service.

He explains: “I’ve thought about doing a Masters degree and moving to the private sector but at the minute with the cost of everything, I couldn’t afford it. I may have no other option but to take out a post graduate loan.

“This isn’t the way it should be, but I have to think of the future and what’s best for my family, just like everyone else.”

Last six months ‘the most difficult in my time as a rep’

As a representative for more than ten years, I have found the last six months to be the most difficult in my time as a rep.

You expect to deal with the less positive aspects of the police working life. These include, discipline, ill health, grievances, sickness and complicated personal circumstances, but in recent months this have been overtaken by financial concerns and desperate personal situations.

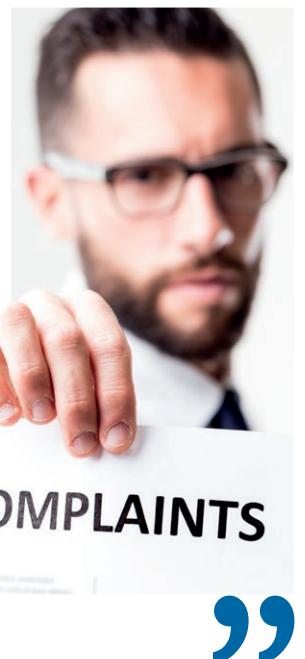
A lack of support and leadership from the top and, on occasions, unwarranted criticism from all comers has already undermined frontline policing. As one officer told me: ‘why would I stay my brother earns more as a supervisor in the local shop and doesn’t have any of the rubbish ...’

Officers are candidly admitting they will have to leave to make more money working in a local shop or push for a move closer to home to allow them to sell their car and walk to work to cut travel costs.

The rep tidies up the pieces, the rants, the cries, the less well thought out email. Refers the officer to the Benevolent Fund, or Occupational Health, tries to negotiate a move with senior managers.

I am not looking for pity or kudos; in the end, like many others, I volunteered to be a rep, but really how long can we go on buffering the harms that are done to our hard-working frontline colleagues? Physically, mentally and now financially. Before it takes its toll on us too.

Beaten and abused in the street and beaten and almost broken by ineffective leadership, self-interested politicians and an uncaring public. That is until they ring in that call ...



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An officer tells how pride is replaced by fear

‘I see my fellow officers fret, taking out IVAs, pleading for loans and consuming a poor diet’



“I joined the PSNI over 15 years ago. I made that move out of a sense of duty and desire to serve and help the community I lived in. “I joined that organisation, and in doing so took a pay cut and lost a company car. I was happy to take this reduction in pay because I knew that with overtime, I would come back to that level.

“I joined an organisation where you had support, structure and a sense of purpose. I was surrounded by like-minded colleagues who were ambitious, keen to help and working with a sense of pride.

“In 15 years one is bound to see changes and progression, that is to be expected

of a progressive organisations. However, when budgets become strained, progression becomes stifled.

“Added now to the financial pressure being placed on every office, the sense of purpose and pride is replaced by a sense of fear and trepidation.

“I am no different than thousands of my colleagues, trying not to get into debt and struggling each month to put food on the table or fuel in the car.

“I see my fellow officers fret, taking out IVAs (Individual Voluntary Arrangements), pleading for loans from the credit union and consuming a poor diet that they can just afford.

“Mileage allowance has not moved in years and in the current climate.

“The PSNI have shut most canteens and officers are forced to consume a fast-food diet. Night kitchens are not fit for purpose and if you bring food in, or have it in the car, more often than not, there is nowhere to heat it and, if called to another station, your food is back at your original station. Meal claims are constantly queried, yet they will only pay £7.25 per meal.

“I am now talking to many colleagues who have retired or actively looking for alternative employment. Not just due to financial pressure, but also the pressure and conditions they are working in.

“It is something I am now contemplating myself. It is not an easy choice but what sways it for me is the view my sons hold and what I’m teaching them

“I don’t want them to think this is normal or this is how hard work and dedication should make you feel.

Detective takes on delivery van job and refers eight colleagues to boost income

“I started my career in Strand Road 6 years ago which involved a daily round trip commute of 140 miles on top of often long and challenging hours. This was endured on a salary of £21k. Slow incremental rises over the 4 years I worked there showed me on £26k by the time I was able to transfer to Newtownabbey, much closer to home.

“Newtownabbey was walking distance for me and meant I didn’t need a second car reducing outgoings. After a while I took up a detective post in Belfast which brought better work life balance but meant I needed a second car. This involved more outgoings again which was fine but this was before the cost of living sky rocketed.

“Six years on, and I’m on a Salary of just over 30k. I’m one step off the final incremental rise for my pay band but this won’t take

place until August, and that’s providing the incremental freeze is sorted by then. Due to the budget constraints, it is unlikely there will be any window to seek promotion in the next few years either.

“With lack of any meaningful pay rises, poor salary against the cost of living and the serious reductions in opportunities for overtime, I have had to take on a second job as a delivery driver. This ultimately means I work a minimum 6-day week just to ensure there is enough coming in each month to support my family.

“It needs to be made clear that this is not through overspending or poor budgeting on my part and that I’m not alone. I have referred eight colleagues already to the delivery company, so they can seek extra income.

“It’s clear that officers are being failed by the organisation and the government. Policing can often be a harsh environment to work in with the people you deal with often being verbally and physically abusive to you. Long hours alongside pressures many of our other public sector colleagues rarely face means it really is a profession that you need to do for

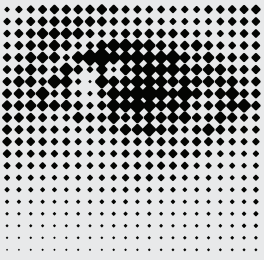
love of the job and not just for the money.

“Previously, policing was seen as a challenging yet financially rewarding endeavour but that couldn’t be further from reality now. Housing allowance and detectives’ allowance are gone and heavy pension contributions all lead to very light pay packets for officers each month.

“I’ve had friends resign for reasons I’ve already mentioned but also because of the lack of support from senior management. There is a feeling of separation amongst the federated ranks between our interests and the bosses’ interests. People just don’t want to juggle the fear of over-the-top disciplinary procedures and lack of backing from the bosses alongside the poor pay any more. My friends that have moved on now work elsewhere for better money and they leave their work in the office at the end of their shift too.

“There is an ignorance towards the realities of modern policing. Not just from the public but more so from the people who are meant to lead and support us in our roles at the most senior managerial and political levels.”

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In my view.....

By Liam Kelly, Chair,
Police Federation for Northern Ireland

Surveys generally gauge the depth of feeling over a particular subject or go to prove a position.

The PSNI conducted a Local Policing Survey to explore the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and results confirmed worst fears. Officers are hurting, struggling with everything from the fuel to heat their homes or power their cars to meeting the cost of the weekly food bill and mortgages.

As you might expect, there were no big surprises in the survey findings. Almost 2,100 people from Local Policing took part – that's a remarkable response level of 46%.

Obtaining a response rate of this magnitude reflects genuine and widespread concern. To put it bluntly, officers, particularly Constables, are at wits' end.

In order of concern, vehicle fuel costs were identified by 86%, followed by household bills at 82%.

Third highest concern (66%) was the cost of travelling to work. Covering the mortgage or rent was highlighted by 61%. Related stress and debt were flagged by 60% and 51% respectively.

A raft of suggestions has been put forward which include compensation for fuel (81%); subsidised means (66%); remote or alternative working locations (54%) and opportunities to transfer closer to home (43%).

Police officer pay topped the list of 'other issues' identified followed by shift patterns, overtime allocation and use of Modified Rest Days (MRDs) instead of overtime.

In overall terms, 95% of respondents (1,973) said they were either 'very' or 'fairly' concerned about the economic crisis.

Distressingly, 63% said they couldn't share their concerns with line management. In itself, this finding speaks to a deficiency and an out-dated culture in the organisation that says it prides itself on listening to and addressing officer concerns.

The survey more than justifies all that we have been saying for months now. The crisis that we warned about has engulfed the men and women I am proud to represent.

We were not scare-mongering, but rather telling it as it is when others were in denial. Now that the extent of the crisis has been assessed, it's time to take strong and decisive action.

The Cost of Living Gold Group, which the PFNI is part of, is mulling over these quite frightening survey results and exploring what can be done.

Without a pay award or increments coming through, it's important we work collaboratively and at speed to implement some relief measures. We have brought ideas to the table, but time is not on our side and whatever the PSNI decides, amelioration must be meaningful and implemented sooner rather than later.



Zero tolerance urged in assault cases

The Police Federation is demanding tough new legislation to tackle assaults on officers in Northern Ireland.

In 2021, 906 constables were assaulted 'with injury' which is up 244 on the figure recorded in 2017.

Assaults 'without injury' stood at 2,476 in 2021 compared to 2,007 in 2017.

In England and Wales, new legislation introduced in 2018, ensured that assaults on emergency workers were punishable with up to a twelve-month custodial sentence.

The PFNI Chair, Liam Kelly, wants to see the same law being applied in Northern Ireland, but acknowledges that that will require all-party support in a restored Assembly and Executive.

Mr Kelly said: "Assaults on our officers and our emergency service colleagues must be answered with stiffer sentences in the Courts. This Federation is encouraging a zero-tolerance approach to serve as sufficient deterrent.

"If would-be assailants think they might have to serve twelve months behind bars, it would hopefully make them think twice before committing an assault.

"Sentencing in Northern Ireland depends on the Assembly and the Executive getting back to work. The law would have to be changed and that requires the support of whoever has the Justice portfolio.

"This change has to happen sooner rather than later. For that reason, I've written to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, requesting him to intervene to ensure our officers are given the same protection as their counterparts and other emergency workers in England and Wales."

500 could exit Service by March

Upwards of 500 officers could have left the PSNI by the end of the current financial year in March.

That's the stark prediction of the Federation after the latest figures for officer 'cessations' showed that for the eight months to November, a total of 301 officers had left the Service.

Sixty-one of them had 'resigned at own request' and 140 had retired. There were 78 medical retirements and 20 officers were dismissed.

Out of the 301 total, thirty-one were probationary officers. Twenty-six of them resigned at their own request and five were dismissed.

In 2021/22, 368 officers exited the Service. Eighty-five of that total resigned at their own request. From the total of 368, fifty-three were probationers.

Reacting to the figures, PFNI Chair, Liam Kelly, said: "The figures for the first eight months of the current financial year are worrying. They show that we're on course to witness as many as 500 leaving the Service by March. Recruitment has been paused and future training at Garnerville has been effectively 'mothballed' which means that the Service numbers are worryingly reducing.

"We're rapidly heading to the 6,000 that was predicted a few months ago. The only

difference is that that won't be over three years, but over eighteen months or so if the current amount of leavers continues unabated. Historically, we see the highest figures for 'cessations' in March each year and I'm fearful that situation will be repeated.

"This amounts to a calamitous situation for policing in Northern Ireland. There's a growing trend to leave policing because pay and everyday pressures are not commensurate with what appears in monthly payslips.

Policing is no longer a job for life. Unacceptable delays in implementing the pay award and increments merely make a bad situation worse.

"More will leave and not be replaced and that's a crisis for this entire community and a Government that for some inexplicable reason has its head in the sand.

"It's little wonder that officer morale is scraping the floor. The pressures they are under are intolerable and many are saying they've reached breaking point.

"There are many other employment opportunities out there and who can blame our colleagues for saying they've had enough and are opting for better paid and less dangerous jobs.

"We will continue to campaign aggressively and loudly for a reversal in this shocking trend."

