

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH 2019

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Cabinet Secretary, Chief Constable, guests and delegates it is my pleasure to welcome you to this, the 96th Conference of the Scottish Police Federation.

I can see the mathematicians amongst you puzzling over how we can be celebrating our Centenary, if it's only the 96th Conference. Well, during the 2nd World War we didn't hold a Conference and we now have biennial Conferences.

We are joined today by our friends and colleagues from the Police Federations of Northern Ireland; the British Transport Police; Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Ministry of Defence Police, the Garda Representatives Association and the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors.

Colleagues from EuroCOP and the International Council of Police Representative Associations from almost every corner of the world are also with us.

Also represented are Police Scotland; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland; the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents; the Retired Police Officers Association Scotland; the Scottish Police Authority; the Scottish Prison Officer's Association; Police Care UK; The National Police Memorial Day Trust, the Police Treatment Centres, the Scottish LGBTi Association, SEMPER, the Care of Police Survivors and the Scottish Government.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you are most welcome.

This is our Centenary and we are marking that milestone in many different ways over the coming year.

Tonight we will host our Centenary Dinner where we will welcome many former Scottish Police Federation Office Bearers and a number of VIPs from across Scotland and beyond. All have played a significant part in shaping policing as we know it today.

Conference, since we last met in 2017 a great deal has happened.

In 2018 we negotiated an immediate 6.5% pay award over 31 months. In addition, there were improvements to pay on promotion for Sergeants and Inspectors and increases to allowances for on call, plain clothes and dog handlers.

The Competence Related Threshold Payment is to be subsumed into the pay scales, bringing to an end the needless bureaucracy that has plagued the scheme since its inception.

On top of that there were significant amendments to the Workforce Agreement; exigencies of duty; notifications to work; reinstatement of rest days and original shifts and the bulk re-rostering of rest days.

We also reached agreement on recall to duty; working into a rest day; the abolition of the pernicious deduction of 30 minutes casual overtime and the introduction of additional compensation for excessive disruption to rest days.

We also delivered new simple arrangements for overnight deployments which bring to an end the decades of needless debate over what held in reserve actually meant.

This is a lengthy list by anyone's standards. What might not be apparent to everyone, is the amount of work that goes into each and every strand of it, sometimes spanning years before agreement is reached. Nothing comes easily.

And by very definition, negotiating involves give and take, it is not all about wins and gains.

However, if we take the last two years of PNB work as a whole, I think we can be reasonably satisfied with the outcome.

But - Cabinet Secretary, this does not mean that all in the garden is rosy. There are many things that need to be fixed and we are already developing proposals to bring to the negotiating table soon.

In our unique employment situation and with the significant restrictions placed upon us, our conditions and negotiating mechanisms need to be fair, and need to be seen to be fair.

Do not think that by calling cuts modernisation that we won't see them for what they are. If the Scottish Government wants to demonstrate its regard for Police Officers it will stop using this term as a Trojan horse when it comes to Police Pay and Conditions.

A reasonable pay deal buys you some goodwill but it doesn't buy our silence or our acceptance of the manifestly unfair. The restrictions placed upon us come at a price. Either that price is acknowledged and met, or the restrictions need to be removed.

Cabinet Secretary, prior to the creation of Police Scotland, we had the PNB UK to deal with negotiable subjects such as pay; allowances and other arrangements.

For non-negotiable subjects there was the Police Advisory Board for Scotland which advised Scottish Ministers on general questions affecting policing.

It made representations on draft regulations for non-negotiable subjects including promotion systems, training and uniforms.

PABS representatives included ACPOS, ASPS, CoSLA, HMCIC, the Police Convenors Forum, SPSA, SPF and the Justice Department.

Whilst some of those bodies have gone or changed name, they represented the interests of all stakeholders and provided Ministers with a range of views on these important matters.

Would you rather hear first-hand the thorny issues that prevail within the Police Service from those who know them best, or is your preference to wait until the issues explode all over the press and dominate your ministerial mailbox?

Currently we have the Scottish Police Consultative Forum but, in our opinion, this is not a sufficient replacement and it is time to reinstate PABS.

Cabinet Secretary, the Scottish Police Federation has fought for one hundred years to protect Police Officers when they do their jobs. We have slowly improved training and equipment and have done what we can to reduce the risk of assault and injury.

Unfortunately, it has taken tragedy to demonstrate why Police Officers need the highest level of personal protective equipment but unfortunately this isn't always supported by politicians from every party.

We also believe we need greater support from the Crown and the Courts. Take for example a case which was reported last year.

After a Sheriff refused an individual bail, he spat on the Sheriff hitting his face, the inside of his mouth, his arm and gown. The man was jailed for more than two and a half years.

If that man had spat on a Police Officer, it would have been highly likely that the charge would have been plea bargained away. That is the reality of how the criminal justice system deals with assaults on Police Officers.

It is common place for people who assault Police Officers to be released from custody rather than held for court.

On Christmas Day two Officers, who were keeping our communities safe instead of celebrating with their families, were assaulted.

The culprit was arrested, however he was home tucking into his turkey before the Officers, who had been assaulted, had even finished their shift.

A century ago the first Scottish Police Federation Joint Central Committee demanded that all assaults against Police Officers be prosecuted.

Cabinet Secretary, one hundred years is a long time during which nothing has changed, we ask that you fight to ensure that anyone who assaults a Police Officer should, at the very least, be held in custody to appear in court the next day. Will you do that?

The injustice is further compounded as Police Officers are now effectively discouraged from claiming Criminal Injuries compensation as assault is almost deemed to be an occupational hazard – this is entirely unacceptable!

Perhaps it is time to set up a bespoke Compensation Scheme for Police Officers or do you consider them underserving of such?

We demand the level of protection that our members deserve. Spitting on or assaulting a Police Officer is no lesser a crime than spitting on a Sheriff.

We recently carried out a survey which showed that 9 out of 10 Police Officers wanted to be issued with Taser whilst 64% said they would like access to a handgun. That is a significant shift in attitude from Police Officers towards firearms and other personal protective equipment.

During the past year the Service has issued Taser to a small and limited number of Officers as a pilot project. We know an evaluation is ongoing by the University of the West of Scotland and we understand that the findings to date are very positive.

Health and safety legislation does not have a political expediency exemption, and the day will come where the Chief Constable could be liable for assaults on our members that could have been prevented with proper protective equipment.

Indeed there was a perfect example of this yesterday afternoon not very far from here when two of our own were badly injured.

There was a call about an ongoing domestic incident, which would not ordinarily fit the criteria for dispatching an Officer armed with a Taser.

On arrival of two local Officers the suspect ran off and they called for the assistance of Constable Paul O'Donnell and Police Dog Remo.

Remo tracked the male who was now armed with a metal bar. He immediately started to attack Remo, striking him with the bar and biting off a chunk of his ear. During this time Paul was trying to restrain the male and he was struck on the head with the metal bar.

Paul sustained facial injuries and was bleeding from his ear. He was taken to the hospital where he was treated for cuts to his face and potential concussion.

Remo, in addition to the injury to his ear, lost a tooth and has damage to his jaw.

I am sure everyone will join me in sending our congratulations on a job well done to Paul and Remo and wishing them both a speedy recovery.

However, Cabinet Secretary this incident perfectly illustrates that our members never know what they will face when they attend a call and why it is imperative that all Officers are given this important piece of personal protective equipment now!

Before I leave the subject of Officer Safety ...

We know you will have access to the same information as we have when it comes to the threat level in this country. We know that you know, the threat level against Police Officers is real. We know that you know, that we can't be complacent as recent events at Glasgow University have demonstrated.

Cabinet Secretary you need to give this serious consideration and ensure that all Police Officers are issued with Taser as part of their personal protective equipment and that their safety and that of the public is not compromised by some for political point scoring.

Our General Secretary wrote to you recently about the Workplace Parking Levy and highlighted the risks faced by Officers and specifically the terror threat against them. To date we have not received a reply other than to advise that you had, inexplicably, passed this matter of Police Officer safety to the Minister for Transport, Michael Matheson.

We wrote to you about a matter of safety for Scotland's Police Officers, either you value their safety or you do not.

Imposing this parking levy does nothing to mitigate the risks Police Officers face, nor is it realistic to expect a desperately underfunded Police Service to bear that burden.

Your Government created Police Scotland, removing all influence over Police funding from local authorities.

It is ironic, that the process of various local authorities taking different approaches to giving money to the Police Service was so unreliable that it had to come to an end, and is now to be replaced by a method that creates even greater financial instability by taking money from the Police Service.

Cabinet Secretary, I appeal to you to bring this to an end and tell Conference that you value our safety and will oppose this levy on Police Officers and the Police Service.

Policing has always looked at what it was doing and how it was doing it. However, in my 29 years' service, I have never known such an intense and hostile level of internal and external scrutiny as we have experienced since the inception of Police Scotland.

For as long as anyone can remember there has been best value and efficiency reviews. Business practices have been increasingly adopted and, in my view, this was when we lost sight of what policing really is. We are not a business, we are a Service, often the Service of last resort for those in our communities who need help.

The old Police Act definition of guard, patrol and watch was simplistic. Ten years ago, at this Conference, we expressed the view that no neatly packaged phrase could ever fully encompass what the Police Service does.

Fifteen years ago we expressed concern about more and more new duties being placed upon us with no consideration of the resources required to carry them out.

Every now and then, we are told that there is no direct correlation between Officer numbers and crime. We are told we can cope with cuts, that we can be agile in the use of resources and that service delivery is not affected by reduced numbers.

Imagine my surprise therefore when a proposed cut of 300 Officers was postponed because of Brexit.

Was that not an admission that Officer numbers impact on service delivery?

This cannot really come as a surprise to you. Our colleagues in England and Wales warned that cuts to policing would be Christmas for criminals. They were not, as someone detached from reality claimed, crying wolf or scaremongering.

You must understand then how we felt, when Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government began to discuss reducing Officer numbers. We were, and we are, incredulous.

Last year a report was presented to the Scottish Police Authority which introduced the new, vibrant catch-phrase Capacity Creation which was about finding time in individual Officers' days which would create capacity and improve productivity.

Despite having no operational knowledge the authors of the report crunched some numbers and sought advice from consultants, before finally declaring that they could axe 1 in every 14 Officers without creating a gap in frontline services ... or to put it another way, they could axe Officers without creating more crime and more victims of crime.

It is indisputable that you cannot get more for less, so the reality is that this was nothing more than a numbers exercise, carried out on a spreadsheet not a duty sheet.

We are Police Officers, we operate in the real world. We deal with complaints from members of the public who are assaulted, who are raped, whose loved ones are murdered or have gone missing.

We deal with victims who have had their homes broken into. We deal with serious crimes and terrible accidents. We don't deal in meaningless phrases like Capacity Creation.

If those behind the spreadsheets saw what we saw, did what we do, go face to face with the violent, the serious mentally ill and other aspects of real Police work, things would not be so sterile and so simple.

Therefore, it was heartening to see that, despite the denials from the heart of Downing Street over the consequences of cutting Police numbers, a wise man recently commented

Pure and utter ostrich-ism from the PM. Imagine believing that cutting over 20,000 Police Officers has nothing to do with certain crimes rising - head completely in the sand, or the PM is lying. Either one is not a good look

You know who said this Cabinet Secretary, don't you?

It was you and we couldn't agree more.

But just in case there is any ambiguity over what I am saying - let me be unequivocal. Reduce Police numbers and you will limit our operational capability because it is not possible to get more for less. Therefore, you will be responsible for creating an environment which will deliver more crime and more victims of crime.

And you will exacerbate the pressure on the Police Officers who remain causing increased workloads, stress and other ill health problems.

Do you really want your legacy on policing to be a failure to listen to your own advice and instead follow the calamitous negligent approach of Theresa May?

We discuss demand and capacity as if they were new concepts and we are paying over-priced consultants to tell us what these amount to, when any Police Officer can tell you, for free that demand is completely overwhelming the capacity of Police Scotland to deliver even the most basic service to our communities.

Consultants!!! Arthur C Glasgow once said, A consultant is someone who saves his client almost enough to pay his fee.

In all seriousness the use of consultants or professional services, is out of control. Indeed one could be forgiven for thinking policing has become a job creation scheme for consultants.

Official figures presented to the Scottish Police Authority last year revealed that the Service had spent over £20 million on external consultants and 2026 internal transformation posts. Surely this £20 million would have been better spent on actual policing and providing a service to our communities?

Especially when you consider that during the same period we only spent £5 million on our fleet! A fortnight ago in Kirkcaldy only two out of the nine vehicles allocated to the area were roadworthy and one of them had over 140,000 miles on the clock.

Our fleet is a disgrace, how can we be expected to respond quickly to incidents when it is so inadequate it is often held together with duct tape?

We have squandered a vast sum of money on a system to record fuel economy when it doesn't take a genius to work out that having hub stations and custody centres equals greater travelling distances and therefore more fuel.

Our buildings are crumbling, our uniforms are coming apart at the seams, our IT system is shambolic and antiquated and yet we continue to spend millions on consultants and internal transformation posts to deliver 2026, does that seem like good value to you Cabinet Secretary?

Speaking of the elephant in the room, what exactly has 2026 and £20 million delivered?

The results of the Change Readiness Survey carried out by Professor Linda Duxbury clearly demonstrate that the answer is the sum total of not very much.

This survey tells us more than any consultant ever could and it comes from Officers across all of the ranks who are carrying out policing duties on a daily basis.

Professor Duxbury, when speaking about change within policing, once said Never put a civilian in charge of change because they don't understand the culture.

The survey results unquestionably reiterate this sentiment as neither Officers nor staff understand how 2026 affects them, does anyone, and they don't think it has any connection to the reality of day to day policing.

What they want, and need, is very basic, they want enough resources to provide the best service to the communities of Scotland, they want uniform which is practical and of good quality, they want personal protective equipment which is functional, they want vehicles in a good state of repair, they want an effective, user-friendly IT system ... Cabinet Secretary they want the basics not some elusive strategy.

I know there will be an outcry from the architects of 2026 defending their successes but in truth most of what has been presented to date as a 2026 success is, at best, business as usual.

For example, the Taser Pilot. This is being lauded as a 2026 success when in fact it had nothing to do with 2026. It was a piece of work which was delivered on time, providing something tangible and much needed to Officers and all without the three ring circus, army of personnel and cost which invariably surrounds 2026 projects.

We were told in February 2017 that the Service did not have staff qualified to deliver 2026.

We argued that many of our Officers and staff had skills, expertise and experience that would be invaluable in delivering 2026.

They could ensure that essential operational requirements were acknowledged and considered.

We were ignored.

In August 2017 we were told that Police Staff in the Procurement Department were not qualified to do what was required so they had to be replaced. Again, there was no recognition of their organisational and operational knowledge.

A year later, new staff in place, we were hearing about problems with procurement halting progress on 2026 projects. But more alarmingly, there were also problems with supplies of uniform trousers, PAVA spray, defective body armour, difficulties in obtaining specialist firearms and public order equipment, the list goes on.

Nothing fancy, quite simply just business as usual, basic necessities for day to day policing that our members require NOW.

In 2017, Direct Entry at Superintendent Rank was introduced in England and Wales.

Your predecessor told us this would not happen in Scotland and I sincerely hope you retain that view.

In January, the College of Policing circulated an advert to extend the scheme to Inspecting Ranks.

The advert stated

Are you looking for a career change?

Want to use your leadership skills for the greater good?

Searching for a varied and exciting career where you don't have to start at the bottom?

Chief Superintendent Gordon Crossan, former President of ASPSP, was utterly appalled and voiced his disgust on Twitter.

His tweet was viewed and shared by thousands and Jude Helliker, our Director of HR, tweeted

Start at the top. Join the best police service to work for @policescotland.

A clear message that it is not just the Scottish Police Federation who are strongly opposed to Direct Entry.

Cabinet Secretary - be on the right side of history - do the right thing - be unequivocal that no Officer will be promoted to a higher rank in Scotland unless they have served at least two years in the rank of Constable. Kill direct entry stone dead - right here - right now!

Whilst it is regrettable that the Service has no option but to follow the College of Policing in matters controlled from Westminster such as Firearms, Public Order and Counter Terrorism, we must exercise extreme caution in all other aspects of policing.

The College of Policing is a business, answerable to shareholders meaning that policing, and by extension the needs of our communities, will always come a poor second.

Policing in Scotland has an excellent reputation worldwide and much of what we do is far superior to anything being 'sold' by the College of Policing so why would we want to pay exorbitant fees for something which we can do so much better.

At National Federation meetings we hear many stories about what is being imposed by the College of Policing but we are particularly concerned about the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

Whilst I appreciate that this is a Government initiative, the College of Policing is developing the strategy for England and Wales, on behalf of the NPCC, and it is frightening.

No amount of fancy words or glossy brochures can hide the fact that this is a blatant attempt to save money by reducing, yet again, the starting pay for Police Constables in England and Wales whilst they are in the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

Unfortunately this can only have one outcome ... the dumbing down of policing.

Under no circumstances can you compare a Probationary Constable to an apprentice tradesman or technician.

As soon as a Probationary Constable leaves the sanctuary of the Police training college they are asked to deal with life and death situations, they have to make decisions about taking away a person's liberty, they have to run towards danger when all others run away and their personal lives are severely restricted, to name but a few important differences.

Cabinet Secretary, Chief Constable, I cannot believe that either of you think dumbing down policing in Scotland is in any way acceptable and so I urge you not to introduce a Modern Apprenticeship Scheme for Police Officers in Scotland.

Although, if we need to introduce a Modern Apprenticeship Scheme perhaps we could use it for the consultants and the internal transformation managers to ensure that they learn about policing before they start trying to change it.

Or, perhaps we could make even more radical efficiency savings by terminating 2026 altogether!!!

Throughout history the Police Service has had to work hard to provide a basic level of service to the public 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

On top of that, we have the major events – such as G8 meetings, Commonwealth Games and other major sporting tournaments.

Cabinet Secretary, we are delighted that Scotland is a destination of choice for events such as these. Yes, they cause huge disruption to our member's working and private lives but that is part of the job. All we ask is that proper funding and resources are provided for policing such events properly including looking after the welfare of our members.

Business as usual, major events and finally, we have the unforeseen, the myriad of events which can take us all by surprise and which we have to respond to without warning and without the opportunity to plan or those events where the public reaction and the policing requirements are completely unpredictable until the last minute. Dare I use Brexit as an example?

At the Justice Sub Committee you were recently asked if you believed there was enough slack in the Police budget to deal with the unknown. Unsurprisingly you said that you believed there was, but you are wrong. There isn't even enough in the Police budget to deal with the known and, unless that changes, our Service will go backwards.

A look around our Centenary Showcase will remind you of such events; devastating accidents; acts of terrorism; and mass murders.

The Police Service has to respond. It cannot say, I'm sorry we're closed. Or, that's someone else's job. Or there is no money in the budget.

You implied that the Service can create its own slack by adjusting its deficit reduction plans. I'm sorry Cabinet Secretary but adjusting deficit plans is simply borrowing by another name. The Police Service is not allowed to borrow money without the explicit consent of Ministers. Are you suggesting our Chief Constable ought to be coming with the begging bowl to respond to the next unknown?

Whether Police Officers are on duty or off duty, whenever something catastrophic happens, they attend for work. This can and does put a tremendous strain on Officers and their families. They can never plan anything with certainty.

When you throw court into that equation, well the whole thing becomes chaotic.

Figures show that only 3% - yes three per cent - of Officers cited for court are required to give evidence. The impact of this on Officers and the Service is overwhelming.

Shifts are obliterated - Officers are exhausted - mistakes are made.

We are tired of telling consecutive Ministers about the bedlam court inefficiency creates - and we are astounded that no one is doing anything about it.

Business as usual, major events, unforeseen events, court, all taken together leaves the Service seriously stretched. We have Officers with massive workloads, some with dozens of serious cases sitting on their desks with little prospect of them being given the attention they deserve.

We have Officers who can go for days without proper refreshment breaks and who are taking work home with them because there is no other option.

This is not on and it should concern you and every parliamentarian that Police Officers feel that they have no option other than to take highly confidential information out of the security of the policing environment to work at home simply to keep the creaking wheels of justice turning. This is not something we want platitudes for - for we know the criticisms will be relentless the day a case becomes compromised - we simply want it to stop.

We have too many Officers suffering stress related illnesses and the only real help they can access is through the Police Treatment Centre, which is mainly funded by the Officers themselves.

We are stretched beyond breaking point which means that when the break comes it will have disastrous consequences.

Cabinet Secretary, before I finish, I would like to mention a positive aspect of policing in Scotland right now. We have been encouraged that Chief Constable and the Deputy Chief Constables have been reviewing the executive portfolios and are taking back control of the most important elements of policing.

It is the view of the Scottish Police Federation that this is exactly the right thing to do.

It takes a senior, capable and experienced Police Officer, to direct significant areas of our work and understand how they relate and impact on other parts of the service and a return to that is welcomed and long overdue.

We are undoubtedly living in interesting times. However the first duty of any Government is, and continues to be, to keep its citizens safe. To do this all political parties must work together to ensure that the Police Service is as strong as it can be. Don't ever be distracted from that.

I can assure you the Police Officers and staff of Police Scotland are strong and are, as ever, ready and willing to do the job.

Therefore, I ask you and your colleagues, to give Police Scotland the resources, both physical and financial, to enable them to do this to the best of their ability, recognising their loyalty, hard work and professionalism.

Cabinet Secretary, I have heard you say many times that when it comes to policing the Scottish Government puts its money where its mouth is.

I ask you to show this by your actions and demonstrate that you are not a soundbite politician who lavishes praise on Officers when they are doing what no one else is prepared to - but is notably silent when the daily grind is wearing them down and making them ill.

The result of the cuts in England and Wales has been more crime and more victims of crime and this will affect policing and communities for generations.

Will you learn from the mistakes of history or simply repeat them?

I am asking you today to help us make sure that doesn't happen. It is quite simple Cabinet Secretary, if you value it ... fund it.

May I now invite you to address Conference.