

FORUM

The magazine of Gwent Police Federation

SUMMER 2023

Force meets uplift target *But is it enough?*

Report on pages 4 and 5

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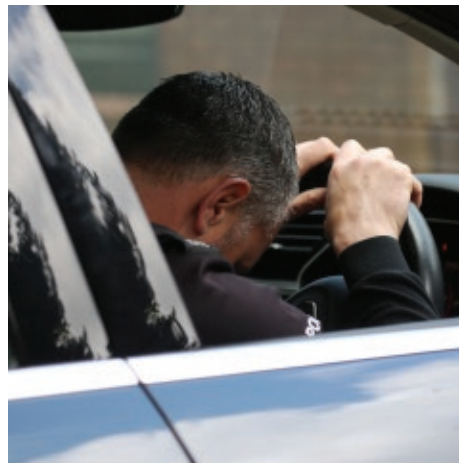


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Gwent Police Federation
Federation Office, 9 The Highway,
New Inn, Pontypool, NP4 0PW
Tel: 01495 764349

Chair: Matthew Candy
Email Matthew.candy@polfed.org

Secretary: Dan Lanfear
Email Dan.lanfear@polfed.org

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR



By Matthew Candy, chair of Gwent Police Federation

Welcome to the summer edition of our members' ezine. This is an opportunity for us to update you on recent news that affects you and policing on our patch.

The big news, as trailed on the cover, is of course the officer uplift. The Home Office confirmed that the Force has hit its recruitment target of an extra 206 officers – and we now have 1,539 colleagues – which is 116 more officers than we had pre-austerity.

So far, so good you might say, and don't get me wrong this is good news (quite a rarity these days) but as I say in the article overleaf, it's important that we don't get too carried away as this is not the end but the beginning.

Our challenge going forward will be retention. Unless the Government and the Force can fix the very real problems officers face, such as erosion of pay and the pressures of the job, whether through heavy workloads or assaults and unsociable hours, we could face a revolving door.

Of course, key amid this is pay. Thanks to inflation and years of below standard increases in the last decade our pay has eroded by some 20 per cent. This is no

laughing matter at a time of high fuel and food prices and is putting our members and their families under pressure like never before.

The Federation will continue to use our collective voice and any, and all, levers open to us to address pay and conditions. You would expect nothing less of us.

Elsewhere in the edition you can read about promises from the Home Office to cut red tape and remove the requirement for police to get involved in cases of online offences or attending some mental health incidents – we watch with interest.

The Home Secretary has described the changes she wants as returning to “common sense policing”. In a speech to the Public Safety Foundation, Suella Braverman said police should be “fighting crime, catching criminals, and keeping the public safe” rather than getting involved in arguments on Twitter.

I don't disagree with the sentiment, it's what we've been saying for years, but first we must ensure that more than 10 years of under-funding and the dismantling of policing's infrastructure are reversed.

Addressing the long-running row over police pay would be a good start with a sensible negotiation over our 17 per cent pay claim and the scrapping of the Police Remuneration Review Body.

The Government must then look at the whole funding model and bring in a mechanism that allows forces to plan strategy for the future and budget more effectively rather than trying to operate on the current yearly settlement system which doesn't really work for large organisations like police forces.

The funding cuts of the last 13 years led to huge changes in the way forces are organised and returning to the models of community policing which the Home Secretary talks about will take time and investment.

Our members are more than willing to play their part but their commitment to change has to be matched by the Government.

I hope you enjoy the edition and the sunnier weather.



PENSIONS RULING

The Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) has responded to the Pensions Challenge Employment Tribunal judgment announced on Wednesday (7 June).

The judgement found that PFEW let down a large group of our members across the country. Clearly, the ruling makes for very difficult reading, both for our members, and for us as elected officials.

Our members work incredibly hard to protect the people of Gwent and we understand that they feel let down. As a local branch, and on behalf of PFEW, we are

committed to working tirelessly to protect our members and to represent their interests without fear or favour – just as our members serve our communities on a daily basis.

The ruling will be carefully considered, and we are dedicated to ensuring that the response represents and protects our members' interests effectively.

As a branch, we make a firm pledge to do all we can to ensure your views are heard and acted upon, both locally and nationally.

Recruitment target met – but cuts continue to cast long shadow

Gwent Police has met its target of recruiting new officers under the Government's Police Uplift Programme. The Force was allocated an extra 206 officers when the scheme was launched in 2019 and now employs 1,539 officers compared to 1,300 when the uplift campaign began - an increase of 239.

The current headcount is higher than 2010 when it stood at 1,423 but that figure had fallen as low as 1,269 by the start of 2019 after several years of austerity-led funding cuts.

Gwent Police Federation chair Matthew Candy welcomed the increase in officer numbers but warned the figures could be misleading.

He said: "Our members have been under relentless pressure with rising workloads

and increased demands as the cuts made during austerity had a huge impact. At best, some sort of balance has now been redressed but in reality the Force still needs more officers than it took on under the uplift scheme if it wants to offer an effective service to the people of this region."

Nationwide, a total of 20,951 extra recruits have joined the service under the Police Uplift Programme and the only Force that failed to meet its target was the Met.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Twitter: "In 2019 we promised to recruit 20,000 additional police officers in England and Wales to make our streets safer and protect communities. Today, I'm pleased to say we have delivered that promise."

Home Secretary Suella Braverman described it as a "historic moment for our

country". During a speech in Westminster, she said: "We should be immensely proud of what we've achieved in the last few years."

Asked whether it was fair to say that cuts to the police service in previous years had been a "problem", she replied: "No. Since 2010, we see that overall crime has fallen. When you take out fraud and online crime, it's almost 50 per cent lower than it was in 2010."

Police Federation national chair Steve Hartshorn said the latest figures did not stand up to scrutiny.

“The reality is, considering population growth of more than four million since 2010, even with an uplift of 20,000 officers, we will have fewer officers on the streets than we had a decade ago.





Home Secretary Suella Braverman.

He said: "The reality is, considering population growth of more than four million since 2010, even with an uplift of 20,000 officers, we will have fewer officers on the streets than we had a decade ago.

"Half of all police forces now have fewer officers than they had in 2010 and voluntary resignations have almost doubled."

Concern over plans for different joining routes

A new non-degree police officer entry scheme with a lower educational level could create a two-tier system for new recruits, the Federation fears.

Branch chair Matthew Candy is opposed to the Level 5 learning programme, which is equivalent to a diploma of higher education (DipHE) and has called for the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing to ensure non-degree entry would still be accredited to educational Level 6.

Failure to do so would fly in the face of the founding principles of the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) and could lead to problems further down the line, he said.

"The operation of two different learning programmes blurs and reduces some of the essential standards chief officers need to consider when applying

the Police Regulations 2003 and is a cause for concern in terms of assuring a fair approach between different learning routes," said Matthew.

"The Casey Report highlighted the dangers of placing officers in roles they are not trained for and promoting a non-degree entry route of Level 5 at par with the Level 6 programme contradicts the resolve to act on the review's recommendations.

"The move also dilutes concentrated efforts of hardworking officers to instil trust among community members in policing as they will be viewed as having been trained at a lower standard."

The new Level 5 (non-accredited) learning programme is being made available for forces as soon as possible but not later than 1 April 2024.

A close-up photograph of a police officer's uniform, showing a high-visibility yellow-green vest with a blue rectangular patch that reads "POLICE" in white capital letters. The officer is wearing a black short-sleeved shirt underneath. At the bottom of the frame, a pair of metal handcuffs is visible, attached to the officer's belt.

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Lowri followed in the footsteps of her father to join the police.



'Memorial Day helps us keep Terry's memory alive'

Gwent officer PC Terry Davies was cycling home when he died after being hit by a stolen car on 30 August 1990.

He and his wife, Jayne, were parents to Becky at the time and expecting their second daughter, Lowri, who graduated as a

Gwent Police officer in 2017 and now has her dad's collar number.

For the family every National Police Memorial Day remains 'just as significant as the last', as the event allows them to 'reflect, remember and celebrate the life' of their loved one, and stand in solidarity with others.

"The National Police Memorial Day is such an important day, for all the families and loved ones of officers who have died," said 61-year-old Jayne.

"It gives us a chance to keep Terry's memory alive while remembering the husband and dad he was. It's a big day for us, and every year is just as significant as the last one. It never stops being important."

Jayne added that Memorial Day brings families together and provides a network of support between loved ones.

"It sounds strange to say it, but it really is a lovely weekend," she added.

Lowri, who is now a sergeant and on maternity leave having welcomed her first child, Isla, says the day is 'full of emotion but so amazing'.

"Even though Dad died a long time ago, this is still such a massive event for all of us. I don't think people quite appreciate how much it means to all of us until you're there and seeing it for yourself," the 32-year-old added.

"It's a day to remember - and not just to remember your loved one, but a chance to remember everyone who has died while on duty. Whether it's a loved one, a friend or a colleague, they all should be remembered.



Baby Isla with Terry's hat.

"You get to know the other families and watch each other grow, year after year. In some ways, the event almost becomes like one big annual family reunion."

Since passing out in 2017, Lowri has been wearing her dad's collar number, something she says, 'helps to keep his memory alive'.

"I wear his collar with pride every single day," continued Lowri, who lit the candle of remembrance for fallen officers at the last service.

"People still remember him. In fact, quite often, his former colleagues will come and speak to me about him. By wearing his collar number, I'm helping to keep his memory alive."

Jayne, Lowri and Becky, along with their children and partners, will all be attending this National Police Memorial Day, which will be taking place at St David's Hall in Cardiff on Sunday 24 September.

Officers are not 'thought police' says Minister

Gwent Police Federation has welcomed a planned shake-up of the way crimes are logged in a bid to reduce paperwork.

Under reforms unveiled by policing minister Chris Philp, officers would no longer be required to record frivolous allegations of offensive speech or social media rows as crimes.

Mr Philp said officers were not the "thought police" and that being rude or insulting should not be treated as a "police matter". He said changing Home Office counting rules on how reported incidents were logged would slash "unnecessary red tape" and free up more time to investigate crime.



Policing minister Chris Philp.

In a speech to the Law Society, Mr Philp also accepted that police officers should not be expected to deal with mental health cases or act as a stop gap for other agencies.

Gwent Police Federation chair Matthew Candy welcomed the proposals but urged the Government to go further in its attempts to reduce bureaucracy.

He said: "Workload remains a massive issue for our members with many ending up working on their rest days or in the evenings into the early hours just to keep up with the paperwork.

"We welcome any measures that reduce those ludicrous levels of admin but feel there are other areas - particularly for detectives surrounding the disclosure rules - that can also be looked at.

"The reforms outlined in the minister's speech would be a good start and we would be happy to offer suggestions on how we can get officers back on the streets and into their communities."

Matthew also welcomed the minister's comments on officer hours taken up on

cases which could be handled by other agencies.

He said: "This is a serious issue that was highlighted during the pandemic and I am pleased our concerns are now being looked at by the Home Office."

The proposed shake-up follows recommendations from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) which said a review of productivity found an estimated 443,000 officer hours were spent filling in forms and dealing with unnecessary admin - the equivalent to attending 220,000 domestic abuse incidents or 270,000 burglaries.

In his speech, Mr Philp said: "We're going to make clear that frivolous allegations of malicious communications should not be recorded as a criminal offence unless the criminal threshold has clearly been met.

"We don't think that being rude or insulting is a police matter. Officers are not the thought police and where something is reported that doesn't meet the criminal threshold, we don't want that to be investigated or reported as a crime. We don't want to waste police time on that kind of thing."

The Home Office said the changes would save police time by no longer recording cases of messages that may offend someone or where a public disturbance occurred but has been resolved.

HAVE YOU BEEN AFFECTED BY NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS?

Noise-induced hearing loss can drastically affect those who work in law enforcement

Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is a term used to describe hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus caused by exposure to excessive noise at work where insufficient or no training or ear protection has been provided. NIHL can have a significant impact on those who work in law enforcement, particularly those who use firearms, due to frequent exposure to extremely high levels of noise in their line of work.

Though hearing loss is a common symptom of age, it's important to note the distinct signs that indicate noise-induced hearing loss. Some signs to look out for include:

- **Difficulty hearing or understanding speech, particularly in environments with background noise.**
- **Tinnitus, which is a ringing, buzzing, hissing, or other sounds in one ear or both ears.**
- **Some people become more sensitive to loud noises. Everyday sounds that were previously tolerable may become uncomfortable or even painful.**
- **Difficulty accurately determining the direction a sound is coming from.**
- **Constantly increasing the volume of the television or radio.**
- **Asking others to speak louder or repeat themselves frequently.**
- **Fatigue or strain from listening for extended periods of time.**

All these signs and symptoms can vary in severity and differ from person to person.

As police officers often deal with exposure to loud sounds such as gunshots, sirens, explosions, and high-decibel events, this can and often does lead to damage being sustained to the sensitive structures of the inner ear, which can turn into noise-induced hearing loss. Though symptoms differ, this could cause a permanent decrease in hearing sensitivity, making it more difficult for police officers to hear important sounds, such as verbal commands from colleagues or approaching emergency vehicles.

Hearing loss may also compromise an officer's situational awareness, making them less able to identify any potential threats or hazards. This can impact the ability to respond quickly and appropriately to dangerous situations, potentially jeopardising their safety and the safety of others. Hearing loss could even affect an officer's job performance, especially in tasks that require good hearing abilities, such as gathering witness statements, conducting interviews, or participating in surveillance operations.

To minimise the risk of police officers developing noise-induced hearing loss, it's important for police forces to implement hearing conservation programmes. These could include training in and the provision of hearing protection devices, regular hearing screenings, education on the risks of noise exposure, and strategies to minimise exposure to loud sounds whenever possible. The law says that every employer has a duty of care to protect employees from suffering harm in the workplace, including noise induced injuries.

Madelene Holdsworth, Managing Director of Specialist Legal Services and expert in noise induced hearing loss cases on behalf of police officers, says: 'It's imperative that police departments have stringent safety strategies in place to reduce noise induced hearing loss and tinnitus amongst their staff. Having worked with police federations for over 60 years, we've seen the detrimental impact that hearing loss and tinnitus can have on officers. Employers' duty of care is crucial in safeguarding the health and safety of police officers and safety measures used must be fully effective at all times particularly around the use of radio earpieces.'

Police officers, like other employees, are protected by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. These regulations set out the standards and requirements for employers to manage and control noise in the workplace to prevent occupational hearing loss.

If a police officer believes that their hearing loss was caused or significantly worsened by their work environment, they may be eligible to make a claim for compensation.

Expert noise-induced hearing loss claims lawyers at Slater and Gordon will arrange for you to be examined by a medical professional to determine what proportion of your hearing loss is due to workplace exposures to noise, and on the basis of that independent medical opinion, you will be advised on whether you have a claim that can be pursued.



“Now the pressure's gone, I can get back to my police work.”

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Extra bereavement support available for police

Gwent officers urged to give their views on wellbeing support

Oscar Kilo, the national police wellbeing service, is asking Gwent officers to share their views on the support offered by forces, so improvements can be made.



The annual survey, now in its fourth year, is run by the Policing Research Unit at Durham University with support from the College of Policing.

It launched on 15 May for seven weeks and gives everyone working in policing an opportunity to have their say on the current state of wellbeing provision and support offered by their forces, so police leaders can assess where to do better.

Local Federation chair Matthew Candy said: "Oscar Kilo does an incredibly important job in looking after the wellbeing of our members, which is so important in a stressful, sometimes thankless role, such as policing.

"We never know when we might need its help and that's why I would encourage all members to put aside a few minutes to give their feedback."

The National Police Wellbeing survey of last year saw the highest survey response yet with 36,633 officers, staff and

volunteers taking part – a 60 per cent increase on the number of respondents previously.

They showed a reduction in depression symptoms among police officers and staff, with these being at a similar level between the two groups. However, fatigue levels for police officers had increased in the past 12 months with 29.6 per cent of police officers and 21.9 per cent of police staff indicating very high levels of fatigue.

Average scores for job satisfaction have declined for police officers, and intention to quit was found to have significantly increased for both officers and staff.

Andy Rhodes, service director for the National Police Wellbeing Service, explained: "We carry out this survey because it is critical that our work is focused on what those working in policing every day are telling us they need.

"We have had fantastic response rates to previous surveys, and we want to build on that again this year. Each year, we respond directly to the findings from the survey, creating practical support at both organisational and individual level."

The survey can be accessed by the Force intranet.

Federation members who are struggling with the loss of a colleague or loved one can call on the support of a new bereavement service.

Gwent officers and their families can access free support thanks to a new partnership between National Police Wellbeing Service, Oscar Kilo, and bereavement support organisation Just 'B'.

Branch chair Matthew Candy said: "Policing is a unique job and teams are close-knit units through their shared experiences, so losing a colleague can have a huge impact.

"There's no right or wrong way to grieve or deal with bereavement, but it's reassuring to know that should the unthinkable happen then support is there for officers and their families should they need it. And it's great that the support is funded by Oscar Kilo and available for free to all members."

Counselling will be delivered face-to-face, online or on the phone. A referral will most likely be made by the Force's occupational health or wellbeing team, following the usual process that is involved when a police officer or member of staff dies in the line of duty or by suicide.

Just 'B' chief executive Tony Collins said: "Our tailored support will be there for police officers, staff and their families across the 43 police forces, ensuring it can be accessed during a time when it's most needed following a death in service or by suicide, with our specialist support provided alongside existing structures in place."

If you feel you need additional bereavement or wellbeing support, please speak to your line manager, or contact the Federation.

Discounted insurance for all the police family

Police Insure provides specially discounted insurance for all serving and retired police officers, police staff, members of the Special Constabulary and police support volunteers as well as their partners and families.

Originally based in Bury with the famous Robert Peel statue situated just across the square, Police Insure has been a growing presence in the insurance business for more than 15 years specialising in offering highly competitive rates for all the main insurance products – car, motorcycle, home and landlord - regularly providing policy holders with substantial savings as well as excellent service.

Now, having become part of the A-plan Group in December 2022, Police Insure has access to an expanding team of staff dedicated to continuing to provide the best personal service and savings to both new and existing clients.

As well as its online presence, Police Insure engages directly with members of the police family “on the ground” in partnership with the local Police Federation teams or through its dedicated phone lines (**0161 762 4416**) into six “hub” A-plan offices

situated across the country where you can immediately speak to a member of the experienced, helpful and knowledgeable team.

Police Insure currently engages with more than 40 Police Federations, including the Gwent branch, and related associations and, to develop and sustain those relationships, has a network of regional Business Development Managers (BDMs... it just wouldn't be the same without a TLA) who are all retired police officers themselves.

It's really encouraging that a growing number of the Gwent Police family are enjoying the personal service, confidence and particularly savings that Police Insure has to offer, which is especially important in the current challenging financial climate, and, together with the central Federation

team, the company is looking to ensure that as many colleagues and families have the same opportunity to enjoy those benefits in the future.

Additional information on Police Insure products and services can be obtained by calling **0161 762 4416**, visiting www.policeinsure.co.uk or contacting the Gwent BDM, Martin Barber, on martin.barber@aplan.co.uk



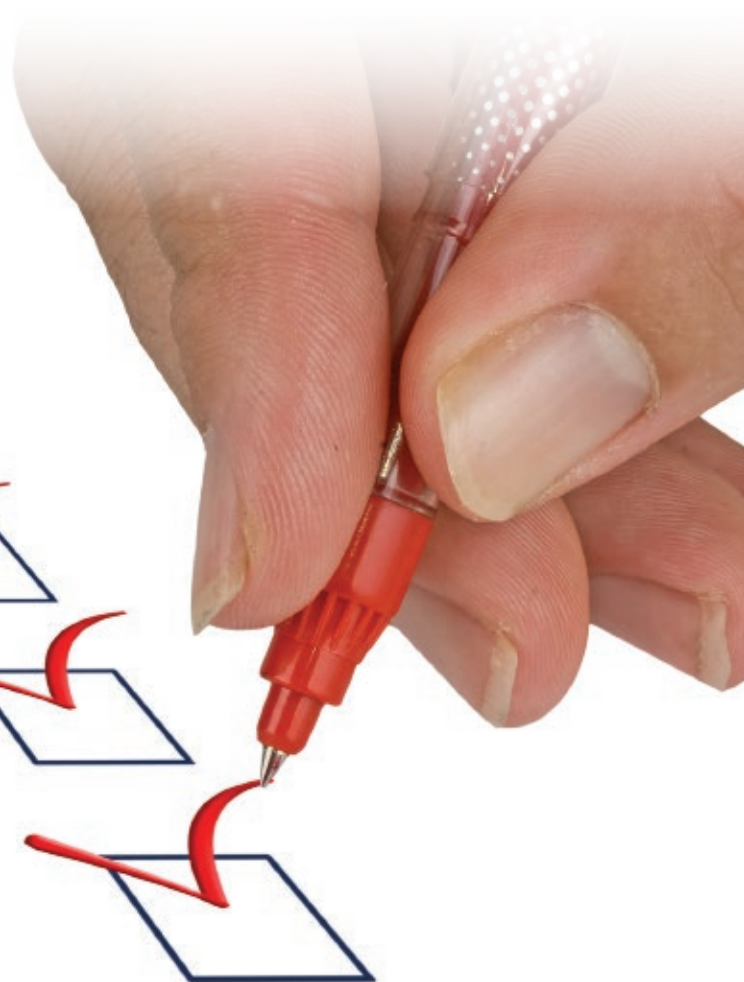
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