

Case Study: JBB Chairman

Cath Hollands, Chairman, Wiltshire Federation Joint Branch Board

I think its fair to say that there is no such thing as a typical working day but I'll generally arrive at the office at about 7ish which allows two things; firstly a guaranteed parking space and secondly, time before the phones start ringing, to catch up with Erica (JBB Secretary) and Gary (full-time DLO). I also scan what has happened overnight for any incidents which involve officers who may need our assistance.

Erica, Gary and I are on call 24/7 as we feel it is essential that our Members have access to Federation advice at all times in the event that something disastrous happens and they need our help - fortunately it is fairly rare to be called in during the night. Officers have accidents, get arrested or are just plain unlucky at any time of the day or night and it is only right that someone is available. I would rather answer the phone in the middle of the night and then make the decision as to whether I need to attend, than arrive at work the next morning to find that an officer has not been able to get help when it was most needed. Very often there will be a local Rep on duty somewhere in the county who could assist, but they all have primary policing roles and are often busy elsewhere.

Meetings with HR, senior management, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority play a major part in my day. We are extremely fortunate in Wiltshire to have built up a good working relationship with these groups. I think that having the Federation office located at Headquarters does help in this respect, as very often the spontaneous 'pop over and discuss' approach is far more effective than the formal pre-booked meeting.

We also enjoy a good relationship with our Unison counterparts and this has been drawn closer during the massive amount of change and Modernisation which Wiltshire Police has experienced over the last two years. Under our previous Chief Constable, officers and staff saw two BCUs merge, enquiry Offices close, shift patterns change and the implementation of Neighbourhood Policing. These are huge changes and challenges which would pressure a large force. As one of the smaller forces, Wiltshire found these changes tough. It was a busy time for the Federation office but I am proud of the resilience our members have shown.

We now have a new Chief Constable who is making changes in a very different way. As one of the national workforce modernisation pilot sites, Wiltshire is restructuring in carefully specified areas. Previously, one of the criticisms we, the Federation, levied at the force was their lack of communication to officers and staff about what was happening and why. The CC has taken that to heart and his mantra of 'taking our people with us' appears to be being put into practice. Slowly but surely there is a very definite shift within Wiltshire police and the feeling that maybe we are on the way back up. To have plummeted from 6th in the table to 41st was a real morale killer.

What is a chairman:

Whilst I was planning my re-election campaign I asked myself the question, "What is a Chairman?". Over the days and weeks prior to the election, I came up with the following:

- Spokesperson
- Negotiator,
- Politician,
- Ambassador,
- Marriage Guidance Counsellor,

- Friend,
- Legal Rep,
- Welfare Officer
- Financial Advisor and countless other roles.

I use one or more of these skills on a daily basis.

Why did I become a Federation Rep?

Very early in my career I found myself, along with a number of other officers, on the wrong side of a PSD investigation and at the end of the case (four years later), having been completely exonerated, I vowed to never have anything to do with the Federation again. As far as I was concerned, they were no help whatsoever.

Many years later whilst on Traffic, I wanted to be part of the Force Clothing Committee. This was in an attempt to get decent, waterproof kit for officers. I was told that I could only sit on the Committee if I was a Federation Rep.

I decided to put my money where my mouth was and so, in December 2004, I stood for the vacant Roads Policing seat. Having been elected unopposed, I found myself on the Wiltshire JBB. I never did get to sit on the Clothing Committee which was disbanded shortly afterwards!

In 2006, the Chairman as was, announced that he was retiring. I was approached by members of the JBB and asked to stand for the position. This was something I had never considered but, the more I thought about it and the more encouragement I received, the more determined I became to stand. I was elected and the rest as they say is history.

It was then that my eyes were well and truly opened to the workings of the Federation. I was stunned as to how much is done in the background locally and nationally for the good of Police Officers. It really is a different world.

This is where, I think, the Federation let themselves down. Police Officers are notoriously bad at self publicity and the Federation is no different. We should be crowing our successes from the roof-tops but, due to the confidential nature of the majority of what we deal with, we can't and don't.

Wiltshire have the first all-female Chair and Secretary combination in the country -tell us more..

There are only a small proportion of female officers within the Federation as a whole and very few in Executive positions. I think that this is a shame. Chairman and Secretaries meetings are one place that there will never be a queue for the Ladies! Female Officers have a massive contribution to make to the workings of the service and should not feel that, if they were to become a Rep, that the Women's Reserve was the only option. I was the Roads Policing Rep for Wiltshire, representing a Department made up predominantly of men. I never once felt that I could not represent both sexes equally, nor was I treated differently because I was a female Rep.

Erica and I are, I think, a very successful and productive combination. Being female, very often we will approach issues in a slightly different way to our male colleagues. I hasten to add that in no way I am implying our male colleagues are wrong! Any Fed Rep, whether male or female, learns at an early stage that there is a right way and a wrong way to get things done. It is not about who shouts the loudest, it is only by using good, effective powers of persuasion and negotiation that we get results for our Members. In the right circumstances, though a good old-fashioned heated discussion with the Force works wonders.

I have also learned that there are very few totally unique problems out there. The Federation network is fantastic in that respect – if I cannot get the advice or information from within my own Board, there is always another JBB Chair/Secretary/DLO/Rep who will give support and advice on a huge variety of topics. Mentors also play a vital role.

As any JBB Chairman knows, the role is not just about chairing meetings or attending Conference; it is about working 365 days a year, for the benefit of our Members. It's about caring for every one of the officers in the Force regardless of where they work, what habits they indulge in or the scrapes they get into. It's about wanting the best for them and keeping an open mind. It is also about the special relationship between the JBB Chair and Secretary. I am always aware that it is the JBB Secretary who makes sure that the Chairman gets to the right meetings, with the right papers, on the right day!