



policebeat

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National Police Memorial Day



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EDITORIAL

A crisis in full spate

By the time you read this, police pay will have been further eroded with the pound in your pay worth even less than it was a month ago.

We have heard dire predictions of inflation tipping the scales at 18.1% by the end of the year. Price increases for foodstuffs, energy and essentials are placing a frightening strain on household budgets. Economists are further predicting base level interest rates will also rise to around 5.8% by next Spring causing mortgage payments to jump significantly. Against that backdrop police officers have not had a pay increase since 2020 and prior to that had suffered a 20% real terms pay cut over the past decade.

In an unjustifiable and overly bureaucratic way of sorting out police pay in Northern Ireland, any recommendations from the Police Remuneration Review Body must be first considered and ratified by the Justice Minister. As part of that process the PSNI must provide business remits and the Department of Finance must also be content, elongating and entangling the final sign off in affordability discussions and the wider issue of Public Sector pay awards. Since last year incremental pay remits have also been unnecessarily coupled with this process adding more angst for our already exasperated members.

Core police pay scales in Northern Ireland are historically aligned to the award that is made to counterparts in England and Wales. On that basis, the expectation is that from September 1st., our officers across all ranks would get a targeted cash sum of £1,900. Subject to federated rank and pay point, that’s an increase of at most 8.8% down to a minimum of 3.3%. Additionally, some of

our allowances (such as NITA and the Dog Handlers Allowance) may also be eligible for a specific uplift. Although a seemingly positive step following no pay award in 2021, the bottom line is that the expected pay increase would still fail to come close to what is required. Our members are increasingly left feeling they are being taken for granted and undervalued in respect of the sacrifices and risks they must take on a daily basis in providing an effective policing service.

At present our members see many public and private sector bodies actively engaged in strike and industrial actions over pay and conditions. As we are all aware, under statute, police officers are prohibited from taking any industrial action. However, the Federation have already commissioned legal advice on behalf of our members on this matter. In the end, the advice proffered was that only a legislation change could provide the full reassurance that officers prepared to engage in any such actions would not face criminal and misconduct proceedings. Police Federations across the United Kingdom will therefore be discussing seeking the necessary legislative change if our respective Governments continue to treat us is a derisory and unfair manner.

Policing is a stressful occupation, characterised by spur-of-the-moment decision-making and fraught with excessive oversight by a system that has, as its default, a blame culture that merely serves to erode officer confidence.

Poor pay is taking a toll on morale and wellbeing. People are voting with their feet for better paid jobs elsewhere. Probationary officers are leaving the Service – 104 in the last three years alone – and pay, or rather

the lack of it, and a sense of being undervalued, contribute to that exodus.

Increasing numbers are turning to the RUC GC-PSNI Benevolent Fund for assistance to deal with cost-of-living challenges. The charity works to relieve hardship, need and distress and can make monetary awards or interest free loans. Across the United Kingdom officers are reported to be using food banks. It is a damning indictment of the pay process that serving officers are being so financial squeezed that they are being forced to look to the charity sector for help as never before.

What we are seeing is a crisis that isn’t just developing, but one that is in full spate. No Northern Ireland Executive and no direction or leadership will only see a further worsening of the position.

The PSNI budget is well and truly obliterated. It has to be said that the loss of so many officers, not just probationers but many with valuable experience, will see the Service decline in number to 6,000 at a faster pace than that expected by Brooklyn. That will bring additional workplace pressure to officers already under increased strain. Mr Byrne has acknowledged that budget deficits ‘will almost certainly mean a smaller, less visible, accessible and responsive service. It will also mean some aspects of service delivery will look different and slow down.’

That’s an appalling prospect and one that none of us wants.

Conversely our colleagues across the border and the Irish Sea are seeing heavy investment to uplift police officer numbers. If Stormont is unable or incapable of halting the rapid decline of the PSNI, then it’s time for Westminster and Direct Rule Ministers to take the lead.

PFNI CHAIR MAKES APPEAL TO POLITICIANS

The Chair of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, Liam Kelly, is appealing to politicians to sort out the police budget to avert a full-blown crisis.

Mr Kelly said: “We’re in a place that is not good, and is getting worse by the month. Budget shortfalls mean cuts in recruitment and that, in turn, means a reduced headcount which will lead to 700 fewer officers over three years or a total officer workforce of 6,000.

“This is unsustainable, unrealistic and dangerous. The pressures officers are enduring right now are intolerable and expecting them to do more with less is a recipe for service-wide breakdown in the work we do on behalf of our communities.

“Increasingly, we are first responders to incidents where ambulance delays are excessive and that means we are taking officers off other essential duties to deal with emergency, often life-threatening situations.

“This is a problem that must be fixed before there’s further slippage. Budgets have got to be sorted out as a matter of urgency. Delaying taking the steps to fix what’s broken or threatened isn’t an option.

“Our politicians owe it to the people who vote for them, and who rely on the services officers provide, to sort out this situation if we’re to avert a full-blown crisis.”

A TRIBUTE TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND WELCOME FOR KING CHARLES III

Her Majesty The Queen was no mere figurehead who followed the direction of Her Government.

Many times throughout her reign, the late Sovereign gave encouragement and quiet support to those from Northern Ireland who committed themselves to a path away from the bomb and bullet, from destruction and pain to one of reconstruction, forgiveness and peace.

Her leadership and soft diplomatic skills contributed greatly in ushering in a new era in local politics and east-west relations. There was her historic visit to Dublin where she laid a wreath in the Garden of Remembrance to those who fought for Irish Independence. Then, in a gesture that signalled a re-defining of Dublin-London relations, she uttered some words in Irish – ‘a Uachtaráin agus a chairde’ (President and friends) – that meant so much to so many in the

Republic of Ireland who yearned for a new beginning.

This diminutive lady of great courage and strength went one step further in a most significant gesture that was seen globally. She literally stretched out her hand to the late deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, in Belfast’s Lyric



Paul Slaine QPM receives the George Cross from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on behalf of the RUC.

Theatre. She and other members of the Royal family had suffered grievously at the hands of republican terrorists, but here was a leader who remembered and acknowledged the tragic past but wanted all of us to look to build a better future for all of us.

We salute the steadfastness, the support she offered RUC GC officers and their families and the work she undertook to cement our peace.

In his previous role, His Royal Highness King Charles III was Patron of the National Police Memorial Day (NPMD). He was a strong supporter of the work we did and understood the range of challenges officers face.

We wish our new Monarch well in his new duties as he follows the outstanding lead of his late mother as a peace-builder and influence for good in our society.