



policebeat

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June 2023

The News Magazine of The Police Federation for Northern Ireland



PFNI 51st Annual Conference: Telling it as it is



Also inside this issue

In My View - Liam Kelly • Federation Future Focus • Celebrating 50 Years of Part Time Policing

EDITORIAL

Policing in Northern Ireland 'a political pawn'



Chris Heaton-Harris was stung by the criticism that was made at the PFNI Annual Conference. Liam Kelly said that the Secretary of State and his Government didn't care about police officers and policing generally in Northern Ireland.

Frankly, the Chair of the Federation could have said quite a bit more about the punishment inflicted on the Service. The budget is savage. Officer numbers are rapidly falling. Promises and commitments are broken. And all this at a time when the terrorist threat level in Northern Ireland is rated 'severe'.

It's not lost on our officers that across the water, where the threat is less, this same Government pumped millions more into an expansion of constabularies in England and Wales. Why the disconnect? Why is policing here put on the naughty step? Are we being used as a bargaining chip for political purposes?

If policing is a pawn – and there are grounds for believing that it is – it is shameful and grossly disrespectful of the efforts our officers make to deliver a broad spectrum of services to counter virulent terrorism and answer everyday calls for help from the public.

Mr Heaton-Harris didn't come to our conference and refused on two occasions to meet with full-time officials. In our view, that is the action of a remote and indifferent senior political figure. We can but hope that his advisers will help him right the errors of his way. Frankly, the Federation isn't holding its breath.

It's all very well to outline unswerving support for policing, and laud our efforts on the ground, but it's quite another thing to step up to the plate with the financial resources that are needed to maintain the effort. We will see drastic cuts implemented in many areas as strenuous efforts are made to make do with less. It is a thankless and impossible task.

We will likely see station closures; reduced opening times at other stations; one of the three helicopters 'moth-balled'; vehicles parked up to save on fuel costs; Neighbourhood Policing possibly cut from 700 officers to a low of 250 and a halt to recruitment. There will be a painful reprioritisation of services, painful for officers and the general public.

By slavishly adhering to a brutal and inadequate budget, this Government will inflict enormous damage. They are presiding over an unmitigated disaster and seem blissfully unaware of the consequences of their actions.

Some of our politicians appreciate the seriousness of the situation, but so far there has been no outcry or campaign of opposition. If these swingeing cuts are not overturned, it will take years to repair the damage.

The Chief Constable told the Federation's Annual Conference and the Policing Board that 'difficult choices' lay ahead. The funding gap is an eye-watering £107 million but that is expected to reduce to £43 million through the cost-cuttings measures outlined.

It's unknown at this stage where the Service will look in an attempt to balance the books. Finding the final £43 million will be a tall order. It might well be unachievable without inflicting irreparable damage.

Far better the threat is countered at this juncture rather than rushing at a later stage to shore up a hobbled and hamstrung PSNI.

There is still time for Mr Heaton-Harris to step up to the plate and do what's right. Right now, there's little evidence that he is prepared to listen to reason or proactively act in the best interests of policing and the safety of our society.

OUR CONFERENCE NEWS RELEASE

PFNI SAYS UK GOVERNMENT DOESN'T CARE ABOUT POLICING AND LOCAL PARTIES NEED TO GET BACK TO WORK

51ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Chair of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland (PFNI), Liam Kelly, has criticised the UK Government and Secretary of State for being out of touch and not caring about policing.

Mr Kelly told the Federation's Annual Conference that Chris Heaton-Harris had turned down an invitation to attend the event and also two requests for meetings to discuss the crisis facing policing in Northern Ireland.

Mr Kelly, in his keynote address to delegates, said: "His failure to meet, or even be here today, is testament to an out-of-touch Secretary of State who seemingly couldn't care less.....or care about our policing service.....or care about you and your colleagues who do what you do every day of every week.

"When push comes to shove, it is clear that if the policing crisis doesn't impact on Conservative seats, it doesn't make it on to the political Richter scale.

"Why are we treated so shoddily? There are 20,000 additional officers in England and Wales but in Northern Ireland, we're witnessing declining numbers.

"Unlike all other regions of the UK, our threat level here is set at 'severe'. But we're told we have to implement savage and unbearable cuts."

Executive failure

Mr Kelly also criticised the track record of the Northern Ireland Executive prior to suspension.

Mr Kelly said: "Even when we had an Executive, it too failed to deliver on policing.



"An end to stop-start local government that results in our inability to maximise, locally, nationally and internationally, the promises, future and hope envisioned from the 1998 Agreement.

"In this, the 25th anniversary of the Agreement, prove to all of us that it was worth it by getting back to work and building the new Northern Ireland.

"We sought a three-year budget to give stability and allow for forward planning.

"It didn't happen.

"We were promised an increase to 7,500 officers under New Decade, New Approach.

"It never materialised and now we could quickly end up with 6,000 officers. The track record of local Ministers is every bit as disappointing as their Westminster counterparts.

Remove vetoes

"Selective withdrawals from the Executive can no longer be tolerated. If that means going back to the drawing board to remove vetoes, then so be it.

"Northern Ireland cannot afford to be held back by this crude device.

"If there is a problem, sort it out across the table. Walking away isn't the solution.

"We want real and effective Government. A realistic and effective three-year budget for the Service.

"There's nothing further to be gained by continuing your squabbling. Letting the cobwebs take hold in Parliament Buildings and in all Government Departments will merely serve to further alienate and make people feel despondent."

DCI Caldwell

Elsewhere in his conference address, Mr Kelly extended best wishes to DCI John Caldwell and his family as he continues his recovery from a cowardly gun attack in Omagh in February.

Federation delegates also heard a prediction that the Service could shrink to 6,000 by the end of the financial year – its lowest figure since coming into being in 2001 – and a budget shortfall of some £120 million.

Mr Kelly focused on the introduction of time limits for discipline investigations and the rise in assaults on officers. He called for enhanced Personal Safety Training courses for front line officers; the wider roll-out of Taser and stiffer sentencing by the Courts.