



## SCOTTISH POLICE FEDERATION

Established by Act of Parliament

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Dear Convener

### **Pension changes and the impact on staff numbers**

I refer to the above and to the correspondence dated 18<sup>th</sup> May on this subject, sent to you by Mr David Page on behalf of the Police Service of Scotland (PSoS).

I very much regret that I have to write to you in these terms, but the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) simply cannot allow such a fundamentally inaccurate articulation of the realities this correspondence represents, to remain unchallenged.

It is factually untrue that the changes to the pension commutation calculation have created a new cohort of officers eligible to retire from the police service in the next 12 months. As you are aware, the ability for police officers in the 1987 pension scheme to retire from age 50 with at least 25 years of service has been a provision of that scheme since its inception.

The only change that has been applied to that provision is one that now ensures lump sum payments are determined by an actuarial calculation, and not an arbitrary fixed multiplier. This change is welcomed as it removes almost certain discrimination from the scheme on that particular issue and avoids the inevitability of expensive and lengthy legal action.

Whilst it is true that this change now represents a more advantageous financial option for officers to consider retirement, it is not true that the retirement of officers between 25-29 years of service can be directly attributed to the pension changes.

It is a matter of considerable regret that the PSoS seems incapable of acknowledging there are a myriad of internal, as well as some external, factors driving officers into retirement.

The SPF has been raising through internal mechanisms that whilst the changes to commutation opens the door, it is a combination of internal and external circumstances, demands, and events that are causing officers to step through it into retirement.

Our members are telling us that they are overworked and undervalued. They tell us they have their rest constantly disrupted; they tell us they are being made physically and mentally unwell by the tolls of a job that simply heaps more and more work on those who have literally nothing left to give. Not only do our members tell us this, independent academic research does the same, and the service's own surveys do likewise.

In addition, our members tell us they feel unsafe at their work as so few officers are available to respond to calls. They tell us they feel they are failing victims, and the wider public as inquiries take so long to complete due to an overwhelming volume of workload. They tell us they are carrying more and more risk, and that training is close to non-existent once probation ends. They tell us the PSoS seems deaf to these concerns, and they have long since given up any hope that the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) or Scottish Government are interested as all they see are self-congratulatory narratives that disguise these realities.

Whilst I could narrate at length a whole host of other relevant factors it is demonstrably true that over the past decade and a half, the Government, the Service itself, and (since 2013) the SPA, have presided over a systematic degradation to the value of police pay that stands apart from the pay of other public sector workers.

It is also noteworthy that palpable anger remains across the PSoS as to how police officers were treated by Government, the Service, and the SPA during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Quite simply the reason police officers are choosing to retire is because they have had enough.

Mr Page states "*... at this time there is no impact to service delivery ...*" This is demonstrably untrue and verging on the deliberately disingenuous.

The PSoS has the issue of mass retirements on its risk register. Concern is being raised at all ranks as to the exceptional risks the loss of so many officers and with so many skills has on the ability to deliver policing at all levels. The ability to police safely is a real concern and yet the corporate response from the service, as so ably demonstrated in Mr Page's letter, is one of denial.

**Police Officer Recruitment** - The PSoS already has the lowest number of police officers since 2008. Retirements are happening almost daily, and numbers continue to fall. The true scale of the shortfall in police numbers will be obvious in June with the publication of officer numbers taking place before the accounting chicanery of mass recruitment before each quarterly publication, is able to be achieved.

“Maximising transferee opportunities” is simply meaningless corporate language.

**Leadership and Promotion** - Whilst leadership and promotion are clearly critical in the police service, the impact of promotion ultimately leaves fewer constables.

Leadership however is about more than rank insignia. The skills required, and demands faced by officers in promoted posts require to be nurtured and developed with training. As I have previously articulated, training is almost non-existent and its absence simply compounds risks for those newly promoted.

**Workforce Planning** - The sad reality is that all of these issues have been foreseen. They have been highlighted; options for amelioration have been presented, and simply ignored. Frankly there has been a corporate disconnect between the needs of policing, and of police officers when set against the almost all-consuming focus on balancing a budget.

The PSoS is undoubtedly at a critical point in its history. It cannot properly respond to the challenges it faces here and now if it is not honest about them to itself, whilst simultaneously seeking to present a highly partial narrative about them to our parliamentarians.

I am more than happy to address your Committee in person on the issues this letter covers should you so wish.

Yours sincerely



CALUM STEELE  
General Secretary