



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR RETIRED POLICE OFFICERS

Briefing for PCSC Bill Committee

MAY 2021



We welcome the Government's proposed Police Covenant and are pleased to learn that this will be extended to include retired police officers and their families.

As part of the Government's ambitions to improve support for the entire policing family, **NARPO is calling for better mental health and wellbeing support for retired officers.** We believe the Covenant should be enshrined in law, as is currently being planned for the Armed Forces, to ensure that the support received is substantive.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN RETIREMENT

Police officers dedicate their lives to keeping the public safe, but often their duty has a detrimental impact on their personal mental health and wellbeing.

Whilst mental health and wellbeing support for serving police officers has rightly improved in recent years, provision for retired police officers is woefully insufficient and almost entirely reliant on police charities.

In March 2021, we surveyed our members on this topic and received over 2,500 responses. Some of the results were extremely concerning:

- **94% of retired police officers** agreed that the police service, nationally and locally, should have a duty to provide mental health and wellbeing support for retired police officers, as well as those serving.
- Yet, **95% of retired police officers** were not aware of any specialised support available to them if they were experiencing negative mental health and wellbeing issues.
- **53% of retired police officers** said being a member of the police had negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing.
- When asked which aspects of their role had contributed to their negative mental health and wellbeing in retirement:
 - 66% of retired police officers said experience of **distressing or traumatic crimes**
 - 57% said **supervisory and management decisions**
 - 48% said **excessive workload**
- 75% of respondents said they had **not received any training** to help support their own and/or colleagues' mental health and wellbeing when they were serving in the police.
- 56% of retired police officers felt that their local force **never encouraged them to talk openly about mental health and wellbeing issues.**

In gathering evidence, many of our members shared their own experiences of dealing with mental health and wellbeing issues:

"I take anti-depressants as a result of work induced stress and over exposure to death which had a negative impact on my wellbeing."

"There was a lack of support including working 12/13 hour shifts to keep up with workload. I saw some things which still will not go away and am currently self-funding counselling to try and deal with these issues."

"I still suffer daily from PTSD. Seeing a police uniform or car can set me off. I distrust everyone."

"Dealing with traumatic incidents, especially where my life was in danger has left its mark. During my service there were opportunities to self-debrief with colleagues but since retirement I no longer have the support of my peers."

"Horrendous sights and scenes caused recurring dreams. I was afraid to take sick leave due to the sickness policy and stigma around mental health in the Police. A drop in staff numbers meant I was dealing with scenes of horrendous nature: bodies, sudden deaths, drug deaths and decomposition on a shift-by-shift basis instead of on occasion. This was too much for any human."



KEY ASKS

As part of the Government's commitment to bring forward a Police Covenant, as outlined in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill, NARPO is calling for a structured, centralised system of mental health and wellbeing support.

The proposed support would be similar to that provided in the Armed Forces' Covenant. This would include:

- A **dedicated strategy** to support the mental health and wellbeing of police officers in retirement.
- A **centralised system** where retired police officers could be referred for further support. If their condition was found to be operationally related, they would be able to access specialised support and treatment locally. This would ensure consistency in the provision of services.
- This should be supported by **local champions for each police force**, to provide retired officers with a contact point locally, which should feed into the centralised system to obtain treatment and support.
- An **accreditation system** so that local GPs are aware of a patient who has been a member of the police force and therefore, may be suffering mental ill health due to his or her experiences of service. This will help to ensure that the NHS is better able to meet the needs of retired police officers as part of the Police Covenant.
- **Transitional support** for officers who are approaching retirement, which would recognise any early signs of mental health problems, provide access to early support and access to therapeutic treatment for complex mental health difficulties and psychological trauma. Where appropriate, help should also be provided with other needs such as transitioning into a new job.
- For complex mental health needs which have not improved with earlier care and treatment, we are calling for a **Complex Treatment Service** which would provide intensive care and treatment, including trauma focused therapies and wider support around transitioning out of the police.
- **Guidance** for police officers who are retiring from the police force or transitioning to a new role outside of the police. This guidance should focus on the emotional and psychological challenges that may occur as members leave the police and offer guidance on the stages of change and support available to them.

NARPO welcomes the roll-out of the Oscar Kilo programme but it must be **extended to retired police officers**. Currently, resources are targeted at serving officers and whilst this support is undoubtedly needed, we know that there are growing concerns about poor mental health and wellbeing amongst retired police officers.

The lack of data currently held in relation to suicides amongst retired officers could also be rectified to help understand the problem at hand.

Currently, the PCSC Bill only enshrines a duty on the Home Secretary to prepare an annual Police Covenant report and the Government has said that the Police Covenant will *"take the form of a declaration and will not be set out in legislation."* This was previously the case for the Armed Forces Covenant which is now being enshrined through the Armed Forces Bill. **It is vital that the Police Covenant also be enshrined in law to ensure consistent and appropriate support.**



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICE OFFICERS AFTER RETIREMENT

Many officers continue to work after they leave the police. Police officers are highly skilled and have highly transferable skills which can be applied to a variety of sectors. In addition, we know that continuing to work can be beneficial for some retired police officers' mental health and wellbeing.

The Armed Forces' Covenant provides for a Career Transition Partnership which supports veterans to find a new career or job by translating their skills and qualifications. A similar scheme would greatly benefit retired police officers who wish to continue working. Their in-depth knowledge and experience of working with local communities is an asset which should be harnessed for wider public good.

NARPO welcomes the recent [announcement](#) from HMRC offering National Insurance contributions relief for employers who hire veterans. Employers will be able to apply the relief in real time through PAYE. The relief is available for 12 consecutive months from the veteran's first day of civilian employment and the approach is in line with existing reliefs for under 21s and under 25s apprentices. NARPO is calling for a similar scheme to be implemented for retired police officers to allow them to transition to roles once they retire from the police. Not only will this be an asset for local communities and businesses but NARPO believes that for some retired police officers, this support will be beneficial for their overall mental health and wellbeing.

However, we know that some police officers may struggle adjusting to a different role as transition can bring uncertainty and anxiety. This is why NARPO is calling for dedicated guidance and welfare support for police officers who are approaching retirement and those already in retirement to ensure they are supported.

HOW CAN PARLIAMENTARIANS HELP

NARPO needs your help to make the case for better mental health and wellbeing support for retired police officers. You can become involved by doing any of the following:

- Consider an amendment to the PCSC Bill to ensure that the contents of Police Covenant will be enshrined in law
- Keep the lack of support available to retired police officers in mind when scrutinising the Bill
- Write to the Home Secretary to express the need for greater support for retired officers in the Covenant
- Share your personal support via social media
- Submit parliamentary questions

For ease, we have included drafts for the above actions below.

ABOUT NARPO

[NARPO](#) is a member organisation that represents over 93,000 members spanning all forces across England and Wales.

Formed in 1919 by a group of retired police officers, NARPO is a branch-led organisation with headquarters in Wakefield. Since that time, we have become one of the largest public sector pensioner organisations in the country. Our members include former police officers and spouses/widows of former officers. We strive to improve the lives of our members, whether it be in work or leisure, to thank them for the contribution they have made to our society.

For further information or to arrange a meeting please contact Beth Sidwell at narpo@connectpa.co.uk.

LETTER TO HOME SECRETARY



Rt Hon Priti Patel
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

[insert date]

Dear Home Secretary,

Mental health and wellbeing support for retired police officers

I am writing to raise the need for improved mental health and wellbeing support for retired police officers and to ask if you will consult with the National Association of Retired Police Officers (NARPO) on what this support should entail.

I was pleased to hear that the Government has confirmed the Police Covenant will extend to retired police officers and their families. This is an important step to improving mental health and wellbeing support for retired officers and ensuring that we are looking after those who have helped to keep our streets safe, even after they retire from the police.

NARPO recently conducted a survey of its members which found some disturbing and deeply saddening results: 53% of retired police officers said being a member of the police had negatively affected their mental health in retirement but shockingly, 75% of respondents said they had never received mental health training on the job and 56% of retired police officers felt that their local force never encouraged them to talk openly about health and wellbeing issues.

I am fully supportive of NARPO's calls for a dedicated mental health and wellbeing strategy for police officers in retirement as well as a centralised system where retired police officers could be referred for further support. It is vital that we do our utmost to support our serving police officers, but we cannot withdraw this support once officers retire. Tragically, it is often in retirement that mental health and wellbeing issues emerge as police officers have time to reflect on their experiences in the police force. Many retired police officers who are concerned about their mental health and wellbeing do not know where to turn as there is limited support for them. Too often, the only support they can access is through police charities.

I also believe it is vitally important that the Government looks to enshrine the Police Covenant in law to ensure that protection for serving and retired police officers is consistent across the country and is given due consideration by all bodies.

I would be grateful if you could set out how the Government intends to support our retired policing family through the Police Covenant. I look forward to receiving your reply [optional: which I will share with NARPO members living in my constituency].

Yours sincerely,

[insert name]



SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- I am proud to support @narpohq's calls for improved mental health and wellbeing provision for retired police officers. Tragically, they are too often forgotten about and left to struggle on their own. This needs to change.
- #PoliceCovenant should be enshrined in law to ensure that serving and retired officers receive the support they require.
- We owe police officers a debt of gratitude for their service, that's why I'm supporting @narpohq's campaign for improved mental health support for retired police officers. I will stand up for the policing family and ensure that the Police Covenant delivers support for all.
- .@narpohq's recent survey shows that over half of retired police officers think being a member of the police negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing. Better support is urgently needed including a dedicated strategy and centralised system #PoliceCovenant
- The trauma of serving in the police doesn't end on the day you retire. But unfortunately, the support available does. I support @narpohq in their call for a national mental health strategy for retired officers #PoliceCovenant

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Oral questions

- How does the Home Secretary intend to improve mental health and wellbeing provision for retired police officers through the proposed Police Covenant?
- Will the Home Secretary consider enshrining the Police Covenant in law to ensure maximum consideration and protection for both serving and retired officers?
- Mental health and wellbeing support for veterans is at the core of the Armed Forces' Covenant and undoubtedly makes a world of difference to veterans. Will the Home Secretary consider providing similar mental health and wellbeing support for retired police officers through the Police Covenant?
- How is the Home Secretary supporting police officers approaching retirement to transition into different careers?

Written questions

- To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the benefits of extending the Government funded Oscar Kilo programme to retired police officers and policing staff?
- To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (a) what assessment she has made of the impact of the Police Wellbeing Programme and (b) whether she has considered the merits of making the programme mandatory across all police forces?
- To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has conducted any research into the mental health of retired police officers?
- To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment on the potential impact of a career in the police on mental health and wellbeing?
- To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the benefits of enshrining the Police Covenant in law?