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Centenary Speech – John Apter, National Chair 21 November, 2019

Good afternoon colleagues. Good afternoon to all our guests. And good afternoon and welcome to you Home Secretary. Thank you for taking time away from what is a busy period for you to be with us today.

So colleagues, you may wonder, why are we here – at the Methodist Hall – here in Westminster. Well – a very quick history lesson if you'll allow me:

It was just over one hundred years ago, in 1918 - there was a strike by police officers over pay. Their pay had eroded to such a low level it had fallen way below inflation.

Interestingly, a century on and some things never change.

The police officers wanted to be able to join a trades union. In response, the government of the day appointed Lord Desborough to head a committee of inquiry.

This inquiry resulted in the Police Act of 1919, which was the legislation that created the Police Federation of England and Wales.

But it was suggested by some that the newly formed Federation was too cosy with the Government. As a result, a national police strike was called in 1919 to prevent the formation of the

Police Federation. Two thousand officers took part in London, Birmingham and Liverpool. Ultimately the strike failed, and being a member of a police union was made illegal.

And it was on 17th and 18th November 1919, that the very first conference of the newly established Police Federation of England and Wales took place in this building. And I couldn't be more proud to stand here now – as your first National Chair elected by our membership – on this very stage, in the same building where we held our first conference 100 years ago, almost to the day.

And then for over 30 years, every November, every year, the Home Secretary of the day would take the short walk from Parliament to this building to address Fed Reps.

Now, whilst the location of our conferences has changed over the years, Home Secretaries have continued to make the journey and address our annual conference.

Some have been warmly welcomed. Others not so much.

But Home Secretary, we do warmly welcome you today and we thank you for attending on this special occasion.

So, a century ago, the Police Federation was set up to look after the welfare and the efficiency of the police service; something Federation Reps have done – and continue to do - to this day.

The welfare of our colleagues is what drives us; it motivates us all. Looking out for, and looking after our colleagues, is what we do. And let's not be ashamed to say...we do it really well.

Through our actions we make a difference to our colleagues every single day.

Fed Reps are the backbone of our organisation.

I know that many of you juggle your day job as a police officer with that as a Fed Rep, very often working in your own time for those you represent, often without thanks or recognition. Well today we give you that thanks, and that recognition.

You should be incredibly proud of what you do and all you achieve. We should all be proud of what we do, each and every one of us.

Locally and nationally, we all make a genuine positive difference - not just our elected reps, but our staff, our solicitors, Barristers, advisors. All play a part in supporting our members and their families. It's that desire to help that not only led many of us to become police officers in the first place, but also to become Fed Reps.

We all have our own reasons, and I certainly have mine.

Becoming a Fed Rep is most definitely not good for career progression, because being a Fed Rep means a focus on members and much less of a focus on yourself.

It's a selfless act, often spurred on by our own personal experiences.

I have never hidden the fact of why I became a Fed Rep. Many years ago, I was treated appallingly by my Force. As a young officer I was arrested as I arrived home after a night shift, arrested as a result of a procedural error that was not of my making. I should say, I was later fully exonerated and received an apology from the force.

Colleagues, I am sure I am not alone in having had a bad experience. But it was the support, advice and guidance that I received from my Fed Rep that kept me in the job. Because I make no bones about it, I was bitter, I was angry and I just wanted to walk away from the job I loved because of the way I had been treated through that whole experience.

But my Fed Rep reassured me; he helped steer me through the process, he kept me sane at a point when nothing else made sense to me, and he made me realise that I too could make a difference to others in their hour of need by stepping up and becoming a Fed Rep myself. So that's what I did, and the rest, as they say, is history.

So, whatever motivated you to become a Fed Rep in the first place, hang on to that....because that's what drives you.

I am fortunate to be able to travel around the country and meet officers of all ranks from all forces and I see first-hand the difference the Federation makes to the lives of our members and their families. I see that excellent work happening locally. The Federation is always there.

Very often in people's darkest times – you, local Fed Reps, become a trusted friend. You're an ear to listen, you're a shoulder to cry on. You offer advice, knowledge and experience that makes a real difference between an officer spiralling in to despair and seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. You help them to cope.

Through the experts we have access to, you ensure they are all there to help our colleagues in their time of need.

Only last week I heard of an officer who, through absolute despair and the horrific things he witnessed while on duty, came close to taking his own life. Thankfully, his Fed Rep intervened and put the measures in place to ensure the officer received the critical support he needed. Let's not shy away from the facts - we saved his life.

We are there when our colleagues need us. That's what we do, day in, day out.

But I accept we don't always get it right, and we can't always achieve what we want to achieve. But it's all too easy to lose sight of the good work done, every single day, locally and nationally. We have almost become ashamed of being proud of being a part of the Federation. Well, let me tell you now: I'm not ashamed, and I couldn't be more proud of what we do, What you do, Because I see the positive difference we make. Please colleagues, never forget that.

We all know that policing is an incredibly difficult and dangerous job and sometimes our colleagues pay the ultimate price for doing that job. It is with great sadness that, in our Centenary year, we have lost the following police officers:

- PC Andrew Harper, Thames Valley Police
- PS Colin Fox, Metropolitan Police
- PC Kevin Flint, Thames Valley Police

They join over 1,700 UK officers who died on duty since 1919, when the Police Federation was created.

Colleagues, please stand and join me in a moment's silence to remember all our colleagues who died on duty during the last 100 years. Those colleagues, and all colleagues we have lost, will never be forgotten.

This month we celebrate 100 years of the Police Federation. 100 years of representing our colleagues. 100 years of supporting those colleagues. 100 years of negotiating – locally and nationally. And for an organisation that many said was set up to fail, we haven't done too badly. We have had some major successes for our members collectively, and then hundreds of thousands of successes for our members individually.

Whether that's legal support, challenging unfairness, representation when allegations are made, welfare support...the list is endless. Don't underestimate the difference you make.

As happens with every organisation, the successes of the much earlier days of the Federation are less well documented than those of the last few decades.

In preparation for today, I looked back over the archives and I also re-read Tony Judge's book, *The Force of Persuasion*, which details the history of the Police Federation. It's a really good read.

Tony lived and breathed the Police Federation. A Blackpool officer he became the youngest ever member of the then Federation's national Joint Central Committee in 1962. He was the founding father and first editor of *Police* magazine – back in 1968 – the year I was born!

Sadly, Tony isn't here any longer to see the Federation's 100th birthday, but his legacy lives on in the history books about the Federation in which he wrote so passionately. In Tony's books, it's clear that the early years of the Federation were consumed with issues of police pay, which to be frank, was absolutely appalling at the time.

There was little time for the officials back then to be involved in many of the welfare and supporting issues we find ourselves dealing with today. But those Fed Reps of 100 years ago paved the way for the good work you are all doing today. They showed government and senior police leaders that the Police Federation was an effective organisation speaking on behalf of its members. They laid the foundation stones for the Federation as the voice of the police service. And Home Secretary, as your predecessors will bear witness to – sometimes that voice can be very loud and very effective.

Let's just look back at recent years:

Many in this room will remember Sir Patrick Sheehy and his attempt to devastate the police service in the early 1990s.

You'll remember the rally we held at Wembley in 1993 and the fight the Federation took to the government of the day which stopped many of the changes he advocated.

More recently, the Winsor reforms to pay and conditions of service.

We fought against a number of changes that were unfair for our members and would have resulted in a poorer service for the public.

We also highlighted the devastating impacts the cuts to policing would have.

If you remember, some people said we were scaremongering. Well, they were wrong. We were right.

Let's not forget – we also won the fight against the introduction of compulsory severance. This would have been devastating for our members. We fought it and we won.

But colleagues - we haven't always got it right – and I am not going to stand here and pretend that we have.

But whatever we do, we do for the right reason. We are driven by what is best for the majority of our members. But that doesn't mean we should stand still as an organisation. It doesn't mean we should just sit back and be complacent. We must evolve, we must question, and we must always strive to improve.

That's why, in 2013, we commissioned the independent review of the Police Federation. It was time to look at what we did, how we did it, and how we could do it better, along with improving our accountability and transparency. We came through a long process of internal change and as we all know, such massive change is never easy. But the independent review, published in 2014, has made our organisation stronger and more accountable to our members. The change has not

stopped or hindered our campaigns to make life better for police officers. It gave our voice focus. It gave our organisation credibility.

And just look at some of the recent successes.

The increase in funding for Taser. We did that.

The Police Covenant, which will provide greater protection and support for officers suffering physical or psychological trauma. We did that.

The greater protection for police officers assaulted on duty. The Protect the Protectors campaign. Again, that was us.

Highlighting the reality of the violence our members face every single day. Getting it talked about in the national media and in Parliament - we did that.

The driving legislation change announced in the Police Protection Bill. Again – from us.

And when I say us, I mean all of us. Nationally and locally. Working together, with one voice.

But this can only make a difference if the Government of the day listens and acts. This has not always been the case.

However, over recent months the government has listened, and they have acted.

And for that – I thank them.

So, 100 years after our colleagues first met here, what challenges do we face going forward?

It's been almost 60 years since the last Royal Commission on policing. Much has changed during this time. What we do. The way we do it. Our structures. Public demands. Type of crime we deal with, such as modern slavery and cyber-crime.

And the population.

In that 60 years the UK population has increased by more than 14 million people, who all need the police.

That's why I genuinely believe that the time has come to ask the public what they want from their police: is the current model of policing right for the next 100 years?

We have a funding formula which sees a disparity in what people in one force area can get compared to those from another. It's a postcode lottery of funding that is grossly unfair. We have a structure of 43 separate forces. Is this right? We have massive increasing demands on policing and our members, to a level which is simply unsustainable. And only this week we published the results of the latest pay and morale survey which showed that 75% of police officers say they are worse off financially this year than last.

There are some officers who, if it wasn't for overtime, simply wouldn't be able to put food on their table or pay their bills. This is shameful. This is wrong and it must change.

So, the Police Federation has much to do. Our members need our support.

They need us to fight for the best pay and conditions.

They need us to speak out for them when they are unable.

But whatever the future holds – whoever the government may be – we will work with them. We simply have to. We cannot go back to how it was. That is not in the interests of those we represent, or those we serve.

We need to continue to work together for the good of policing, our members and the wider public.

But in turn, government needs to value what police officers do. They need to treat us with the recognition and respect for the difficult, dangerous and demanding job we do. And they need to pay us fairly.

In the past 100 years the Police Federation has had its challenges, but what has remained a constant is the commitment and passion of you - our Reps.

As I said a short time ago, the Fed Reps of 100 years ago built the very foundations of our organisation. We are now building the legacy. Together, united, we will continue to do the very best for those we represent: Our colleagues and our members who deserve nothing less.