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MEDIA RELEASE

POLICE FEDERATION PAY & MORALE SURVEY 2021

Statement from Sgt Sam Dobbs – Chair, Northamptonshire Police Federation

This is a dismal day for policing during a dismal time in policing. Today we read the results of a survey of 29,587 police officers in England and Wales, including 460 responses from Northamptonshire officers. For my force, that accounts for around one-third of the rank-and-file members I represent and should therefore be seen as statistically viable and representative.

The survey is as damning, worrying and catastrophic as at any time we've seen in decades of policing. It is published in the context of equally dismal and damning national news, with everyone having a view on policing. This response is designed to communicate the local context of that national survey. The response rate from Northamptonshire officers was higher than the national average and their replies are as follows, with my comments on each section.

On pay & remuneration

- 79% said they are dissatisfied with their remuneration
- 46% said they worry about the state of their finances every day or almost daily
- 74% said they were worse off financially than five years ago
- 14% reported never or almost never having enough money to cover the essentials

Like everyone else in our community and society, police officers are worried by inflation, National Insurance increases, mortgage rates going up and energy prices soaring. And remember, this follows 12 years of pay caps and freezes. It has always been a tradition in this country that remuneration of police officers is rightly protected to offset our inability to have normal employment rights and restrictions on their private lives. Those safeguards have been eroded over the years meaning a pay cut in real terms for officers of 18% since 2010. So of course they are going to be worse off.

The mechanism for our pay review is in tatters, with Pay Review Board members bemoaning their own lack of independence. Of course, any pay increase will be welcomed by us, but the Catch-22 is that whatever deal is negotiated for the benefit of my members, it has to be paid from overstretched local police budgets. This will create inevitable issues for the Police Commissioner and the Chief Constable, given that the Northamptonshire public already unfairly contribute a whopping 47% of their policing bill, unlike other areas of the country. It would be ironic for the Chief Constable to have to cut officers to make the books balance at a time when the Commissioner is committed to increasing numbers, and has put his money where his mouth is, and at a time of unprecedented national recruitment. The government has committed to review the force funding formula within the life of this parliament and we welcome this.

On morale & engagement

- 48% said their personal morale is low (compared to 58% nationally)
- 69% said that morale within our force is low (compared to 84% nationally)
- 60% would not recommend joining the police to others
- 94% do not feel respected by the government
- 11% have an intention to leave policing within two years or as soon as possible

The figures on morale are devastating to us all, and I say this as Chair of a Federation in a force where we are well-led and where there is general respect for our leadership and those charged with our governance. When asked why morale is so low, respondents said that pay, workload, work/life balance, Covid19, and pensions had a significant influence. But a key factor was how the police are treated by the government (95%) and treated by the public (79%). If there is any significant good news at all, I guess it is the morale figures are not quite as bad in this county as in other forces, but that's not much to boast about.

At a time when the police service and the force needs to recruit more officers (50,000 nationally), it is devastating to hear that 60% of our colleagues wouldn't recommend joining the police and that more than one in ten wants to leave within two years.

On workload and working time

- 3% reported being never or rarely able to take at least one rest day per week in the previous twelve weeks
- 69% said that in the past 12 months their workload has been too high or much too high

Demand from the public is ever-increasing, and we are constantly consulted on having the right people in the right place at the right time. But with an increasingly young workforce, with 67% of frontline/response officers having less than two years' service and 88% with less than five years' service, the pressure on these young in service officers, and incrementally on the force, set against the demand, is immense.

No longer is policing seen as a lifetime career. Only 50% intend to stay to pension age. And the learning experience which used to be spread over the early years is now accelerated requiring sometimes super-human stamina and skill. The impact on mental health and wellbeing cannot be underestimated and contributes more and more to the issues we face as a Federation.

Conclusion

I have written this statement having seen the survey from its national and local perspective (our local results tend to mirror the national ones) and it makes for grim reading. I have shared the findings with our Chief Constable, who is supportive but it's fair to say that many of the factors which influence members' views are outside his direct influence and control. We will, however, continue to work together on those areas where we *can* make a difference. I am writing to engage with our Commissioner and the county's MPs to see how we might move forward. Policing has its current challenges regarding culture, which should rightly be open to public and political scrutiny, but that will be best led from within the service without political influence. It is good to see the work of the College of Policing stepping up, with a revision of the Code of Ethics, and the culture work already initiated by our own Chief Constable; and we are committed to playing our part.

I would like to assure the public of Northamptonshire that despite these findings, this county's Police Federation will continue to voice the concerns of our members, to represent them, strongly seek to influence decisions which affect them, and always negotiate on their behalf. I would also like to remind our communities that the police are the public and the public are the police. These are not my words, but those of Sir Robert Peel, who founded policing in the late 1800s. That is why it is incumbent on the public – that is, all of us - to be informed on these matters and to form a view.

Finally, and here is the greatest irony of, despite all this, the vocation, dedication, bravery and commitment of the heroes I am proud to call my colleagues, will continue, because we all swore an oath to serve you without fear or favour. The abuse of that vocation offends us all, and I ask for this to be borne in mind as policing inevitably continues to occupy the headlines in the weeks to come.

In Northamptonshire we are all proud to be police officers, from the Chief Constable to the newest recruit, and to serve the people of this county. I am committed to doing everything possible to support the Force and appeal to our members, and indeed to the public, to support those who fight crime and protect Northamptonshire.

SAM DOBBS
Chair
Northamptonshire Police Federation

The Police Federation of England & Wales is the staff association for police constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors, having been established in 1919. It is one of the largest staff associations in the UK, representing more than 130,000 rank-and-file officers. Our standards were amended in 2014 to stipulate our requirement to maintain exemplary standards of conduct, integrity and professionalism and to act in the interest of the members and the public, seeking to build public confidence in the police service. In Northamptonshire, we have over 1,350 members representing over 98% of the force's rank and file, led by a Council of twenty elected volunteer representatives, and a full-time elected Chair, Secretary and Conduct Lead officer. Our role is to represent, influence and negotiate on behalf of individual members and the wider membership, and to form part of the Regional and National Police Federation structures, more details of which can be found at www.polfed.org