

Police Federation of England and Wales Conference 2017

Session on officer welfare

## Police stresses require proper evaluation and care

Birmingham International Conference Centre

Speech by Sir Thomas Winsor, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

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Thank you to the Police Federation and to you, the delegates, for the compliment of your invitation and for the courtesy of your attention.

This first session of your conference deserves to be first, because the welfare of officers and staff in police forces is a matter of first importance – first importance to the officers and staff, and first importance to the leadership of forces, and to those who hold them to account; and therefore of first importance to the public, who rely so heavily on the police to keep them safe, maintain order, lift offenders and get them put where they belong.

And by welfare, I mean welfare in its widest sense.

I mean welfare in physical terms - are officers being exposed to undue risks because of the demands which they face, their workloads, and the nature of the work they're doing; in terms of physical impairment; from assaults on officers, many severe and life-threatening; some – in the cases of Dave Phillips and Keith Palmer, Nicola Hughes and Fiona Bone and others – faced the greatest risks and never went home.

I mean welfare also in terms of officers' mental health; the severe stresses which come not only from the pressure of the job – the workload which officers are expected to meet – but also from the most appalling and dreadful things which officers - particularly response officers, but others too - must face in their working lives. I am talking not only about the angry and dangerous man, armed with a weapon - although that is prevalent enough - or the reckless or even murderous driver of a vehicle, determined to kill or maim, and the person who is mentally ill, endangering lives in his or her immediate vicinity. I also mean the circumstances of serious road traffic collisions, sudden deaths and suicides - sometimes of young people, people who have died in fires or by violence of all kinds, the elderly person who died alone and a long time before his body was found, the cot death, and so much else; and the strains of telling a parent of tragedy; and of the most unspeakable crimes against children; and the list goes on and on.

These things as we know – and as you know better than anyone – have profound and lifelong effects on the police officers who have to deal with them. And yes, of course, they take those experiences home; how could it ever be otherwise?

As has been mentioned by Che Donald, I referred to this, and these pressures on frontline officers, in my last *State of Policing* report published at the end of March 2017. And we must ask: do forces properly assess and deal with the effects of these things on their officers, on their own mental health and welfare? And let us also acknowledge to understand the knock-on effects on officers' families and those close to them, when officers have dealt with a motorway smash or cut down the body of a teenage girl who has hanged herself in despair and have then had to tell her parents. When officers lie

awake, unable to dispel what it is they have seen, and they withdraw into depression and worse, then their families suffer too, as they try to support and cope with the effects on their own loved one.

Do forces have adequate systems for assessing these things, and providing the necessary support? Well, I think the survey we've just heard about gives a lot of answers.

This matters not only in human terms – in compassionate terms – for the individuals, the officers in question. On a more systemic level, it matters to the efficiency and effectiveness of the force.

If a police force's primary assets – its people – are under undue strain, whether in terms of workload or the nature of the work they do and the effects of that work on them, then the force's ability to serve the public is itself compromised. And that places not only the officers concerned - and their families - at even greater risk; it also places the welfare of others in the force at risk, because an officer is impaired, and therefore it places the public at risk.

I think this deserves very great emphasis.

Of course policing can and should be made more efficient – that is something all officers and staff, at all levels, know well - but that goal of improved efficiency - of being able to do more effective policing with the resources in question - is itself jeopardised and impaired if the officers who have to do this work are themselves impaired, physically or mentally, and often both.

As Sarah Thornton has today mentioned, policing isn't getting any easier, and it certainly isn't getting any simpler: tasks sometimes which would never have been done before, now require to be done and they require to be done with greater intensity. And complexity is everywhere.

As we know, officer numbers have fallen by 18 per cent since 2010.

And the demands on police officers and staff, not only in terms of workload, but also in terms of the skills needed to deal with the complexity of crimes and the other demands on the police – safeguarding, for example, and supervision of offenders – those are changing and are high.

How high? And what are police leaders, and those who hold them to account, doing about it?

We all know that one of the greatest cultural strengths of the police – as well as courage, dedication, professionalism, and resilience – is the can-do, will-do attitude; the never-say-no attitude; the get-it-done-when-others-won't attitude; the not-turn-away attitude.

That is one of the mainstays of the police, but it is not an excuse for failures higher up; for failures in planning, demand management, resource deployment, equipment provision, and, yes, personal support for individual officers and staff who face great danger and the most harrowing things any person could ever encounter.

Last year at this conference, I told you of the force management statement, an HMIC instrument which is to be introduced this year. This will, as you will recall, be a mandatory, published annual statement by chief constables of

their projected demand on the force, the state of the workforce and kit, and the financial resources of the force for each of the following four years.

By demand, I mean all demand: crime and non-crime, latent as well as patent demand.

By the state of the workforce, I mean, for officers and staff, their condition, capability and capacity; what it takes to look after them and develop them professionally; their performance; and how spikes in demand will be coped with. And as I said at last year's Police Federation conference, that certainly includes their mental health and welfare, as well as their physical condition as a result of the severe stresses which frontline officers and others also face.

So, since then, we have been working on the template force management statement, which is close to being ready to come out to consultation, including, critically, by the Police Federation, before it is introduced properly. I welcome Steve White's willingness to help in its design.

If forces have to examine and report publicly on the strains and demands on their officers and staff, and complete reports – including reports on how they do or don't look after them – then I believe we may see very substantial improvements: improvements in the care of those who face the most terrible things that can be done to or happen to other people, and who themselves suffer as a result.