

Connect



SPRING 2020

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM
WEST MERCIA POLICE
FEDERATION



**Federation responds to
coronavirus crisis** - see Page 3

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Cover photo: Workplace reps Ann Marie Laws and Craig Davies were just two of the officers delivering personal protection items to members around the Force. Ann Marie also used money raised in the tuck shop she runs to buy Easter eggs for children in hospital over the Easter weekend.

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Chair: Sarah Cooper
Secretary: Steve Butler

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Working for you

By Sarah Cooper
Chair of West
Mercia Police
Federation



I want to offer reassurance on behalf of West Mercia Police Federation that we are working for you through these incredibly challenging and worrying times, as we try to balance our personal issues and responsibilities with those of our duties and commitments as police officers.

It is hard to comprehend the speed at which things are evolving but it is clear we are working in an environment never before experienced. We need to adapt to working very differently and adjusting our whole approach. We are linking in with the national Federation daily to ensure we learn from the experience of others.

Since taking on this role I have never felt more keenly how important it is that your voice is heard whenever decisions that affect you are being made. Thank you to all of you who have raised issues and concerns with me, branch secretary Steve Butler and your local reps. We are working hard on your behalf to ensure these issues are addressed and to offer support where we can.

One example of this is the funding of cleaning products to ensure that workstations and keyboards are clean and safe. These products have been sourced and distributed by local reps and I would like to thank these reps for their help with this.

The Federation, both locally and nationally, has also been campaigning hard regarding PPE; we recognise how critical it is to have clear guidance on this and be provided with the equipment that will keep you and loved ones safe. As a direct result of concerns raised with me, we have ensured the Force is now making accommodation provision for officers living with loved ones who are vulnerable. I recognise that, unfortunately, the implementation of this has been too slow for some, however, please do get in touch if you feel you could benefit from alternative accommodation to keep others safe.

I have to say I have been absolutely blown away by the commitment of colleagues in wanting to continue to come to work, support each other and serve the public at such great personal cost. We have also agreed with the Force to apply some further discretion around the extension of ongoing pay appeals and we have made significant representations on your

behalf to enable those of you who may wish to cancel and rebook your leave to do so. I would also add that these are going to continue to be challenging times so please don't work yourself into the ground and take time to relax where you can.

These are just a few examples of the many issues we are raising on your behalf and we will continue to do so. We are also offering support to our colleagues in Devon and Cornwall by providing them with the use of our holiday home for officers who are unable to remain in their homes for the reasons outlined above.

We are working through ideas on how we can meaningfully offer support to our members in these truly difficult times. We recognise the strain and worry that will be caused, and therefore we are looking at how we can offer support, both to those who may be isolated at home but also those who remain in the workplace. Again, any thoughts or ideas around this would be welcome and it is great to hear about the support you are showing to other essential workers and each other through these difficult times. Thank you to those who have sent in your images and please keep them coming. The photo below is just one example of officers trying to boost morale and encourage team working.

For information and advice on additional support available please refer to our website. The services offered through the Group Insurance Scheme and Welfare Fund are proving invaluable at this time. We have already been able to offer support to a number of members who are facing personal crisis associated with the outbreak of this virus and we would absolutely support use of the Welfare Fund to offer assistance to any subscribing member facing hardship or a welfare need in this crisis. We also have information on the website relating to financial difficulties and other support available to all staff.

If there is anything at all that you need to raise, please don't hesitate to make contact with me, Steve, or your local reps, who are listed on our 'Meet the team' page on the website – polfed.org/westmercia. Also, if you identify a welfare need with a colleague then we are here to offer support and help wherever we can.

Please take care of yourselves and each other.



Telford A Shift are pictured taking part in coordinated Tik Tok dances to keep up morale.

'Seek support if you need it'

Officers should not be afraid to ask for support if their finances or mental wellbeing are affected during the coronavirus crisis, says West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper.

The crisis is already having an impact on the economy, with people losing their jobs or unable to work because of social distancing and self-isolation and officers could find their household income reduced.

Sarah said the Federation can call on a range of support organisations to help officers during the ongoing situation.

And she stressed that support was also there for officers who felt that their mental wellbeing was being affected by the crisis.

Sarah said: "We're in a completely new situation and that lack of certainty can have an impact on people's mental health and wellbeing, particularly in policing given the nature of our roles.

"And we have seen that the current health crisis is also an economic one, which can add to the mental strain with personal financial situations piling on the pressure.

"We would urge officers to speak up if they're struggling financially or if their wellbeing is being affected.

"The Federation can help you access a wide range of support organisations who

can provide practical help, such as advice on managing your finances, making a credit card payment or taking a mortgage payment holiday.

"We're here for you and can help you find the support or advice you need."

Belinda Goodwin, national wellbeing secretary for the Police Federation of England and Wales, has admitted the growing crisis will bring 'unprecedented financial, mental health and physical problems' for officers and their families.

"There's no escaping the fact finances will be stretched to breaking point and we'll all be placed under a new type of pressure which none of us has ever experienced before," she said.

"As police officers, we cope with the unimaginable every day. This though is a brand new, unknown challenge which we'll face together and head-on as always.

"At this difficult time, there's one piece of advice the Federation can give members which will have far-reaching consequences: please don't bury your head in the sand and think this will just pass over."

Belinda added: "For many years the Federation has worked alongside business partners to offer member benefits and discounts on a range of products. These partners are now stepping up to the mark to help you with your finances and wellbeing."

Visit the Federation's financial support page for more information or contact the West Mercia Police Federation office staff, full-time officials or workplace representatives if you are worried about your finances or wellbeing.

■ For more information about financial support see Pages 4 and 5.

“ WE WOULD URGE OFFICERS TO SPEAK UP IF THEY'RE STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY OR IF THEIR WELLBEING IS BEING AFFECTED.

Supporting front-line officers

Workplace reps have been distributing supplies of anti-bacterial wipes and spray across the Force area to help officers and staff keep their working areas as clean as possible during the coronavirus pandemic.

West Mercia Police Federation funded the purchase of boxes of wipes and bottles of spray but reps also found that a number of retailers were happy to do their bit to support officers. Asda wouldn't let one rep pay for the items when they knew they were for the Force and B & M also threw in a free box.

"Ours reps put forward the idea that this was something we as a Federation could do to support members and we were happy to help," says Sarah Cooper, chair of West Mercia Police Federation, "The reps have been out and about, delivering these supplies which have been really well received by officers across the Force.

"It is vitally important at this time that we all pull together and do what we can to support officers and staff on the front-line who are doing their best to protect their communities but also look after their own health and, in turn, that of their families."



Telford workplace representative Craig Davies delivering supplies to members.

Federation guidance on coronavirus

The Police Federation of England and Wales has set up a website to bring together all the advice on the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

It covers financial advice and tips for wellbeing as well as providing links to Government guidance and the latest NHS advice.

West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper said: "This page has been put together by the Federation nationally to bring everything together in one place for members.

"We want to assure members that we're doing everything we can to ensure their safety and the continuity of Federation support during these times.

"We've been attending the Gold and Silver meetings to help bring together the Force's response to the crisis."

Visit the national Federation's dedicated coronavirus page for more information: <https://www.polfed.org/our-work/covid-19/covid-19-advice/>

More officers dissatisfied with pay

More than nine out of every 10 officers in West Mercia Police do not feel they are paid fairly for the stresses and strains of their job, according to the latest Police Federation pay and morale survey.

The 2019 survey also found that 83 per cent of respondents from the Force did not feel fairly paid for the hazard faced in their job with 79 per cent dissatisfied with their remuneration, a rise of four per cent on the previous year.

Some 11 per cent of respondents from the Force reported never or almost never having enough money to cover their essentials while 73 per cent felt they were worse off financially than five years ago, with almost half (45 per cent) worried about the state of their finances every day or almost every day.

West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper said: "The findings of this survey show that our officers are not just dissatisfied with their pay but also the effect of years of minimal pay increases. Policing is a stressful enough job as it is without having the extra worry of whether your money is stretching for enough to pay the bills or put food on the table.

"It is only right that officers are rewarded with fair pay for the incredibly challenging job they do. The current coronavirus crisis has brought sharply into

focus who the real 'essential workers' are and it is largely those same people who have been treated with contempt in terms of pay over many years now. If there is any good to come out of this then you would hope that the value of the public sector, including police officers, is recognised and rewarded in the way it should be."

A total 61 per cent of West Mercia Police respondents to the survey said their morale was low, 94 per cent felt morale in the Force is low and 72 per cent said they would not recommend joining the police.

However, eight per cent said they had the intention of leaving the service within the next two years.

Sarah said: "After years of austerity and cuts, falling police officer numbers, rising crime rates and poor pay it isn't really a surprise that morale is so low. These figures paint a picture of the struggles and frustrations that many of our members face. But despite feeling that they are underpaid and undervalued, most are still proud to be police officers.

"I know this is appreciated by the public and now it needs to be appreciated by the Government in the form of a decent wage for our dedicated officers."



Helping you find a solution to debt

PayPlan is a free and confidential debt advice provider that has helped more than one million people with their finances since it started in 1992.

The company offers help, advice and potential solutions to anyone struggling with multiple debts.

"Our job is to put our clients in a position where they can make an informed decision on what steps they want to take," said Jane Clack, PayPlan's point of contact for West Mercia Police Federation.

"If we can be of help by offering a structured plan, we're happy to do so, but the choice is always up to the client."

Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, PayPlan's trained advisers can talk through finances and review income and expenditure.

"Once we've taken details of your incomings, outgoings and debt level, we'll have a good understanding of the disposable income you have to pay towards your debts," said Jane.

"We'll then discuss the options available so you can decide on the debt solution that is best for you."

PayPlan is free, confidential and there's no obligation. The company advises on budgeting, maximising income and debt solutions such as management plans, individual voluntary arrangements and bankruptcy.

Jane said: "We look at the disposable income and advise on all potential options, recommending which we feel is the best for the particular circumstances but also explaining why we're not recommending others.

"In a debt management plan, every penny you pay into the plan goes to paying your debts. There is no fee for this service, and we're supported by a large number of creditors who pay us, in arrears, for the money we collect.

"Creditors trust us to put forward realistic and sustainable budgets where the client will be able to make payments every month as they have enough to live on.

"We would not recommend a debt management plan if the disposable income was not realistic to do this. It's an informal arrangement between you and your creditors, and we act as the distributing intermediary."

PayPlan has more than 60,000 debt management plans in place.

If a debt would take a long time to repay, an option may be Individual Voluntary

DEBT ADVISER WITH FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

The earlier people struggling with debt act to address their issues the better, says money adviser Jane Clack.

Jane, PayPlan's representative for West Mercia Police Federation, says there is always something that can be done to tackle financial liabilities.

"Being in debt is something no one ever chooses to do," said Jane, who has experienced her own personal debt



issues. "We all spend up to our income so any change in this can lead to problems.

"Over-time being withdrawn, illness – affecting either yourself or your partner, which goes on a long time, loss of income – all these things can lead to difficulties but most of us believe that something will turn up and delay doing anything until the small problem seems insurmountable.

"That is never the case – there is always something that can be done but the earlier it is done the better."

Jane has worked for PayPlan for almost

20 years after the company helped her address debt issues of her own.

She has a Certificate in Money Advice Practice from the Institute of Money Advisers and the Certificate of Proficiency in Personal Insolvency. She is also the chair of the Institute of Money Advisers, the only professional organisation for debt advisers in the UK.

Jane had been paying £900 per month to her credit cards, and while she had never missed a payment, always paid before the due date and more than the minimum contractual payment, she had received letters



More than nine out of 10 officers in West Mercia Police do not feel they are paid fairly for the stresses and strains of their job

Mental wellbeing is just as important as physical health

It's time to end the stigma around mental health in policing, says the chair of West Mercia Police Federation.

Sarah Cooper says mental wellbeing must be treated as seriously as physical safety as she encouraged members to play their part in the Federation's new Hear 'Man Up', Think 'Man Down' campaign.

The campaign focuses on officers' mental health and was launched on the national Time To Talk Day at the start of February.

Sarah said: "We all have a part to play in looking after each other and our wellbeing, which is why this campaign is so needed, to help put mental health on a par with physical health.

"It's about lifting the stigma around mental health and making sure everyone knows that it's OK to talk."

Sarah added: "We're asking officers to look out for each other and to encourage colleagues who may be struggling with their mental health to open up about that."

The campaign will build awareness of what signs to look out for and signpost to where officers can get help if they need it.

Sarah said: "Sometimes people don't recognise themselves that they are dealing with mental health or emotional wellbeing issues, but it's friends and colleagues and the people closest that do. That's what this campaign is all about. It aims to help us spot the signs, to talk and to encourage people to seek help.

"There is a lot of support available, including through the Police Federation, and we want to ensure that officers are getting the right help at the right time."

Sarah added: "When we join the police we get the training and the protective equipment to do the job. However, all too often, officers' mental wellbeing is ignored and that's what this campaign aims to change."

Belinda Goodwin, the Federation's national wellbeing committee secretary, said: "If we can just get our members and reps to face any issues and seek help, then it can only be a good thing."

As well as concentrating on mental health, the campaign will focus on physical and financial wellbeing.

Officers are being encouraged to support the campaign and to help promote the message that it's OK to talk. Join in the campaign on social media using the hashtags **#ManUpManDown** and **#PoliceWelfare**.

Find out more at <https://www.polfed.org/campaigns/man-up-man-down/>

Arrangements (IVAs).

"These are fixed term plans where you pay back a proportion of the debt and the rest is written off," said Jane. "They are a form of insolvency. Legally binding arrangements, they are not suitable for work."

"Although there are fees for this service, as you're paying for the insolvency practitioner's expertise in writing off debt and protecting assets, it would be taken from your disposable income and only comes into play if the IVA is approved."

Jane added: "We explain the pros and cons of each solution in our advice letter and when we talk to you."

about being in persistent debt.

At this point, Jane took her own advice and talked to her bank about consolidation. She is now paying £356 a month, over five years to repay the debt.

"Sometimes it pays to look outside the box," she said. "However, these credit cards are now destroyed as temptation always lurks."

Jane, who would do face to face meetings to discuss debt, can also do financial statements over the phone.



Wide range of support available from Police Care UK

Police Care UK is a charity for serving and veteran police officers and staff, volunteers, and their families.

Independent of the police service, it is entirely funded by donations and fund-raising and receives no money from the Government or police forces for its work.

You can access practical, emotional and financial support that is confidential and impartial by submitting a referral for you or someone you know.

Police Care UK offers:

- Psychological support
- Financial assistance and benefits
- Specialist equipment grants
- Support for those seeking new careers after policing
- Veterans' peer support
- Educational bursaries for the children of serving and retired police officers and staff and volunteers in full-time or higher education.

Find out more at policecare.org.uk





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

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More than 80 per cent of officers' cold and wet weather clothing is unsuitable

More than four out of five officers in West Mercia Police do not think the uniform issued for cold and wet weather is fit for purpose.

A cold and wet weather uniform survey carried out by PC James Hall, Redditch patrol, on behalf of West Mercia Police Federation found that 83 per cent of respondents felt it was not suitable for their role.

The survey found that almost three quarters of officers (74 per cent) had bought their own clothing items with the most popular items being thermal base layers, with an average spend of £20 to £30.

Warm gloves were another popular item, with a large number of respondents saying that the standard issue leather gloves provide no warmth and limited dexterity, which makes it difficult to use personal protective equipment.

Some officers spent as much as £150 on branded jackets, while others had bought fleece neck warmers.

"It is clear the vast majority of staff do not feel the current issued clothing designed for cold and wet weather is fit for purpose and staff are spending their own money on items to allow them to carry out their role. The biggest issue with the

clothing appears to be items that provide warmth, both waterproof jackets are scored fairly well in terms of waterproofness, but are scored lower for warmth. The fleece, which is the only item provided to keep staff warm, scores very badly in terms of warmth," says James.

"In my opinion, staff should not routinely be spending their own money on basic items to enable them to carry out their role as these should be provided by the Force. Officers purchasing and wearing their own items also means that the uniform is no longer uniform as people are all wearing slightly different items which can lead to staff appearing mismatched and unprofessional."

The survey found the current issue fleece was rated poor or very poor by more than 58 per cent of respondents. A third said it was average, 8.3 per cent said it was good and none said it was very good.

The hi-vis blouson was rated average or good by 60 per cent of respondents. It was rated poor by 27 per cent, very poor by 12.5 per cent with no one giving it a very good rating.

The survey found that the hi-vis three quarter length coat restricted officers' ability to access PPE while wearing it. More than

76 per cent rated it poor or very poor in that respect.

Overall, 31 per cent said it was good or very good, 46 per cent rated it average and 23 per cent rated it poor or very poor.

The survey, which was answered by 633 officers, found the items officers most wanted to be part of their uniform were a micro-fleece to be worn under the stab vest and a soft shell jacket.

James explains: "I feel the best option would be to be provided with a thermal base layer along with a micro-fleece/soft shell to be worn under a stab vest. This, coupled with a fleece and waterproof outer, should provide adequate thermal protection through a number of thinner layers and an element of protection from the wind. It would also provide options so that the various layers can be worn as needed in different weather conditions. Importantly, it would not be one big bulky layer that can make movement difficult and restrict access to PPE."

The Federation will now discuss the findings of the survey with the Force with a view to improving the items provided.

The survey was carried out for two weeks from 8 January to 24 January 2020 and attracted 633 responses.

Pension discrimination

Members of public service pension schemes with relevant service will be automatically entitled to the remedy to the unlawful age discrimination within the transitional arrangements identified by the Court of Appeal, it has been confirmed.

Economic secretary to the Treasury John Glen announced in a Written Ministerial Statement - all relevant members will benefit from the remedy to the discrimination, regardless of whether they have made a claim.

This means the remedy will apply to every Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) member subject to the

discrimination and they will not have to bring a claim to ensure that their pension receives the same treatment as those who have already brought claims.

Mr Glen said: "I would like to reassure members that their pension entitlements are safe."

After 'constructive engagement with trade unions, staff associations, public service employers and other stakeholders', the Government is continuing to work through the details of the technical design elements of the proposals.

Detailed proposals will be published later this year and will be subject to public consultation.

The announcement follows the Government's decision in July 2019 to take steps to remove the discrimination retrospectively.

The Court of Appeal previously ruled the Government's transitional protections introduced for judges and firefighters were discriminatory on the grounds of age.

This latest statement does not cover compensation for claims involving hurt feelings or for any other financial loss.

Further information about the remedy can be obtained from the pensions section on the Police Federation of England and Wales website.

New conduct regulations focus on learning and development

New conduct and performance regulations aimed at changing the blame and punishment culture to one of learning and development came into effect on 1 February.

The new regulations provide officers with the chance to undertake reflective practice with their line manager if their performance requires improvement, by discussing how the issue can be avoided in the future, accepting what happened and then moving forward - instead of facing punitive action for minor issues.

There is also a higher threshold for disciplinary action, meaning conduct proceedings will be only be triggered if the wrongdoing warrants at least a written warning, while low-level outcomes have been removed.

The harsher outcomes are balanced by the fact that more officers will be diverted away from the misconduct arena and only serious matters will be escalated.

Lesley Williams, West Mercia Police Federation's conduct and performance lead, gives an overview of the new arrangements.

Reflective Practice Review Process - the officer's guide

WHAT IS IT?

The Reflective Practice Review Process (RPRP) is a reflective practice designed to give officers and line managers an opportunity to discuss where things have gone wrong and look for ways of addressing issues.

RPRP is not a disciplinary process and it sits above normal management interventions on minor matters. The behaviour in question will have been referred to the Professional Standards Department (PSD) which, along with your line manager, will have decided not to take formal discipline but to deal with any shortcomings by this process.

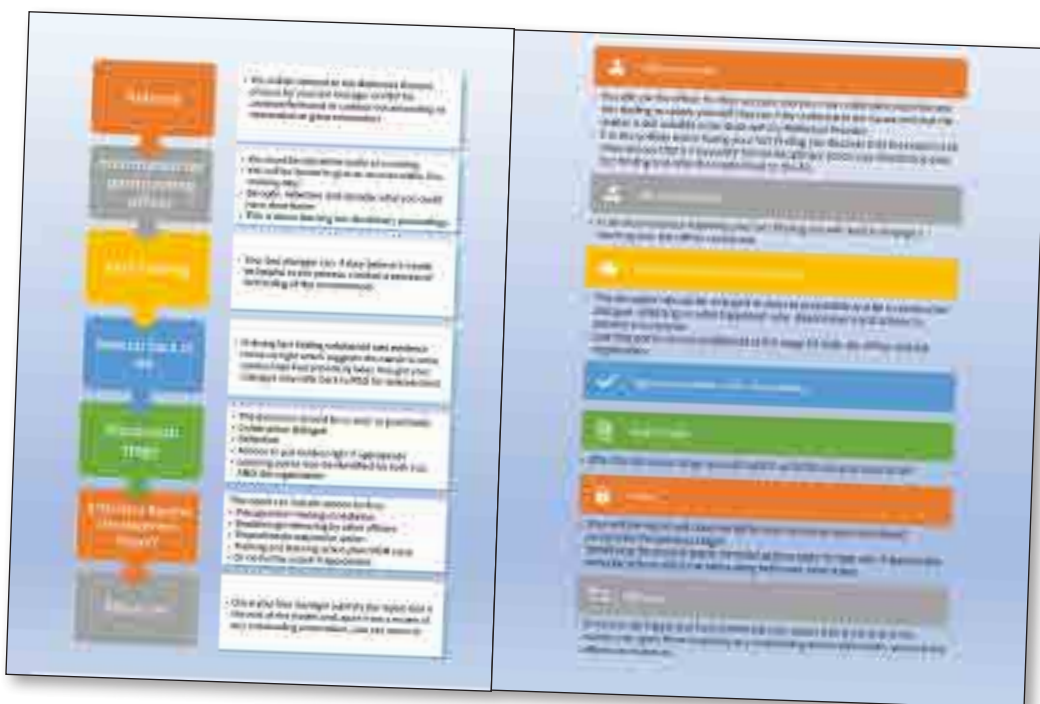
Matters may be referred directly from managers as well as by way of public complaint or other means. It is not a misconduct finding and is designed to be a way of dealing with relatively low-level misconduct or performance issues in a proportionate way. This means RPRP cannot be used to block promotions or job moves.

CONSISTENCY AND PROPORTIONALITY

To ensure consistency, fairness and proportionality, RPRP will be centrally recorded but managed locally by your line manager. It will also be used to establish patterns and trends – not only in your case but for the Force in general to identify areas causing problems for the Force.

THE PROCESS

- You will be informed that you are subject to RPRP and this may be in writing.
- You will be invited to give your version of events and have five working days to do so.
- You may seek advice from a Federation representative at this stage.
- You will be invited to a Reflective Practice Review discussion with your line manager.



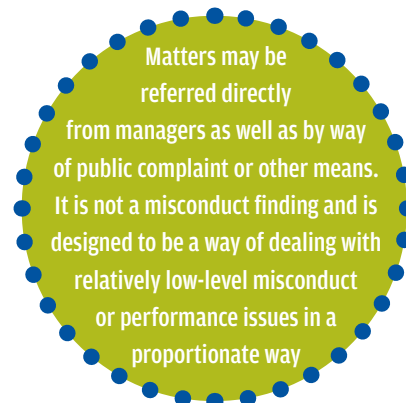
THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE REVIEW DISCUSSION

- There is no right to have a Fed rep at the meeting: it is a professional discussion between officer and line manager.
- There is an expectation of engagement – failing to engage could result in the matter being referred for formal proceedings.
- The discussion will encompass the incident that led to RPRP - learning, training needs, welfare, and actions moving forward.
- It is an opportunity to reflect on what went wrong, or what could go better next time.
- Officers can speak freely because matters discussed about the reasons for the Reflective Practice Review discussion cannot be used in any misconduct proceedings in the future.
- If an officer fails to sufficiently engage with the process, they may be moved on to the Unsatisfactory Performance Procedure (UPP) process if appropriate.

This is not a disciplinary process and RPRP is not a finding of misconduct.

THE REPORT

After the discussion, a report will be completed by the line manager which will be retained and reviewed as part of the officer's Performance and Development Review (PDR). It will include what was discussed, as well as any actions agreed, if any, moving forward.



Reflective Practice Review Process - the line manager's guide

THE REVIEWING OFFICER - THE LINE MANAGER

As a line manager, you may become a reviewing officer on a Reflective Practice Review Process (RPRP) for a breach of the standards of professional behaviour referred to the Professional Standards Department (PSD) which has been assessed as not sufficiently serious to warrant formal disciplinary proceedings.

Your Appropriate Authority (AA) in PSD will consult with you but, once it has been agreed, you will oversee all the stages. This should be regarded as no more than basic supervision and, as such, forms part of your normal duties. There are no sanctions or other outcomes more than learning for both the individual and the organisation.

The officer (participating officer) will be notified that the matter will be dealt with by way of reflective practice and will be invited to provide an account, in writing, of what they did or did not do. This response needs to be returned within five working days. Participating officers are encouraged to be open and reflective and to consider what they could have done better.

Upon receipt of this account, you may undertake fact-finding to satisfy yourself that you fully understand the issues and that the matter is still suitable to be dealt with by reflective practice.

If in the unlikely event that during your fact-finding you discover or suspect that the breach is far more serious than initially thought and that it would justify formal disciplinary action, you should stop your fact-finding and refer the matter back to the AA.

If the matter is referred and upgraded to formal discipline, any statement made by the participating officer is inadmissible in such proceedings and you should not pass on the account nor its contents under any circumstances.

On most occasions following your fact-finding, you will need to arrange a meeting with the officer concerned - the discussion stage. As reflective practice is 'informal' - not



formal misconduct - there is no right for the officer to have a Federation representative present, but this does not stop the officer - nor you - seeking advice.

This discussion should be arranged as soon as practicable and be a constructive dialogue, reflective of what happened, why, lessons learnt and actions to prevent a recurrence. Learning points can be established at this stage for both the officer and the organisation.

After the discussion stage, you will need to write this up. This report will close the RRP and should summarise all actions taken - identifying the shortfall, the remedial actions taken to date, any remedial actions still to be taken and so on, along with basic time scales.

In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to consider a purely welfare centred response.

Once you have submitted your report that is the end of the matter and, apart from reviewing any outstanding action plans, both you and the officer can, and should, move on.

In all cases, this is simply about doing the right thing, being proportionate, constructive and focussed on learning the lessons and being better in the future.

Reflective practice is not to be confused

with the informal part (pre-Stage 1) of Unsatisfactory Performance Procedure (UPP) which can be dealt with by way of management action for poor performance. In a similar vein, there will be low-level conduct issues that as a supervisor you are expected to deal with as part of your normal line management of officers.

You will always be allowed, and encouraged, to deal with low-level conduct and performance issues that do not even justify notification to the AA. Think of the pen test - if it can be dealt with by words of advice then that is your job. If you need to sit down with someone and make notes and plan remedial correction, then you need to ask the following questions:

- 1. Under normal circumstances, should I be able to deal with this?**
- 2. Is this a one-off or part of a series of behaviours?**
- 3. Have I tried to resolve this to no avail?**
- 4. Has the officer engaged sufficiently?**

If the answer to Question 1 is yes, then, if the officer works with you and Questions 2 and 3 do not apply, then you should be able to deal with this without referring up. The more difficult to deal with it becomes, the more likely you are to refer up. Then, and only then will consideration be given to reflective practice and all actions recorded.

IOPC pledge on timeliness

The head of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has pledged to work closer with the Federation to improve the timeliness of investigations.

Michael Lockwood, director general of the IOPC, made the pledge in a report on the watchdog's efficiency, effectiveness.

Proposed actions included in the report include:

- **A new streamlined investigation process for lower-risk cases, which has helped to reduce the average time it takes to complete investigations.**
- **Engaging extensively with the Federation and other staff associations to develop a respectful relationship and greater co-operation to action any concerns.**
- **A multi-disciplinary Critical Case Panel, chaired by the director general, which now oversees particularly complex or high-risk cases to ensure cross-organisational support and assurance that**

work is properly resourced.

- **New opportunities for users to feedback and challenge the IOPC's work, including the introduction of restorative practice debriefs, which will allow users to discuss any concerns directly with IOPC staff.**
- **An External Stakeholder Reference Group, consisting of a range of statutory and non-statutory external stakeholders, to challenge and influence work.**

Despite the comments, the Police Federation has vowed to continue with its Time Limits campaign which calls for a time limit to be set for disciplinary proceedings against officers and suggests this should be 12 months from allegations being made.

This would fit in with the new regulations whereby Police and Crime Commissioners will be given explanations when cases take longer than 12 months.

I'm a firm believer in doing things for the right reason

The Force's head of PSD has urged officers not to 'suffer in silence' if they are the subject of a complaint or investigation.

Superintendent Rebecca Love says that if people are in any doubt they should talk to someone in PSD.

She said: "The first piece of advice is to understand that PSD will always try to resolve a complaint at first contact with the member of the public, and that we will only send matters out that we need a further account for. The second is to take the opportunity to provide your account as soon as possible, and in as much detail as you can.

"Under the new regulations, individuals under investigation will receive terms of reference for the investigation so it is clear from the outset what the investigation is focussed on. Regulations offer an opportunity to respond to the notices within 10 days and I would urge individuals to make full use of this.

"Finally, I would urge people not to feel like they cannot talk to my team, and to suffer in silence. If in doubt, ask us."

Rebecca said she shares the Federation's concerns about the timeliness of investigations and the effects drawn-out investigations have on officers and their families.

"It's something I've worked hard to address in my department. I also believe we need to keep officers updated more frequently and provide regular quality communication to try to alleviate any anxiety that may be caused by the not knowing," she explained.

"In addition, investigators will now routinely consider the impact on people's health and wellbeing, and if required refer to the appropriate support mechanisms and agencies."

Rebecca took over as head of PSD temporarily in July and was officially promoted in post in January.

She said: "I remember studying for my sergeants' and inspectors' exams and reading all of the sections in the study books that related to the police conduct regs, and thinking 'oh, they're complicated, I'll give those a quick read and hope they don't feature in the exam paper too much'.



Superintendent
Rebecca Love.

"So, when I landed in PSD it was a steep learning curve, but actually with knowledge comes confidence in dealing with matters and decision-making."

Rebecca said one of her main objectives was to review the department aims in line with the new conduct regulations.

"I believe we've been working towards the shift in levels of misconduct assessment for some time, and my Appropriate Authorities have been very clear when making assessments of severity to ensure they sit at the appropriate level," she said.

"We've renewed all of our forms and processes to ensure consistency across investigations and held departmental briefing days to discuss the new departmental aims and objectives."

She added: "With all new legislation, it will take time to fully understand the changes and ensure everyone is confident in their role. There is a bigger role for line managers across the Force under the Reflective Practice Review Process, and this

thankfully these occasions are rare."

Rebecca says her role can throw up difficult situations.

She said: "There are days when I do feel I cannot do anything right for anyone. However, as with other roles I have taken on, I'm a firm believer in doing things for the right reason and being genuine and objective in my decision-making. My 'Horlicks' test; how do I sleep at night?, is being able to go home and know that my values of fairness, integrity and honesty have not been compromised."

She added: "There are some days where you can feel a little isolated, and decisions are difficult, especially when you are potentially dealing with matters that could result in individuals facing a conduct procedure that may result in them losing their job. Given the size of West Mercia, it is inevitable I will deal with situations involving colleagues I have worked closely with, and this naturally is very difficult."

Rebecca said she understands from



THE FIRST PIECE OF ADVICE IS TO UNDERSTAND THAT PSD WILL ALWAYS TRY TO RESOLVE A COMPLAINT AT FIRST CONTACT WITH THE MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC, AND THAT WE WILL ONLY SEND MATTERS OUT THAT WE NEED A FURTHER ACCOUNT FOR. THE SECOND IS TO TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE YOUR ACCOUNT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU CAN.

will take time to bed in.

"I'm hopeful though that this shift in culture from punitive to learning will lead to incremental changes in behaviour."

Rebecca said that police officers carry out a unique job and she wants to help them to be the best they can.

"I truly care for the police and appreciate what a critical role we perform in the public's lives," she said. "Unlike other emergency services, the police tend to have a much wider contact base, and deal with people at their most vulnerable or in their times of most need.

"As a result, I want our workforce to be able to deliver the very best service it can, and support people in learning how to do this if they are unclear or unsure.

"Of course there will be times some individuals behave in a manner that is so far away from what is expected they should not be allowed to hold this privileged position, and it is at these times I will expect my team to take prompt and swift action, but

her own experience how 'unnerving and frustrating' it can be to be the subject of a complaint.

"I remember hearing the phrase 'you're not doing your job properly if you don't get any complaints' coming from a supervisor when I had received a particularly upsetting one," she said. "I'm not sure I totally agree with this sentiment, but I can understand the point they were trying to make to me, to offer me some reassurance."

She added: "I was the subject of an IOPC independent investigation when a male prisoner seriously injured himself while I was the custody sergeant. After ensuring the male was cared for and on his way to hospital, I remember my world going a little bit fuzzy as it dawned on me what was happening, and the realisation hitting me of what was about to happen.

"Thankfully there was no finding against me, but it served as a good lesson in how much being under investigation can impact on the individuals involved."

Rebecca, who joined West Mercia Police in August 2001, heads a team of 37.

"I feel we're in a very healthy position and the investment made by Chief Constable Bangham in PSD is very noticeable," she said, "As with policing resources across all areas and all forces nowadays, it is about reviewing practices and looking at more effective and efficient service delivery by focussing on those areas of most harm.

"In PSD we're continually looking at ways to improve our service delivery whether that be through processes or by systems investment."

CAREER HISTORY

Rebecca Love believes working as a youngster in her father's shop helped her on her path to becoming a police officer.

"I have always worked in public-facing roles, whether that was in my father's shop, or other retail premises, and enjoyed the public contact and front facing roles," she explains, "I knew I wanted to help people and make a difference to the lives of others, and to be honest, I had no set career path.

"My interests were wide ranging from physiotherapy to the RAF. It was timing that led to West Mercia undertaking a significant recruitment campaign, and within months of the application, I found myself in stores being measured up."

Rebecca started her career in Redditch where, she says, she found her perfect role as a beat officer. After taking her sergeant exams, she was a patrol sergeant, custody sergeant and a detective sergeant in South Worcester before taking up a post as detective inspector in North Worcestershire PVP.

She returned to South Worcestershire as a duty inspector before moving to CID and then back to North Worcestershire as SNT inspector for Redditch.

Rebecca said: "Following a very enjoyable period back in Redditch, I was given the T/CI post for SNT in South Worcestershire and, following promotion to CI, I was posted to PSD as a DCI for complaints and conduct. I have remained in post until my promotion to head of PSD in January 2020."

And what are the low points?

"This job comes with many of these and I still am amazed at the resilience and spirit of those in the policing profession," she said, "There's no doubt that the tragic incidents we attend, and those which have caused me to take a quiet moment of reflection will imprint themselves on memories forever.

"However, at these very lowest points, I've always felt the pressure and responsibility increase on me to deliver the very best service I could, trying to make the situation a little more bearable for those loved ones left behind. It was this that always kept me focussed and determined and carried me through."

Fantastic news – though no quick fix

**By Stephie Dyer,
West Mercia
Police
Federation's
detective lead
and also deputy
equalities lead**



I'm really hoping that you have all taken the time and opportunity to read

Assistant Chief Constable Geoff Wessell's blog on the intranet dated 13 February 2020. Kojac/Luther? I think I'm both Scott and Bailey – single mother of two, often waking up on the sofa following a dinner of cereal and wine.

From my perspective as a detective and a Federation representative looking after the interests of detectives, this was a long-awaited great read – an uplift of 88 detectives is most welcome.

Everyone in the Criminal Investigation Departments, including the bosses, acknowledges there is a desperate need for investment and improvements to investigations within West Mercia. Unfortunately, it has been a long time coming, but also unavoidable with the difficulties with the separation of the alliance, the re-election of the Government and the allocation of funding.

However, this is absolutely the right thing to do and it needs to be done now.

A lot of great work has already started around how best to use Athena with regards to enhancing investigations. I urge you all to look at and use the 'Raising IQ – Investigative Quality' under Policing Applications on the Intranet to help you all with this. There is an option through this to be involved in the discussions and assistance with Athena if you think there is something missing that could help everyone with their investigations. There is also help on there for supervisors, which is useful for everyone to read, around the appropriate allocation of crimes; the right person with the right skills for the investigation and one who has capacity.

I have regular meetings with Chief Superintendent Damian Barratt as the head of crime as to what is happening in Force around CID. Skills and capacity have been an area we have been focussing on together as well as recruitment and retention of detectives with the support of the Federation's National Detectives' Forum.

There is work being done nationally around remuneration for detectives to recognise the extra work which is taken on by them all. This project is ongoing and will be further explored with bosses when I have the data from the other forces. Regardless, there is an absolute acknowledgement that certain investigations are clearly in need of specialist skilled detectives and now the senior command team recognises we need more of them to provide the 'vital' role in achieving the investigative improvement West Mercia needs.

An uplift of 88 more detectives is a significant amount and this uplift has been agreed in order to move forward with the New Investigative Model whereby there will be a PVP department in each policing area (as in the North), in order to manage the risk more effectively and tackle safeguarding of vulnerable people involved in crime to achieve a better service for victims.

Again, just as with Athena, this is going to take some patience.

Additional posts will be created and filled, which will clearly take some doing. We all have a responsibility to look out for those keen, proactive uniformed officers who we think may make an excellent detective or have a specific skill set which can be used centrally. I understand there will be a push Force-wide to attract officers with workshops being proposed in the North and South of the Force, so please encourage those you know to go along when they are advertised.

There will be 56 officers placed locally within CID offices across the five LPAs and another 32 centrally in order to bolster cyber-crime investigation, online CSE and digital forensics.

As soon as officers are in place and vacancies filled, the next step will then be to move to the new PVP arrangement and local CID. Initial workshops on each LPA will look at existing officers and the skills they have along with preferences and where best to place them, which would hopefully be the latter quarter of 2020.

If there is any feedback around this, the meetings with Ch Supt Barratt is a two-way process, so please feed back to me on any issues or anything you wish to raise, which I'm happy to represent on behalf of the whole CID family. I can only attempt to address and raise issues I am aware of, so, please get in touch either by emailing stephanie.dyer@westmercia.pnn.police.uk or ringing 0777 304 3003.



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SOLICITORS

Fed team is focussed on helping members

An officer who admits to having gone through such tough times that he seriously considered quitting the Force is now using his experiences to help colleagues after being elected as a Federation workplace representative.



Barry Horton was first a Fed rep in 2013 when he worked for West Midlands Police and, after transferring to West Mercia, became a rep here in 2018.

"I had been subject to some very tough times both personally and professionally, which nearly resulted in me leaving the service for good," he explains. "Initially, I turned to my then local representative for help, but that didn't go too well. I was then put in contact with a (now retired) full-time rep who was amazing, supporting me through the issues, while providing me with advice and some honest truths.

"With her help, my career came back on track. As a result, I was inspired to come forward and give my time back to those who needed it. Working as a rep is an honour I take very seriously, and I hope to be doing it for many years to come."

Barry started his policing career working at Dudley Police Station as a response officer. From here he moved to Safer Travel in Birmingham, operating across the West Midlands in a strategic role.

From Birmingham he moved to Walsall, where he worked in numerous different roles. Today, Barry cites the time he spent on the public order team as the most rewarding, when he had the chance to work at football matches and engage in tasks such as forced entry into houses.

However, it is his role in the Fed, which has played an equally important part in his police career.

"I have been a member of the Federation since my first days in service," reveals

Barry, who currently works in reactive CID in Telford, "As new recruits in the West Midlands, we were taken to the Federation offices at Guardians House in Birmingham by bus and given a presentation. Like most new recruits, I signed up straightaway.

"I started as a workplace rep in 2013, while I was working in West Midlands. I was the equalities and welfare rep, based at Bloxwich. When I transferred forces, I frequently made contact with the local rep and the current branch secretary, Steve Butler. This kept me up to speed to with what the Federation was doing locally."

He adds: "When the triennials came round in 2018, I immediately put my name forward. This is my second term as a Fed rep, and the team who support the officers are fantastic. They are completely committed and focused on helping the Fed members in West Mercia.

"Since I've been elected again, I've completed my initial reps' course, the conduct and performance course and an online course on GDPR, and I have more recently joined the branch board and become deputy branch secretary."

Although Barry is completely focused on supporting officers in their respective roles within the Force, he also believes that keeping the trust of the Fed members is imperative. His mantra for consistency in conduct and performance within the

organisation is, 'pensions, pay and officers'.

Barry explains why: "Pensions and pay are national subjects for debate, which affect everyone I talk to on a daily basis. With regards to policing, there simply isn't enough officers, despite the recent uplift in numbers.

"Take the Malinsgate Estate in Telford, for example. This, in particular, is filling rapidly, and is becoming an increasing threat to officer safety. I'd personally like to see double-crewing return to this area for 80 per cent of day shifts, and all of the night patrols. Maybe it's even time to start returning officers to the out-stations?"

"Another issue is mental health," he continues. "This was hardly an issue when I joined, now it's a part of everything we do. Despite cuts in policing budgets, we are the service that cannot say no which impacts massively on demand. Partner agencies must take more responsibility for the 24-hour response to mental health issues.

"On a final note, I think the police service as a whole doesn't have the right technology in place for the future," concludes Barry. "In fact I'd go as far as saying, we're way behind. Officers need the best technology, not the cheapest, to ensure they are effective in their work. I'd love to see someone like Richard Branson or Mark Zuckerberg take control of the IT, and see what improvements they could bring in!"



WHEN THE TRIENNIALS CAME ROUND IN 2018, I IMMEDIATELY PUT MY NAME FORWARD. THIS IS MY SECOND TERM AS A FED REP, AND THE TEAM WHO SUPPORT THE OFFICERS ARE FANTASTIC. THEY ARE COMPLETELY COMMITTED AND FOCUSED ON HELPING THE FED MEMBERS IN WEST MERCIA.

'The Federation supported me throughout'

An officer who faced a gross misconduct hearing after a complaint was made against them has praised the support they received from the Federation and urged colleagues to ensure they remain a member of the staff association.

The officer admits that when the complaint was first made they did not worry, accepted it as 'par for the course' and was confident knowing they had done nothing wrong.

But, as the investigation process continued, their anxiety increased and 11 months in, they were told they would have

to attend a gross misconduct hearing.

The officer explained: "I then had a nine-month period leading up to the hearing and, despite the support I received from colleagues and friends, I found it to be a lonely process. I was under constant worry regarding my income, pension, keeping my home and having my professional reputation destroyed.

"The Federation was excellent and I was represented by a high level barrister, whose fees I would never be able to afford, without the Federation covering all of them for me. Consequently, after 20 months, I was found

to have no case to answer.

"I can honestly state that if I was not a member of the Federation, which supported me throughout and acquired for me the best legal representation, a fair result may never have been achieved and I could have been left both personally and professionally damaged.

"My message to any officer reading this is simple. If you are not a Federation member, become one. Even the most innocuous complaint can result in a situation where you can lose everything."



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MPs urged to support police officers

West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper has urged the region's MPs to back the new Police Powers and Protections Bill and put the safeguarding of officers at the heart of the new Parliament.

In a letter to MPs, Sarah encouraged them to ensure that officers who put their lives on the line to protect the public, as currently demonstrated during the coronavirus crisis, have the resources they need and the support of the criminal justice system.

She said: "The Federation has campaigned long and hard to change the law to ensure highly-trained police drivers, pursuing suspected criminals on the roads and driving to the very high standard required by their training, are better protected from the risk of lengthy investigation and potential prosecution.

"As well as including the legislative change required to give police drivers the protection they deserve, the bill will also institute a Police Covenant to recognise the contribution that police officers make and seeks to improve officer welfare."

The letter pointed out the way in which officers were putting their own health at risk while seeking to serve and protect the public

during the pandemic. Sarah pointed out that some officers felt they had no alternative but to move out of their family homes to avoid potentially passing on the virus to vulnerable loved ones.

Sarah mapped out the priority areas for the Federation in the coming months including concerns around the leniency of sentences given to those who assault officers.

"In the last few months I have had to make representations regarding shameful CPS charging decisions relating to officers who have been seriously assaulted while on duty. The impact on morale and the message this sends out cannot be under-estimated," she said.

"I strongly believe the proposed Police Covenant should incorporate an obligation on the CPS not to take the easy option when charging but to charge with offences that reflect the seriousness of an incident when colleagues are assaulted."

She welcomed the pledge to recruit 20,000 new officers but urged the Government to commit the funding to return numbers to the levels of 2010, saying the pressure placed on officers by decreased numbers as well as the threat of violence and an increased workload was linked to the wider issue of wellbeing.

Keep up to date with our website

Our new website – polfed.org/westmercia – is now up and running and we will be gradually building on the current content over the next few weeks.

Please check the website regularly for updates on all the news affecting you.

You can use the 'Meet the team' page to find out contact details for the office team and your workplace representatives and there is a dedicated section for information about our Group Insurance Scheme, including application forms.

You can also find details of our member services partners who can help you with mortgages, legal advice and other services.

Among our partners is Police Mutual which has produced a special edition of its 'Let's Talk Money' newsletters to focus on coronavirus.

Police Mutual originally launched the newsletters as part of the Police Federation of England and Wales' ongoing officer wellbeing campaign. The special edition gives an outline of Government measures to help people through the financial effects of the pandemic and includes a list of top tips for keeping your finances in check.

You can read the newsletter at: <https://tinyurl.com/ssybjng>

Choosing the right divorce lawyer

By Pamela Dick, lawyer in family law at Slater and Gordon



The selection of a strong legal partner can significantly influence the outcome of your divorce settlement. If you want specialist advice for something important in your life then you go to the appropriately qualified professional, such as a surgeon, dentist or optician. Choosing your divorce lawyer is no different and, as a police officer, making the right choice is vital.

Protecting your interests

You need to have trust and confidence that your lawyer has experience of the intricacies of your role as a police officer, how you are paid, your working patterns/over-time and your police pension.

At Slater and Gordon, we have more than 20 years' experience in divorce for the police and our lawyers go through a vigorous police training programme. We'll work tirelessly to secure you the best possible outcome when faced with a breakdown of your marriage.

We appreciate that listening to what you want from a settlement, advising you

on the appropriate legal strategy, putting forward your case fiercely and not being afraid to fight your corner is key to producing the relationship you want and need in your lawyer during what's a highly personal and emotional process.

Appointing a forward-thinking lawyer who solves problems creatively and uses their expertise to provide you with commercially-driven advice to help protect your interests can help you achieve the fair and reasonable financial settlement that you deserve.

Access to the best experts

A lawyer who has experience of police pensions upon divorce and has immediate access to the best pension actuaries is imperative, especially when it comes to such a valuable asset as your police pension that you've worked hard to contribute to throughout your working life and which could be shareable upon divorce.

While an amicable solution will be considered and the upmost will be done to achieve a settlement without the need to attend court, where this isn't possible, you need a lawyer who'll be tough on your behalf and who has experience of proceeding to trial.

Your lawyer should use their expertise to pursue your case vigorously, instructing

specialist barristers who are experts in their field to represent you in court.

An accessible team

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We appreciate that as a police officer, you're busy and require a lawyer who's accessible, whether that be at the Police Federation office or via email, Facetime, Skype or mobile.

When faced with a breakdown of your marriage, it's vital that you appoint a lawyer you feel comfortable with, who understands what life as a police officer is like, shares and supports your philosophy towards divorce and has a style that works for you. Divorce is our business but, most importantly, we recognise that this is your life.

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