

Police widows entitled to pensions 'for life', says Home Secretary

The surviving partners of officers who are killed in the line of duty will receive pensions payable for life, regardless of whether they go on to remarry, under new proposals outlined by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.

The proposals are part of a review of the system of police injury awards due to take place this summer, and which will also include the power for police authorities to make "sizeable" one-off lump sum payments to existing police widows and widowers.

Ms Smith announced the changes, along with significant increases to the lump sum payable to officers who commute part of their pension on retirement, at last month's Federation Conference.

She told officers that the introduction of lifetime pensions for the partners of officers killed in the future was "a key part of a package of support for surviving partners" which she hoped the PNB would agree by the end of the year.

"At the same time, I want to do more for existing survivors who have already lost their partner in the line of duty. At the moment, the pension they receive is withdrawn if they marry.

"I recognise that this can cause hardship, and so to alleviate that problem I intend to give police authorities the discretionary power to make one-off lump sum payments to help existing survivors who have remarried or may remarry.

"I will work with the Police Federation and other members of the Police Negotiating Board on the details of the scheme, but I envisage this lump sum payment to be sizeable in most cases."

Turning to commutation payments, Ms Smith announced new "commutation factors" used to calculate retirement lump sums under the Police Pension Scheme. "This will increase the lump sum payable to all officers

who retire under the 'old' police pension scheme, or who retired with a lump sum under the old pension scheme on or after October 1, 2007," added the Home Secretary.

Examples of the new calculations included:

- An increase of almost £23,000 to just over £109,000 for a 50-year-old male constable at the top of the pay scale who retires after 30 years and commutes the maximum.
- An increase of almost £24,000, to just under £120,000, for a 52-year-old male sergeant in similar circumstances.
- A £14,000 increase to just over £142,000 for a 55-year-old female inspector in similar circumstances.

Some officers were sceptical about the timing and motives behind the announcements, and during the question and answer session following her speech, the Home Secretary was accused of "pulling a rabbit out of a hat" in an attempt to appease officers still angry over her failure to implement the pay deal in full.

But when asked at a later session if the announcement on commutations was a poor deal designed to distract attention away from the pay dispute, Federation Chairman Jan Berry said: "I don't think so; I think this is good news for officers, although it is only what we are owed."

Jacqui Smith: One-off payments for widows remarrying



Photography: Anderson Photography

Pensions: Is the Home Secretary trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat?



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