

Federation Matters

The magazine of Hertfordshire Police Federation

Winter 2019



*Federation invests in
new welfare van* – Pages 6 and 7

Centenary celebrations – Pages 10 to 13

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Plus a whole lot more...

Front cover: *The new Hertfordshire Police Federation welfare van will be out and about so members can make use of the facilities it offers.*

Remember, you can find news updates and more information on the work of the Federation on our website at

www.polfed.org/herts

Check regularly to keep fully up to date.

Federation Matters is published by **Hertfordshire Police Federation**

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Telephone: **01707 638096** Web: **www.polfed.org/herts**

Produced by **XPR (UK) Ltd** www.xpruk.com

Working for you

By **Geoff Bardell, chair of Hertfordshire Police Federation**

May I firstly wish you and your family seasonal greetings, and I hope that the new year is indeed a happy and healthy one.



The last year, and particularly the last six months since our summer publication, have been a really busy time for us all in the Federation.

I thought it might be worth giving an insight into the work undertaken by the four full-time Federation officials on behalf of members. I was actually quite surprised when I totted up how many officers I alone have helped and supported in the past six months. Since 1 July I have assisted 115 members, whether that be by making representations on their behalf due to sickness, performance, fairness at work, unsatisfactory attendance procedures, misconduct or other issues.

Colleagues in the office would likely to have had similar figures, so we have probably helped close on 20 per cent of Hertfordshire Police Federation members just over this six-month period alone.

Added to this are our numerous contributions to the Force operations, working practices and policies. I meet regularly with executive officers, local policing commanders and other senior managers as your representative and with the welfare of all officers always at the forefront of my mind.

On top of this day to day work, we have been involved in a number of big events including, of course, Brexit planning and Operation Isobar

which, as everyone knows, has been a huge piece of work.

Generally, we have continued to look at how we can help members further, especially in the area of wellbeing.

We have started to contribute to the cost of counselling when officers have exhausted the support available through the NHS or Employee Assistance Programme sessions available to them. This is something which had not been done before that we felt would be of great benefit to members in need of extra support due to a mental health crisis.

We have also invested in a welfare van, an initiative that we know other Federation branches with such vehicles have received excellent feedback about. Our first welfare van deployment was on Operation Isobar and you will see us out and about on New Year's Eve. I hope that this goes down as well as it has done elsewhere in the country.

The new respite home – a three-bedroom caravan on the Hopton Haven Village site near Great Yarmouth - has already been used by a number of members since we bought it earlier this year and we are pleased that people are feeling the benefit of this facility. Several other local Federations have followed our lead and, you never know, there may be a second one in the pipeline, but keep that quiet from our treasurer.

Have a great festive period if you are able to take time off and, if not, stay safe. I am working right across this period and I am on call when not in the office so please contact me if you need any advice, help or support.

“ We have probably assisted close on 20 per cent of Hertfordshire Police Federation members just in the past six months. ”

Wellbeing remains our priority

By Al Wollaston, secretary of Hertfordshire Police Federation

The last six months have been a busy period with support being provided to our members in relation to a wide range of issues from general enquiries around pay and conditions to gross misconduct hearings.

As ever, our number one priority has been officer wellbeing and this has been a thread running through all our work on your behalf.

In relation to conduct, we have had meetings with senior managers within the Professional Standards Department (PSD) to ensure correct processes are followed and that officer welfare is always of paramount importance.

We have continued to highlight the levels of sickness especially due to stress and psychological illness and have emphasised the need to get these figures down. We must ensure support is in place for officers who are struggling with work-related stress but we have also highlighted the importance of putting every effort into preventing them from having to go off sick. All avenues must be explored including reasonable adjustments to support officers in the workplace and help maintain their wellbeing.

All too often we see officers being treated as another person in a process. Everyone should be dealt with as an individual and I have been in discussion with both the occupational health unit and human resources around the wording on some of the generic forms sent out, especially in relation to sickness, since they can seem very impersonal.

We are still aware of the issues around annual leave requests and have asked for figures from the Force around the number of times leave is refused. It is important that officers apply for their leave and follow the appeals process if they do not



get it. Annual leave is an entitlement. Every officer should be able to take all their leave in a 12-month period and this includes some time off over the summer period as well.

Officer retention is another issue that has been causing us concern. We are seeing officers with various levels of service either transferring to another force or leaving the police all together. The recent pay and morale survey (see Page 5) revealed 77 per cent of Hertfordshire officers were dissatisfied with their overall remuneration and 47 per cent worried about their personal finances every day. This is totally unacceptable. We have asked the Chief to consider increasing the South East Allowance from £2,000 per year to the maximum of £3,000. We appreciate this will need to be funded but can the Force afford to keep losing experienced officers?

A key success for the Federation this year has been the purchase of our welfare and respite home in Norfolk. This has very proved popular with members and we have been fully booked throughout the year.

If people want to stay at the home next year the booking form can be found on our website (www.polfed.org/herts). Simply fill it out and return it to me. We also reserve spaces for welfare cases and this has been really appreciated by officers who have been struggling since it has meant they have been able to get away. Please have a look on the website and put in a request, next year's allocation will be looked at early in the new year.

As part of our commitment to officer welfare, we have also been making a £10 contribution per officer to team building days.

We will continue to build on our work around wellbeing next year but in the meantime all that remains is for me to wish you a happy Christmas and all the best for 2020.

Officers worrying about money on a daily basis

Almost half of the Hertfordshire officers who responded to the national Police Federation pay and morale survey said they worried about the state of their personal finances daily or almost daily.

In addition to the 47 per cent of respondents concerned about money, more than two thirds (68 per cent) said they felt they were worse off financially than they were five years ago and more than three quarters (77 per cent) reported they were dissatisfied with their overall remuneration including basic pay and allowances.

The survey also revealed 91 per cent of officers did not feel fairly paid for the stresses and strains of the job and 73 per cent did not feel fairly paid for the hazards they faced.

A total of 12 per cent said they never or almost never had enough money to cover all their essentials.

"Police officers have a very challenging role. While they are serving their communities, fighting and preventing crime, helping keep order and protecting the vulnerable, the last thing they should be worrying about is whether they can pay all their bills and make ends meet," says Geoff Bardell, chair of Hertfordshire Police Federation.

"I hope the findings of this survey make the Government take a long, hard look at police pay and take steps to ensure officers are fairly paid for the critical role they play in society.

"In recent years, they have seen their pay reduced in real terms and that needs to be addressed."

The survey results did not make any better reading in terms of officer morale; 72 per cent of Hertfordshire respondents felt Force morale was low and 49 per cent said their personal morale was low.

The three main reasons given for low morale were how the police as a whole are treated (79 per cent), pay and benefits, including pension, (73 per cent) and management of change within the police (71 per cent).

Over half (52 per cent) said they would not recommend joining the police to others and 12 per cent were aiming to leave the police service within the next two years or as soon as possible.

The Police Federation carries out its pay and morale survey each year with the findings being used in its dealings with the Government and other stakeholders.

Locally, the Federation uses the results when negotiating with chief officers and senior managers on officers' behalf.

The survey was carried out between June and August this year. A total of 192 officers from the Force responded to the survey, a response rate of nine per cent.

"It's disappointing that so few officers were able to fill out the survey," says Geoff, "While we feel the results are still representative of members' views, we would encourage more officers to take part next year as it would then give further weight to the findings and strengthen our case when representing members."



Welfare van boosts Federation's member support

Officers deployed to major events will now have access to a welfare van provided by Hertfordshire Police Federation.

The van has a kitchen area, toilet, wash-down facilities and drying area along with a seating area for six people and a table to eat or work from. Hot and cold drinks will be available along with light snacks, such as chocolate bars and crisps.

"Since becoming Federation chair and secretary, Al Wollaston and I have been looking at what more we could do for our members," Geoff Bardell explains, "To do that, we have taken advantage of initiatives we have picked up from our meetings with regional and national colleagues and that has led us to follow their lead with the purchase of our respite and holiday home and team-building day contributions; ideas that have proved successful elsewhere.

"There was a spontaneous event in the summer involving an environment demonstration attended by Essex and Herts officers where it became clear that the Federation response was superior in terms of fast-time assistance to their members, on top of what their force was providing.

"With a bit of research, I became aware of a recent initiative by Leicestershire Police Federation which bought a welfare van and then responded to a similar event with brilliant feedback from its members. Both Hampshire and Essex had followed suit from our Federation

region. We decided that, with a huge operation coming up in Hertfordshire in December, Operation Isobar for the NATO Summit, we would take a proposal to do the same to our Branch Council and I am pleased to say the proposal was agreed.

"On the very day some of our officers attended the sad incident in Grays in Essex involving the death of 39 people. I took a phone call from a member on the scene for many days who praised the deployment of the Essex Police Federation welfare van, who said: 'Geoff, our Federation should consider purchasing one'. Obviously, I was able to say it's already in hand, and to expect one of our own by the time Operation Isobar."

After extensive research, I found a ready-made vehicle for sale, and at a price similar to that paid by Leicestershire, but six months younger and with half the mileage. He was able to negotiate a £2,000 reduction on the original asking price.

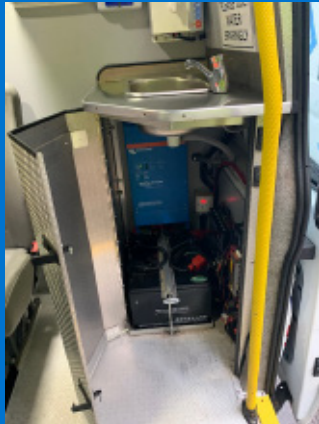
"I have been asked what it will be used for and, of course, we want to see it used regularly, not sitting idle and only being used for major operations," said Geoff, "Again, not wanting to re-invent the wheel, I am liaising with colleagues elsewhere and will take advantage of their experiences to date. However, in the near future, in addition to Operation Isobar, expect to see it out on New Year's Eve, stocked with drinks and snacks.

"As we have said previously, it's all about doing the best for the members. I hope the welfare van is as successful as it has already been elsewhere."

“It’s all about doing the best for members. I hope the welfare van is as successful as it has been elsewhere”

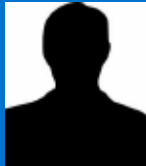


Federation chair Geoff Bardell (left) and secretary Al Wollaston out on Operation Isobar.



‘His approach got through to me’

An officer supported through ‘dark times’ by Hertfordshire Police Federation has thanked his workplace representative for being ‘a ray of light’ and seeing him through a mental health crisis caused by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



The officer had been off work for a year and a half, most of which he spent on a mattress on a floor, when he was contacted by rep Duncan Prior, who is a member of the Hertfordshire Police Federation Branch Board.

“Throughout this time I did everything everyone asked of me; going to countless psychologists, counsellors and doctors spending all my savings, eventually taking lots of different drugs all in an attempt to manage my PTSD symptoms,” the member explained.

“The drugs helped take the edge off but little else helped and I swiftly became agoraphobic and really rather pathetic. Out of the blue, Duncan texted me and arranged to speak with me. I called and spoke to him, not thinking much of it. I remember the phone call well, Duncan was fantastic and, for the first time in a year, I really thought I had a future and thought I should go

back to work.

“I wish I had the words to explain how transformational this simple phone call was but, unfortunately, I am no wordsmith. Duncan helped me continuously throughout my return to work and every step of the way. I was impressed as he really was a ray of light in the darkness. I am not ashamed to admit that some of my symptoms were horrific; not simply suicidal thoughts but a painful internal dialogue, asking me to kill myself, along with Tourette’s.

“I lost my sense of smell and taste and had open wounds all over my body from a psychosomatic itch. I was starting to get tunnel vision and finding it difficult to listen to people yet, somehow, Duncan’s approach got through to me.”

The officer was prompted to thank Duncan for his help and support after bumping into him as part of his duties.

“Seeing him put into perspective how far I have come thanks to his efforts,” he said in a message to the Federation, “I could speak for hours about how impressed I am with Duncan and how much I had written off my career and life to be frank but I won’t; I simply wanted to let you know what an impressive representative you have in Duncan.”

“Duncan helped me continuously throughout my return to work and every step of the way.”

‘Nothing more rewarding’

Duncan Prior doesn't feel he did anything special or over and above what any other Federation rep would have done in supporting this officer.

But, having learnt of their situation through Federation colleagues, he had expressed an interest in the case.

Duncan explains: "I was very concerned at how desperate their situation had become and I recall I never asked them how they felt. We just talked about a number of things. We talked about how they would feel when they had come through this stage in their life because I was certain that they would one day be in that place.

"Although asking a person how they are feeling is the obvious opening question when first talking to somebody with mental ill-health, I have never seen any benefit in it. Just talk to them for a while and get to know them. You will learn how they are feeling without making them justify their condition to you."

He supported this member for many months through pay appeals and a phased return to work.

"Since becoming a Fed rep in 2015 I have helped numerous officers in this way and I have developed a much better understanding of mental ill-health in the police, its triggers and causes," Duncan explains.

"Over a quarter* of all officer sickness is attributed to SAD (stress/anxiety/depression) and 65 per cent of officers state they have come to work knowing their SAD symptoms are so severe they should not be there but they don't want to let colleagues down.

"Add into this, teams working on minimum numbers and increased workloads or a manager enforcing a single crewing policy which leaves an officer alone all night with just their thoughts

and is there any wonder we break our officers?"

Duncan says, after 26 years' service, he understands officers and how they are not good at seeking help or admitting they have a mental ill-health problem. He is aware of many officers who have hidden one for years.

"Officers are afraid of the stigma and have great concerns the Force will make public their condition by changing their roles or altering their duties if they disclose it. There are mental health services that they can access in confidence and I would urge them to do this," he explains.

"Every member is different and they have different wants and needs but we all have common traits as police officers. Officers at their most desperate or unwell will display a familiar reaction that I have seen several times: a tangible frustration, often at themselves when they are trying to quantify what they are going through - 'This is not me, why am I not me and what do I need to do to get back to being me'. Police officers always want to find solutions to their problems.

"As a Fed rep I can be part of the framework that helps an officer initiate that process and which can return them from the brink. Our intervention can literally put lives and families back together so the member can recognise themselves in the mirror again. I can think of nothing more rewarding than that.

"The Federation is 100 years old this year. It continues to support officers experiencing a range of traumatic issues that each of us have had some experience of, be it personally or witnessed in a colleague. I believe in what it does every day for countless officers the Federation is more important than ever."

* Just under 50 per cent of all sickness within the Force has been due to psychological reasons for the past year.

POLICE FEDERATION CENTENARY CELEBRATION



John Apter, national chair of the Police Federation, listens to Home Secretary Priti Patel's speech to the event.

The 'bravery, commitment and sacrifices' of police officers have been praised by the Home Secretary.

Priti Patel made the comment as she addressed 700 officers and invited guests including chief constables and PCCs at a Police Federation of England and Wales celebratory event organised to mark the organisation's centenary held at Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, London where the Federation's first conference was held in 1919.

She said: "Your courage, dedication and public service has been truly moving. I'm hugely honoured that my job is to help you do all of yours. From physically taking on violent and ruthless criminals, to breaking heart-wrenching and tragic news to bereaved families.

"From handling some of the most devastating and atrocious tragedies to bringing safety and security to the communities in which we all live. You are always there. And for that, I salute you all."

Speaking about the dangers officers face, she said: "Each day, I ask myself, do people truly understand how unpredictable, dangerous and challenging the work of a police officer is? "Because, I worry the people posing the threats you face are ever more callous. The job we ask you to do is ever more complex and dangerous. That is why I want to make it clear that I am on your side and that I've got your back.

"I recognise the bravery, commitment and

sacrifices of both serving and former officers. And I stand with you; the brave men and women of our police."

She praised the Police Federation for the 'key role' it plays, saying: "Whether it is engaging with Government, supporting families or, helping officers who have been assaulted, the organisation continues to work tirelessly to represent the interests of the rank and file."

And the Home Secretary said she was committed to strengthening the relationship between the Police Federation and the Home Office.

She also spoke out on officer assaults, telling officers: "As crime becomes more violent, the assaults are increasingly brutal. Many of you will have been hurt. Many of you will have seen friends and colleagues subject to abuse in the line of duty.

"It takes extraordinary courage to keep running to the front-line to face that threat, day in day out. But, for you, your sense of duty comes first."

She concluded: "As long as I am Home Secretary, I will always give you the backing you need to keep yourselves and the public safe. So that, together, we can stand for the forces of right, and against the forces of evil.

"Policing is a job like no other. Every day, in every town or city, police officers perform thousands acts of bravery, humanity and compassion.

"You are the ones society expects to run towards danger, to protect the vulnerable and to keep us safe."

Photo courtesy of Anderson Photography.

POLICE FEDERATION CENTENARY CELEBRATION

Sentencing pledge

Sentences for those who chose to assault police officers could be doubled, the Home Secretary announced.

Violent offenders who assault officers, and other emergency service workers currently get up to 12 months in prison but this could rise to two years, following the announcement by Priti Patel.

She told officers at the centenary event: "We are going to make the thugs who attack police officers think twice."

Ms Patel said: "I've been appalled by the

increasing numbers of assaults on our brave police officers and am not going to stand for it.

"Part of the solution is giving police the resources and powers they need to keep themselves safe but we also need to make sure that the punishment for assaulting an officer truly fits the crime."

In the last year alone, there were more than 30,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales – up 18 per cent.

Time for a Royal Commission?

The national chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales believes now is the time to shape policing for the next 100 years and pave the way for change.

John Apter was speaking in front of Federation members and reps from across England and Wales, as well as the Home Secretary, at the centenary event.

The national chair heaped praise on Fed reps, calling them the 'backbone' of the organisation, and said, 60 years on since the last Royal Commission, he believed the time was right to ask the public what they wanted from their police.

"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?" he asked.

"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?"



John Apter delivers his speech.

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POLICE FEDERATION CENTENARY CELEBRATION

Starting salary ‘unrealistic’

The starting salary for new recruits is ‘unrealistic’ and will ‘definitely’ make recruiting 20,000 new officers harder – according to the chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC).

Chief Constable Martin Hewitt made the comments when he was part of a panel session on policing priorities at the centenary event.

Federation support

Three officers who had received excellent support from the Federation gave an insight into how the organisation makes a difference to its members in a centenary event session called ‘What matters most’.

The panel-style session brought home the critical role representatives play when supporting colleagues.

Photo recreates 1919 image



A backdrop to the stage showed a photo taken at the Federation’s first meeting at Central Hall in 1919.



Officers at the centenary event re-staged the 1919 photo.

Hertfordshire Police Federation was represented at the centenary event by secretary Al Wollaston, equality lead Danny Howe and workplace representatives Terasa Holden, Mel Cotte, Kelly Billington, Kio Bozorgi, Paul Pickett, Duncan Prior, Mike Dring, Gareth Rees and Andy Smith.

Our reps say...

“I felt that the Home Secretary’s speech was just a party political broadcast to a captured audience. I liked the session on the support members had received from the Federation but it was far too long. Overall, I was disappointed that it was more of a one-day conference than a celebration of all the hard work we had put in.”

Terasa Holden, Hertfordshire Police Federation workplace representative.

“John Apter’s speech was excellent. Priti Patel was also excellent and well received. But I felt that overall it didn’t feel like a celebration of 100 years of the Fed. There was not enough acknowledgement of 100 years during the event so it felt like a mini conference.

“I felt that the morning reflections from members, while a good input, was far too long; an hour and a half could have been condensed into 45 minutes. It was disappointing that there were no 100-year celebratory pin badges for sale.” PS Mike Dring, Hertfordshire rep

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'I wanted to give something back'

Having been supported by Hertfordshire Police Federation during a tough time in his career, Kio Bozorgi decided he would like to give something back and also stand up for colleagues who might be facing their own difficulties so put himself forward to be a Federation representative.



Kio has been a member of the Federation since joining the Force as a response PC in 2003 and became a workplace rep in 2012.

He explains: "During the most distressing time of my career when I was subject to unfair treatment, I was supported by the then Hertfordshire Police Federation secretary, Vojislav Mihailovic.

"He treated me sensitively and supported me throughout my ordeal which was one of the most tormenting times in my career. When everyone had alienated me, I was supported by my Fed rep who believed in me. Having come out of this ordeal a wiser person, I decided to become a Federation representative to give something back and fight the corner for our colleagues who might otherwise be subject to unfair treatment."

Kio, who is currently based in intervention response at Borehamwood Police Station, admits being a Fed rep can be a challenging role, with calls

from distressed colleagues during unsocial hours, but says it is rewarding to give officers advice and offer them support.

The key challenge, he says, can be managing members' expectations.

"I do not have the answers for everything but have the experience to draw upon from cases I have dealt with and also having been on the receiving end of some situations myself. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the officer that the organisation is doing nothing wrong and that the Federation is a conduit between them and the organisation to deal with matters at the lowest level with the most proportionate outcomes," Kio explains.

"But often you meet colleagues who you supported years earlier and they have now moved onto different roles, much happier and making something of their careers. It's great to see them acknowledge you and talk to you about how things are different now and how they are once again enjoying the job."

Kio has undertaken a broad range of training to develop his knowledge, completing the new reps' course as well as misconduct, advance misconduct (advocacy) and equality courses. He is also Post-Incident Management (PIM) accredited.

You can find out more about Kio in a profile on the latest news pages at www.polfed.org/herts

Supporting colleagues

Teresa Holden became a member of Hertfordshire Police Federation when she joined the Force in May 2010 as she felt it was important to know that someone had her back.

But three years ago, spurred on by colleagues who said she would be good at it, she became a Federation workplace representative out of a desire to help other officers.

"It can be challenging dealing with senior officers as I am a PC but it is rewarding when I have helped and supported someone, making a tough situation a little less hard for them," Teresa explains.

Currently working as a hate crime officer covering East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne, Teresa has undertaken the initial Federation reps' course at

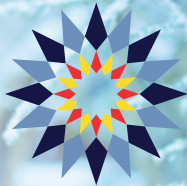


the Federation's headquarters in Leatherhead and also the equality course. Much of her Federation work to date has been dealing with Regulation 13s.

Her career started with three months working on intervention at Cheshunt and she then spent some time on Scorpion, returning to shift in November 2016 before moving to her current role in October 2018.

Working with a tighter budget, Teresa believes, has put pressure on the Force's welfare provisions at a time when officers are suffering stress and mental ill health because of their heavy workloads and the nature of the incidents they deal with.

"This then puts pressure on the Federation. Officers are working in smaller teams, coping with increased demand and also having to work until an older age," she explains.



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Remembering fallen officers

HRH The Prince of Wales attended this year's National Police Memorial Day service at Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall to pay tribute to fallen officers.

The Prince, who is patron of the memorial day, joined a congregation of around 1,500 people at the service which is held each year at the end of September and rotates around England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Hertfordshire Police Federation was represented at the service by workplace representative Gareth Rees who said the service made him feel proud to be a British police officer.

"The memorial day is an emotional event and, for me, it is really quite personal. I was badly injured on duty back in 2008 and was lucky to survive. My wife was three months' pregnant at the time and had the knock on the door in the middle of the night where she was told to prepare for the worst," says Gareth.

"I've been through that whole emotional rollercoaster with my family so can identify with what survivor families go through. I also lost a good friend back in 2012, PC David Rathband who succumbed to injuries after being shot twice in the head by Raoul Moat in Northumbria.

"I'll admit every year I have a good cry in the auditorium when the names are read out and 'Abide With Me' is played and The Last Post is sounded accompanied by falling petals."

Gareth was also touched that US Secret Service Special Agent Nole Remagen, who died while working on US President Donald Trump's visit to Scotland last year, was remembered in the roll call and filmed the moment to send to friends in America who worked with Noel.

Gareth has attended memorial day services both here and in the United States and is one of a number of organisers to participate in a UK Police Guard of Honour that attends Washington DC in



May every year for the US Police Memorial Week Event.

He was at the NPMD services in London in 2016, Cardiff in 2017 and Belfast in 2018 but said this year's service was particularly well done.

"It had a real personal and intimate feel about it. There was a lot of emotion in that hall during the service given the number of fallen officers and the recent timing. I was very impressed with the organisation of the event and the attention to detail," Gareth explained.

Chief Inspector Andrea MacDonald, chair of the Scottish Police Federation, read the names of officers who have lost their lives during the past year:

PC Joseph Robert Cooke, Metropolitan Police.

PC Daniel Clayton-Drabble, Thames Valley Police.

PC Kevin Flint, Thames Valley Police.

PS Colin Michael Fox, Metropolitan Police.

PC Andrew Harper, Thames Valley Police, and

PC Roy Buggins, Police Scotland.

“I’ll admit every year I have a good cry in the auditorium when the names are read out.”



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"It's nice to relax knowing my divorce settlement is sorted."

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Why do more people get divorced in January?

By Laura Flanagan, lawyer in family law at Slater and Gordon

The start of a new year is a time of reflection for many people giving more thought to their future, making resolutions and perhaps taking a closer look at their relationship and life at home.



If there are already problems in a relationship, couples can face a lot of pressure over the Christmas period especially when children and relatives are involved to put a brave face on for. Many couples choose to delay a separation announcement until the new year.

As family lawyers, we tend to see a rise in the number of couples seeking legal advice in January over the breakdown of their relationship.

If you're considering a divorce, here are a few things to consider:

Is it really over?

If you decide to go ahead with a divorce, you need to be sure that there's no chance that your marriage can be saved.

The Christmas period can be both a joyful and difficult time of year, particularly if you or your spouse have been on duty. However, a tough Christmas may not mean it's the end and you may be able to work through your difficulties with your own support network or counselling services, such as Relate.

When can I start the process?

You're able to commence divorce proceedings at any time, providing you're not within the first 12 months of marriage.

You'll need to think about what reasons you're going to give the court to show that

your marriage has irretrievably broken down. For example, if you've felt unsupported by your spouse, or feel that the two of you no longer make the effort to spend time together around your shifts etc, you could rely on this to prove to the court that your marriage is over.

What action should I be taking?

If you've made the decision to go ahead with a divorce, you should speak to a family lawyer sooner rather than later, to ensure you're fully informed before starting the process.

The most common question we're asked is how an officer can protect their police pension and taking action at the earliest opportunity is very important. A spouse does have a claim against not only income and capital but pensions too and the level of the claim will be based on its value at the time of the divorce and not necessarily at the time of separation.

What about the children?

If you have children, you should try to reach an agreement with your spouse about the most suitable and appropriate care arrangements following your separation. If you're unable to do so, you should consider mediation before making an application to court. Indeed, mediation is now compulsory before you can litigate.

The court's paramount consideration is the welfare of the relevant children and you should try to agree to a schedule of care, which is in the child's best interests.

If you need to speak to a specialist family lawyer, please contact Slater and Gordon Lawyers on **0808 175 7710** and we will be happy to help.



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

You never know when you’re going to need legal advice. Slater and Gordon have been advising and supporting Police Federation members for more than 60 years, taking the legal stress away and leaving you to focus on keeping people safe.

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