

Connect



SUMMER 2020

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM
WEST MERCIA POLICE
FEDERATION



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We are here for you

By Sarah Cooper
Chair of West
Mercia Police
Federation



Welcome to the summer edition of Connect. Once again I find myself writing at a time when the policing family has been rocked; this time by the sentencing decision relating to the death of PC Andrew Harper.

While Andrew made the ultimate sacrifice in protecting the public from harm, it is only too common that colleagues in our own Force are routinely being subjected to assault and injury in the execution of their duties and I have spoken to a number of you who have found the criminal justice system being left wanting, both in terms of charging decisions and sentencing.

I have personally challenged this, escalating to chief officers and work around assaults on officers is ongoing. I do try to make personal contact with every officer who is assaulted but please feed into me any observations or views because it is your opinion and experience that matters most.

As featured in this issue of Connect, we have relaunched our social media in recent months. My hope is that we can provide a more 'local' feel to what we are putting out and it is really important to me to feature news and views that matter to you.

I am incredibly grateful to Sgts Sara Goodman and Pete Frankish who agreed to join me in speaking out about their personal experience with mental health and also to DCC Julian Moss who supported us in publishing a blog on his personal journey. These personal accounts were incredibly well received and I have had unbelievable

feedback from officers and staff of all ranks. It is clear that hearing about the experience of others does help people to ask for support or at least feel they are not alone.

If there is anything that you feel would benefit from some exposure through our social media, please get in touch. Good news stories are always welcome but equally I would be really pleased to raise the profile of any other issues that may impact on you and your colleagues.

Something that has been raised with me consistently during my time as a Fed rep is the subject of discrimination in the workplace and, more recently, sexual abuse and harassment at work. This is an area of work that I have picked up together with ACC Rachel Jones and the Force's director of business services, Rachel Hartland Lane. Again, if you have any concerns or a personal experience that you wish to raise with me, please get in touch.

I hope that most of you have benefited from the 'freebies' that have been delivered across the Force. This is a new ongoing initiative that has been set up through our secretary, Steve Butler, so I hope that you are able to enjoy this small token of appreciation.

Finally, please can I encourage you all to complete the Federation pay and morale survey? Past results have assisted in pushing welfare up the agenda and your input is incredibly important as it will form the basis of my conversations with chief officers when discussing issues related to officer morale and welfare.

Take care all and stay safe. I have been blown away by the 'can-do' attitude of colleagues through the Covid crisis and I never cease to be humbled by the work you all do to keep the public safe. Please remember that we are here for you so never hesitate to make contact if needed.

“ I have been blown away by the 'can-do' attitude of colleagues through the Covid crisis and I never cease to be humbled by the work you all do to keep the public safe. Please remember that we are here for you so never hesitate to make contact if needed.

Your photos

Thank you to everyone who responded to our appeal for photographs showing policing in West Mercia.

We received some great images and will be using these over the coming months in

our magazines, on the Federation website and also in our social media.

Please keep the photos coming though. Simply send them to our editor at julie@xpruk.com



MOMENTS THAT MATTER

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Anita Hennessey, Partner, Family Law

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Assaulted PC tells her story

It was little surprise that PC Rachel Alcock's story about being assaulted on duty led to such a passionate reaction on social media.

An emotive picture of Rachel's facial injuries accompanied a detailed personal account of what happened to her on 15 May this year.

A record of more than 30,000 people saw the story on West Mercia Police Federation's Facebook feed with almost 9,000 engagements.

While on the Federation's Twitter platform, more than 130,000 impressions were gained with more than 30,000 people engaging with the posts.

The full story was told on West Mercia Police Federation's website.

Rachel received huge support from Federation staff, colleagues and the public who also condemned the incident which led to the man in question avoiding a criminal conviction.

Rachel had been called to assess a member of the public who was suffering with mental health issues after the family had reported concerns for his welfare.

Along with a colleague, Rachel eventually found herself having to chase the man in question because his actions were threatening his own safety and that of those around him.

"We caught up with him and had no option but to detain him under the S136 Mental Health Act, said Rachel. "He tried to leave and run away from us and headed for a nearby main road. As we tried to restrain him, he became physically aggressive, throwing a number of punches at us making contact with our faces, as well as pulling our hair.

"We managed to detain him on the floor and handcuffed him but he continued to kick out. I requested assistance and we continued to detain him until other officers arrived. In the end, we got control of the situation using emergency restraint belts to prevent any injury to himself or other officers."

By this stage, Rachel had swelling and bruising underneath her eye and cheek area after being hit and went to Worcester A&E with colleague PC Goodman, who had also been hit in the face.

"I was seen by a doctor and a consultant



PC Rachel Alcock injured on duty.

and with substantial swelling to my right eye and cheek bone and bruising appearing, they suspected I had a fracture and I was sent for an X-Ray," said Rachel.

"There was no fracture but a few days later, I had a black eye with bruising down the left-hand side of my cheek and underneath my jaw on my neck.

"It was painful at the time and due to the swelling to my eye, I had to take a couple of days off. Then, when I returned to work, spent a few days in the office to avoid any further injury."

Her story led to an emotive response on social media with hundreds of people

wishing her a 'speedy recovery'.

Andrea Hodgkinson wrote: "Best wishes Rachel. No one deserves this at work."

While Mark Cutts added: "I hope you recover quickly, both physically and mentally."

They were not the only ones with those sentiments.

"Sadly, we are hearing of officers being injured on an almost daily basis. But, it doesn't matter how many times you hear officers' stories, they still leave their mark. No one should go to work expecting to be assaulted and yet we know officers are coming to see it as part and parcel of the job. It's not. As a Federation, we will continue to raise awareness about officer assaults and the lasting physical, mental and emotional scars they leave behind.

"We will work with the Force and the PCC to support officers and to campaign for tougher sentences for those who assault police officers but we also need to see the courts using the full sentencing powers available to them."

“We managed to detain him on the floor and handcuffed him but he continued to kick out. I requested assistance and we continued to detain him until other officers arrived. In the end, we got control of the situation using emergency restraint belts to prevent any injury to himself or other officers.”



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

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Thanking officers



Federation secretary Steve Butler with the Easter eggs.

West Mercia Police Federation distributed Cadbury Easter eggs, coffee, ready meals and other snack items to officers and staff across the Force area as a thank you for their work during the pandemic.

Branch secretary Steve Butler helped co-ordinate the delivery and distribution of the donations which were arranged through Workperk and Gems at Work as part of a concerted effort by companies to do their bit to recognise the incredible contribution of front-line workers during the pandemic.

"I think they just wanted to thank police officers for everything they had done during the coronavirus crisis," says Steve, "It was a lovely goodwill gesture."

Cadbury donated around 2,000 Easter eggs for West Mercia Police officers and staff while both Starbucks and Tasty Bites provided drinks, ready meals and snacks.

"The donations were really well received by officers," Steve adds.



PC Dan Franco and PC Jo Lewis who said on receiving their Easter eggs: "It makes a difference to be recognised and it is really nice to be appreciated."

Pay increase

The 2.5 per cent pay award announced by the Government is just the first step towards improving police officers' salaries after the years in which austerity measures saw their wages fall by 18 per cent in real terms, says the chair of West Mercia Police Federation.

Sarah Cooper welcomed the pay rise, which applies across the ranks and comes into effect on 1 September 2020, but also the fact that the Government had fully accepted the recommendations of the Police Remuneration Review Body (PPRB), something it has not always done in the past.

"It is encouraging that the Government has finally taken on board the findings of the PPRB in making this pay award," says Sarah, "Back in February, the Police Federation of England and Wales and the Police Superintendents' Association made a joint submission to the independent review body and, among other things, called for a five per cent pay rise.

"Since the submission the country has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic and the economy has suffered. However, it is absolutely right that the Government has sought to acknowledge the significant contribution made by my colleagues and other public sectors workers who made personal sacrifices and faced additional risk by remaining on the front-line to provide essential public services during the crisis

"This pay rise is a step in the right direction in terms of restoring officers' pay to a level that adequately reflects their unique role in society, the dangers they face and their commitment to serving the public.

"The Police Federation will continue to fight for improved pay deals once the economy allows."

Have your say

All members are being encouraged to take part in the annual pay and morale survey carried out by the Police Federation of England and Wales.

The findings of the survey are used to underpin the Federation's annual submission to the Police Remuneration Review Body (PPRB) – the independent organisation which advises the Government on officer pay.

"I would urge all members to take the time to fill out this survey. Previous surveys have helped in informing conversations with chief officers around health and wellbeing and it does assist greatly in evidencing where the problems are and how our members are really feeling," says Sarah Cooper, chair of West Mercia Police Federation.

"I understand that there may be a certain level of 'survey fatigue' but please take the opportunity to have your say in order that I can make representations on your behalf locally and also so that your views are reflected in national negotiations around pay and conditions."

Last year's survey revealed:

- 79 per cent of West Mercia respondents were dissatisfied with their overall remuneration, including pay and allowances
- 73 per cent felt they were worse off financially than they were five years ago
- 45 per cent reported worrying about the state of their finances every day or almost every day
- 11 per cent reported never or almost never having enough money to cover all their essentials
- 61 per cent said their morale was low, and
- 72 per cent said they would not recommend joining the police to others.

The survey has been issued via the Federation's National Member Database and will close at midnight on Friday 11 September.

- Contact the Federation office if you need a link to the survey by emailing staff@wmpf.polfed.org

Sara becomes Force health and wellbeing lead

Sergeant Sara Goodman, who has detailed her own mental health breakdown two years ago on our website and social media channels, has been appointed as the Force's new health and wellbeing lead.

Sara started her career in West Mercia Police in 1996 and has served in a wide range of roles including response, CID, Safer Neighbourhoods and Special Branch. She became a sergeant in 2001 where she quickly realised that welfare was a major part of her supervision role.

In 2009 Sara undertook an 18-month secondment to the Community Safety Partnership, training in project and programme management and becoming accredited as a peer reviewer for the Home Office.

She has experience of leading major change in a large complex organisation, managing large scale events such as politician and Royal visits, as well as critical incidents.

A qualified Mental Health First Aider and instructor, Sara has supported the Force in restructuring the recuperation strategy for police officers returning to work from illness or injury.

Having suffered with her own mental health breakdown in 2018, Sara recovered and wrote a children's book to help others with supporting children of those recovering from mental health problems.

She says: "I'm delighted to take over the role as health and wellbeing lead for West Mercia Police. This is an area that is very close to my heart as I suffered from a work related breakdown in 2018. I was always so full-on, I never thought that it could happen to me and when it did, I did not think that I would recover.

"Thankfully, I did recover and was able to finally tell my story on the West Mercia Police Federation Facebook page. People were so lovely with their comments and support, both at the time of my breakdown and since.

"I was then asked to undertake this role and, after some serious thought, I decided to give it a go. I am fully aware that health and wellbeing have almost become dirty words in the police service – something that we should be doing, say we are doing but somehow they end up bottom of the list.

"In the next few months I shall be looking at several crucial areas such as Peer



Support in conjunction with the Oscar Kilo framework. I know that there have been many of you who have taken on these roles with little or no support, and for that we thank you.

"As someone who has used Peer Supporters in times of need, and as a trained Mental Health First Aider myself, I know how important your roles are and how we need to look after you. I believe that combined with staff trained as Mental Health First Aiders, we can help to provide a robust 'baseline' to help ease the ever increasing referrals to our welfare officers.

"These fabulous individuals will then be able to provide more specific professional guidance and support for those requiring it."

Sara will support the occupational

health review, helping officers to get an even better service. She will also fully review and improve the accessibility to information for health and wellbeing on the intranet with a view to having a one-stop shop for signposting, support and information.

"Only once we start to really consider the people who work for us, will we be able to provide a better, more caring, service to our public. As someone recently said, 'if you want good performance - even if you don't care about people, you need to care about your people'.

"That is why it is more important than ever to take the wellbeing survey.

"Overall, these improvements will work towards making the Force a more trauma informed organisation both inside and out."

Mental health has to be prioritised

The police service needs to give the same priority to mental health and wellbeing as it does to physical health.

That is the view of Sarah Cooper, chair of West Mercia Police Federation.

"I do believe the police service has come a long way in terms of how it supports officers, and staff, who are suffering mental ill-health but it needs to build on the progress it has made," says Sarah.

"From my own personal experience of battling with mental health, I really do understand when officers say they can't answer the phone to work or attend a meeting in a police station but all too often they also tell me that they are afraid to ask for help or seek support.

"There is still very much a fear that any disclosure regarding mental health will negatively impact on development and promotion prospects. This really concerns me and I think there needs to be clear and genuine reassurance from senior command that this is not the case."

Sarah continues: "In my experience, those who have suffered poor mental health are more likely to recognise it in others so they have the ability to provide support at the earliest opportunity.

The Force is striving to develop strong, confident and compassionate leaders and an understanding of mental health, and the way it impacts on the workforce, is key to this.

"I am a strong believer that our current promotion processes need to be improved in order that emotional intelligence and the ability to manage staff with compassion can be valued in the way it should be. The damage I see that is caused by poor management should not be underestimated and it is entirely avoidable."

Earlier this year, the Federation launched its 'Hear Man Up, Think Man Down' campaign to encourage officers to talk about mental health, raise awareness and help prevent suicide.

It promotes organisations that can

offer support to anyone suffering with mental health and wellbeing including the Samaritans, Mind, Calmzone, Give Us A Shout, Police Care UK, the Welfare Support Programme and Call4Backup.

Sarah has urged anyone concerned about their own mental wellbeing or that of a colleague to get in touch with the Federation office or their local Federation representative.

Officers can also access help through the Force welfare officers, PAM Assist and, for those in the Group Insurance Scheme, support is available through Health Assured Mental Health Counselling - details of which are available in the scheme booklet on the West Midlands Police Federation website – www.polfed.org/westmercia

Sarah concludes: "We can help an officer access the support they need. Taking the first step by contacting us can be the first step towards getting the help you need so please do not hesitate to get in touch."

Huge support for officers

The decision of three West Mercia officers to share stories about their own personal battles with mental health on the Federation's website has led to an unprecedented response on its social media feeds.

During Mental Health Awareness Week in May, West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper, along with Sergeants Sara Goodman and Pete Frankish explained, in detail, their emotional tales which included bouts of anxiety, tension and fear.

The response to their bravery of opening up led to huge swathes of support on both the Federation's Facebook and Twitter platforms.

As well as huge support on Twitter, their tales reached more than 7,200 people on Facebook and led to more than 3,700 engagements with their posts.

One supportive message under Sarah's

story was from Rachel Jones who said: "You are an amazing and brave lady, thank you for sharing your story. I'm sure it will help many who are going through some really tough times. Take care."

Mike Digger wrote as a response to Sara's piece: "Sara was one of the nicest people I worked with. Very professional and always a smile. Well done for speaking out Sara and letting people know there is a way back from depression and mental health issues."

Natasha Twining supported Pete's story by posting: "Absolutely brilliant sergeant. Always supportive of others despite what he may be going through. Well done for speaking out sergeant."

That was just some of the amazing support that came in during an incredibly busy week on social media as West Mercia Police Federation supported Mental Health Awareness Week.

Flint House offering remote support

The police rehabilitation centre Flint House is now offering remote treatments where possible.

And it is accepting application forms from officers who might need treatment. The forms will be assessed by clinical teams so that remote treatment can be offered if deemed appropriate.

At the start of lockdown, around 450 people were due to attend the centre and so far more than 220 have accepted the offer of a tele-consultation and are now under treatment. Nine patients have made a full recovery and have been discharged.

There is also a wealth of Flint House generated advice and treatment actions that can individually be undertaken while at home on Flint House's YouTube channel and via its Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Access to Flint House is included in your Federation welfare fund membership. To join the welfare fund or find out more visit the welfare fund page on our website at polfed.org/westmercia.



Mental Health Awareness Week: officers share their experiences

It was an emotional time for several West Mercia officers during Mental Health Awareness Week in May.

Sergeant Sara Goodman, response sergeant Pete Frankish and West Mercia Police Federation chair Sarah Cooper all opened up about their own mental health challenges and agreed to tell their stories on the Federation's website.

Mental Health Awareness Week had a nationwide, cross-sector focus and gave officers in police forces across the UK the opportunity to reflect on their own situation and be encouraged to speak out and share their experiences.

Organisers hoped it would break down any stigmas around mental health and, particularly in a job as stressful as the police, encourage a positive attitude in the workplace and urge colleagues to be helpful and considerate to anyone who may be going through a difficult time.

West Mercia Police Federation was right behind that message and chair Sarah Cooper told her own story in a bid to encourage members to speak up, without fear, if they are suffering mentally.

"Mental Health Awareness Week is a fitting reflection of why I chose to stand for the post of Federation chair in the first place," says Sarah, "Mental health awareness is a subject that is extremely important to me. It is my belief, and the experience of many officers that I represent, that positive mental health in the workplace is significantly impacted by general welfare considerations and treatment by line managers and senior leadership."

Sarah's own mental health issues arose after a 'prank' during her first five weeks of being tutored.

"The incident left me with a deep-rooted fear of dead bodies that I still carry with me today and one that has hugely influenced my career choices in an effort to self-manage what to some would be an irrational fear," says Sarah.



Sergeant Sara Goodman.

"The one thing that I know is that this was not something that happened to me overnight. It was a slow creeping process that changed the way I was able to function as a response officer. I would dread my call sign being said over the radio in case I was being directed to a sudden death.

"I was unable to walk past undertakers when walking the town alone at night. I had to ask colleagues to assist me with MISPER house searches just in case there was a dead body in the house and I was terrified of opening the cell hatches in custody in case someone had taken their own life.

"This fear ate away at me and started to impact on my home life, I began to have the same irrational fears in my home and my mood and ability to cope with normal life declined. Eventually, things became so bad that I recall driving home from work in tears and decided that my career as a police

officer was over."

Sarah tells of the good and bad experiences she has encountered since then and how they have affected her ongoing challenges.

"The issues I have faced with my mental health have been hugely challenging personally and, at times, I have felt incredibly low and questioned my future in the police," she says.

"However, I strongly believe that my experience means that I am far better placed to help others and this is something that I really value in my current role. My journey with my own mental health is ongoing and there are times where workplace or personal challenges have caused me to decline.

"It is not a sign of weakness to put your hand up and say 'I'm struggling here' and colleagues should never be in fear of doing this."

Sergeant Sara Goodman echoed Sarah's call for people to speak up if they feel they are struggling.

In her story, mum of three Sara spoke about her own experiences with her mental health to help encourage members to open up about their own wellbeing.

"I had, on and off, suffered with my mental health but always managed to keep a lid on it," said Sara, who joined the Force

“ I strongly believe that my experience means that I am far better placed to help others and this is something that I really value in my current role. My journey with my own mental health is ongoing and there are times where workplace or personal challenges have caused me to decline.

aged 24 in 1996. "In 2004, I was diagnosed with post-natal depression but had been at work the whole time. It was only when a close friend noticed I was struggling that I sought help from the GP. I was put on anti-depressants and recovered well and carried on as normal.

"But when I returned to response police work and 24-hour shifts in 2017, I found I was really struggling.

"Then, I became subject to a complaint which put me under a criminal investigation. The day I was told that, I started crying and did not stop for a month."

The support of colleagues during that period helped Sara 'to dissolve the feelings of uselessness and failure' and played a big part in her recovery.

"My staff on B Shift at Malvern and Evesham visited me at home to help me get over my fear of the police service and without the support of Superintendents Steph Brighton, Sean Kent and Damian Pettit, I would not have been able to return to work and become as well as I am today."

"Without them all I would probably be dead. I know that sounds dramatic, but it's true. And I would definitely not have been able to come back as a police officer."

Sara took six months off work. She also went to Flint House, the police rehabilitation centre, for a fortnight two months after her return to work.

With a good support network in place and having learned more about how to stave off negative feelings, Sara is now a mental health first aider too.

"I'm feeling great," she said. "Like everyone, I have up and down days but being so much more aware now of what I need makes it easier for me to deal with it and stop it getting into a big thing."



Response Sergeant Pete Frankish.



Kate and Pete Frankish.

The third person to open up on our website was Response Sergeant Pete Frankish who explained how an innocent weekend away to meet up with a friend and ask if he would be Godfather to his children took an unexpected, and unimaginable, turn.

“ I have shared my story with several other officers now and have found that a problem shared definitely is a problem halved.

Based in Worcester, Pete explained how he found out that weekend he was facing misconduct proceedings.

"This was truly the start of a nightmare which lasted many months and had a huge impact on my mental and physical health, my relationship with my wife, my children, our wider family and even our friendships," he says.

"At my darkest moments I contemplated

suicide, I neglected my health and could not get the investigation out of my mind, it was all-consuming. I had to take some time away from work or it would have broken me.

"If I can take a positive out of the situation, I have faith in the justice system which saw the allegation for what it was and found no case to answer."

Pete continued: "I have shared my story with several other officers now and have found that a problem shared definitely is a problem halved.

"The feedback I have had from officers I have spoken to is what makes it worthwhile. Some have been in really dark places and on the edge of suicide. Some have wanted to leave their careers behind and walk away with nothing to show but contempt and disdain for the job. But having opened up and spoken about the issues and understood that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, knowing that there will be an end to it, often with less of a sanction than anticipated, is what matters.

"My advice, in a nutshell, speak to your nearest and dearest, let them know how you feel, tell them you love them, let them know what is so upsetting, don't shut them out. Be honest, look after yourself physically, hug your partner, hug your kids until they let go."

Remembering fallen officers



The National Police Memorial Day service will be held online this year to ensure that fallen officers and their families can still be honoured and remembered.

The service will be held on Sunday 27 September at 3pm.

The website streaming the service will also be hosting a tribute wall where you can

share your memories and photos or leave condolence messages.

To access the site and the service, you will be asked to provide your name and email address.

You can find out more by visiting the events page at polfed.org and simply clicking on National Police Memorial Day.



Remembering...

PC Anthony (Tony) Wright of West Mercia Police who died on 9 August 2011, aged 47. His motorcycle was in collision with a car while he was on duty in Kidderminster.

Your Group Insurance Scheme

We are pleased to say that we have managed to renew our serving officer Group Insurance Scheme at the same cost to avoid any rise in subscription rate.

This has meant some small changes in provision consisting of the removal of Red Arc Personal Nurse Advisor as a service, but retaining the Health Assured provision for 24/7 mental health support. Sick pay cover when on nil pay will also reduce from 50 per cent of pay scale to 30 per cent.

But hospitalisation cover is being

increased to £50 per night and the child death grant goes up to £3,000. Phone insurance is increasing to a £1,500 limit plus a doorstep repair service will become available. The critical illness list will be expanded to cover extra illnesses.

As a Federation, we will continue to cover the cost of GP24 and mobile phone cover for serving members to ensure that costs passed on are as low as possible. Changes will come into effect from 1 September 2020 and full details will be available on our website.

Federation diaries

Unfortunately, due to COVID, it has not been possible to produce Federation diaries for 2021 without it being at some significant cost due to lack of advertising opportunities.

Having sought views from local reps and members it has been decided that this money would be better spent in providing members with something like a water bottle, coffee cup and/or sporks and the Federation is looking into this now. Watch this space! We hope diaries will be back for 2022.

Uniform update

In the last issue of Connect, we featured an article about uniform, with an emphasis on the suitability of uniform issued for cold weather.

We are pleased to report that DCC Julian Moss has been incredibly supportive in respect of a review of what is issued so watch out for news on that.

Leave carry over

A number of you have made contact with us to question the Federation position on the decision to review the carry over of leave into 2021/22.

We made strong representation from the outset that the ability to carry over leave should be accommodated and this position remained unchanged during negotiations later on.

The Federation did not support the Force's position on reviewing the decision that had already been made and strong representation was made in respect of this on your behalf.

Pension compensation

The Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) has received 912 applications from West Mercia Police officers plus an extra 98 from those who have served with West Mercia among others.

Thank you to all who have engaged with this. All updates on PFEW's compensation claim and other pension developments can be found on our website.

Federation subs

Monthly subscriptions to the Police Federation will increase by £2 a month to £23.58 from 1 September this year.

The increase, which is the first since 2011, was supported by delegates who took part in a Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) virtual conference in mid-June.

Members can apply for tax relief on their Federation subscriptions and this would mean they paid £18.86 a month for the range of services and support offered through the Federation.

Could you be a Fed rep?

We are always keen to encourage members to consider becoming workplace Federation representatives.

It is a challenging role but it is also rewarding to be able to help support colleagues. Find out more by contacting your Federation rep or the full-time officials.

Making a difference

The most rewarding thing about being a Federation representative is knowing you can make a difference for officers, says Sergeant Robert Camp.

Robert has been a workplace rep for West Mercia Federation since 2015, and still enjoys helping members.

"I put myself forward for the role to help colleagues if they were ever in need, to address poor managers around leadership and abuse of regulations," he said.

"I'm still enjoying helping to address underlying issues around leadership and breaches of regulations. I enjoy becoming involved in meetings with managers and senior officers and making a stand for colleagues and how they work and how they're treated."

He said one of the challenges of the role was making senior figures in the Force realise the value of the Federation to everyone.

Robert said: "It's making managers

and senior officers know that we are there to help them to avert problems and help all the staff."

He added: "I find the most rewarding thing is creating change to policies and procedures that directly impact officers on a day to day basis; to know that I can sometimes make a difference."

Robert joined the Federation in 1991 when he was part of Surrey Police. "Everyone did then to guarantee a friend and get advice when you needed it," he said.

He moved to West Mercia in 1999 and has worked for almost a decade in custody, firstly at Redditch and now at Worcester. He's also a rep on the National Custody Forum.

Robert said he'd recommend joining

the Federation, particularly to new officers.

"They're so busy and so put upon by their supervisors under the current systems, they're less inclined to push back and stand their ground over breaches of regulations," he said.

"I'd encourage them to join the Federation to guarantee a friend and advice when you need it. Managers and supervisors can no longer support you as they did when I joined.

"West Mercia Police Federation has made a fresh start and the leadership team bring a genuine honesty and a commitment that's refreshing and encouraging to all reps," he added.



I find the most rewarding thing is creating change to policies and procedures that directly impact officers on a day to day basis; to know that I can sometimes make a difference.

Wanting to make a change

Rob Seewoosaha is thoroughly enjoying his first year as a Federation rep.

He became a workplace rep in August and says the thanks he receives from colleagues after providing them with support is the most rewarding aspect of the role.

"When our Federation chair, Sarah Cooper, was elected and visited our shift briefing by Sgt Ian Booth, Sarah was asked why she went for the role," said Rob, whose Federation interests include discipline, and health and safety. Her reply immediately inspired me to be part of that ethic and wanting to make change.

"I've had my fair share of Fed advice and action in the past and therefore with this experience and knowledge I wanted to ensure others had the same. This is my first time as a rep and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. I have numerous amounts of people coming to me asking for simple advice.

"It can be tricky as I have to ensure I don't have too much on my plate with my normal work, the Fed, family life and trying to relax.

"I enjoy being approached by members asking for advice. I enjoy seeing more actions being done and officers thanking me afterwards," he

added.

But as well as enjoying his role, Rob said the Federation still had a lot of work to do in the eyes of its members.

"We have to slowly build up our reputation as I believe that West Mercia Police Federation was not the Federation we have today before a change of hierarchy," he said. "Getting our voices and presence out to officers is crucial so they know who we are and what we can do."

Rob started work with West Mercia Police in December 2000 and joined the Fed on his first day. Now based with Worcester response, he's worked mainly in uniform response, as well as in CID and IOM.

He said his highlights in his two decades with the Force included working at the NATO summit in 2014 and being trained in PSU helicopter deployment. Other highlights included attending the first, third and fourth September 11 memorials in New York and completing a tour of duty with the NYPD.

Rob said: "Policing in the last 20 years has changed considerably. Governments change and so do chief officers. All want to change for the better. This will always be the case.

"Also, technology is the killer as we're having more and more incidents of abuse online and trying to police this is a huge task."

He added: "The main challenge for our Force is to find reliable IT. I'll leave that answer there as I can't keep going on about the frustrations of Athena."

He said another challenge was in helping new recruits to build up their training and experience.

"It's a great result as the numbers were ridiculously low," he said. "However, new officers need training and experience. There's been a huge void of experienced officers upon shifts for new officers to learn from and look up to."

Rob's advice for new recruits, and indeed more experienced colleagues, is to join the Federation.

"Don't ever think of not joining," he said. "Your monthly subscription is worth every penny as anyone can make an allegation or complaint against you being a police officer."

And he would encourage officers to become reps, saying: "Be prepared to have extra work but also to have the satisfaction of seeing others smile knowing you have gone out of your way to help them.

"I work along to a phrase I keep as a police officer and Fed rep: if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything," he added.

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Focus on **conduct**

In each edition of **Connect**, West Mercia Police Federation's conduct and performance lead **Lesley Williams** tackles some of the most frequent questions she gets asked.

This time, she looks at what members should do if served with a Regulation 17 Notice.

If you are served with a Reg 17 Notice, this may be done by staff from the Professional Services Department (PSD) or, on occasion, a line manager. You should seek the advice of a Police Federation discipline representative as soon as possible and certainly before making any response.

You can find details of all of the Federation representatives and their areas of business on the Force intranet pages under 'Federation' or on the West Mercia Police Federation website <https://www.polfed.org/westmercia/>

If you are aware in advance that you will be served a notice, contact a discipline representative to discuss the matter.

You should not be asked any questions by the officer serving the notice. If you are, do not make any response without the advice of a discipline representative.

You should sign the notice, keep your copy and provide a copy of your PNB if requested.

You may also be served with a Terms of Reference (ToR) at this point but certainly before any interview or account is given. The ToR identifies the parameters of the investigation.

Do I have to give a response to the notice?

No. There is information and guidance on the regulation notice which sets out that you 'may' give a response within 10 days. This does not say 'must'. Please seek advice from your discipline representative to consider what is best for you. They can advise you on moving forward with a formal written account or interview.

Providing a 10-day response to the regulation notice does not (necessarily) negate the need for interview. That situation is often very rare.

PSD has contacted me and asked me to provide a statement. I have not been served a regulation notice, what do I do?

Again, please seek the advice of a discipline representative before you respond. Officers have an absolute duty to cooperate with

PSD - and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) - but your rep can advise you and liaise with PSD to establish your status and if you are likely to be served a regulation notice.

You must provide your PNB if requested, even if you did not make an entry about the incident in question. If you provided a statement in respect of the incident at the time, PSD should be able to access that. You should not be asked to provide a new MG11 about an incident (often some time after the event) for a PSD investigation.

An account can be provided with the guidance of your discipline rep who can ensure they consider any disclosure matters, whether you have had access to body-worn video (BWV) and other material available.

IOPC investigation

If the matter is being investigated by the IOPC, they will serve their own regulation notice. They may wish to attend an agreed location to serve the forms and ToR. Alternatively, they may seek assistance of the Federation representative to serve the notices on their behalf.

As the Federation discipline lead, I often agree to this in order to serve the notice in a timely fashion and reassure the officer at the earliest opportunity.

What does the IOPC investigate?

Police forces must refer the most serious incidents to the IOPC – whether someone has made a complaint or not. For example, if police actions result in a member of the public being seriously injured or dying:

- While in custody
- After they've had contact with the police
- As a result of a police shooting
- In a road accident involving the police.

The IOPC also investigates allegations of serious corruption and abuse of power. Police forces must refer allegations that someone has abused their position for a sexual purpose, or to pursue an inappropriate emotional relationship.

Key themes for the IOPC

The IOPC has a thematic approach to investigations and these are the current themes:

- Deaths and serious injuries involving the police (DSI)
- Discrimination
- Welfare and treatment of vulnerable people
- Corruption and abuse of power
- Use of force and armed policing
- Police pursuits or traffic incidents
- Custody or during detention
- Child sexual abuse.

Police forces can also refer incidents to the IOPC if they have concerns about the conduct of their officers or staff.

The IOPC can also direct forces to record incidents and then 'call them in'. It can also consider incidents that have not been referred by police forces and decide whether, and how, it will investigate them.

How does the IOPC decide on the type of investigation?

When the IOPC receives a referral from a police force, its assessment unit reviews the information provided. It decides whether the matter requires an investigation and the type of investigation.

There are three different types of investigation:

- Independent – the IOPC investigates the matter using its own investigators
- Directed – the IOPC directs and controls the investigation using police resources (PSD)
- Local – the police force PSD investigates, with no involvement from the IOPC.

Next time:

In the autumn edition of **Connect**, I will look at the following issues:

- Can PSD seize my phone?
- Obtaining legal advice.
- Interviews.

If you have a question you would like answered or to see a feature on a particular topic, please get in touch. You can email Lesley at lwilliams@wmpf.polfed.org





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