

The Fight for Fair Pay continues...

“We ask the men and women who make up our police service to perform roles that are challenging, demanding and often dangerous. We expect them to do so professionally, to the highest standards and in circumstances that often test their limits. There are few responsibilities that are more important in a democratic society...”

Jacqui Smith, Home Secretary, Foreword, Policing Green Paper, July 2008

Home Secretary – actions speak louder than words!

For the third year running the government seems intent on taking on the UK police service and cheating the 170,000 police officers across the country of a fair pay settlement that adequately reflects rising costs, the unique employment status of police officers and the restrictions placed on their working and private lives.

Despite the very best efforts by the Staff Side of the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) to secure a pay deal this year with effect from 1st September, the Official Side have refused to put an offer on the table that Staff Side could accept resulting in a ‘failure to agree’ being registered at the full PNB meeting held on 23rd July.

So, how did we get to this situation again?

Following the debacle of the 2007/08 pay settlement and the betrayal by the Home Secretary who decided to backdate the 2.5% recommendation by independent arbiters to 1st December, not 1st September, thereby reducing the value of the award to 1.9%, we were assured by the Home Office that police pay would be looked on more favourably in this pay round. The Home Secretary herself stressed that her hands were tied by the government’s

public sector pay policy last year.

When we raised the issue of other workers getting more lucrative pay deals, the government were quick to point out that this year for police officers would be different.

It seems the government’s sense of fairness is very different to ours.

Whilst the Police Federation understands and appreciates the restraints of the current economic climate, we are aware that with rising utility, food and fuel bills many police officers, particularly those younger in service, are struggling to keep their heads above water.

It would therefore have been unfair and unjust to settle on a lower figure than the 170,000 hard working police officers across the UK rightly deserve.

What’s been offered?

The Official Side put forward a recommendation of 2.325% for 2008/09, which used the Police Arbitration Tribunal (PAT) index from 2007.

Why was this offer not accepted by the Staff Side?

After the insult of last year’s imposed pay settlement Staff Side was adamant that it would fight tooth

and nail for a percentage this year that took account of last year’s low award and reflected the increased standard of living costs. A paltry 2.325% was clearly not acceptable.

The 2.325% offer was also based on the PAT index which Staff Side maintains is fundamentally flawed as it reflects public sector salaries and takes no account of the unique role of police officers and the restrictions on police officers’ lives.

As the Official Side’s offer was totally unacceptable, the Staff Side of PNB, using the median of the IDS index which includes public and private sector salaries, put forward a counter claim of 3.5%.

What happened next?

The Official Side made clear they would not accept the Staff Side claim of 3.5%.

Conscious that the Home Secretary had written to the Official Side earlier this year asking that a multi-year deal be considered, the Official Side started discussions at Pay Working Group meetings that were established with representatives of both sides of PNB present.

The Working Group was not an official decision making forum.

A three-year deal?

At the Pay Working Group meetings the Official Side pushed for a three-year deal. But regrettably, negotiation was extremely limited and the deal being offered was solely on their terms.

Although no formal offer was ever made to Staff Side, the Official Side made clear the best multi-year deal they would agree to was 2.65% for year one, 2.6% for year two and 2.55% for year three.

Knowing that anything less than 3% would be unacceptable to the 170,000 police officers being represented Staff Side made clear that the only way a three-year deal would be acceptable was on the following conditions;

- That the first year be substantially weighted in favour of police officers to take account of the insulting pay award enforced last year. Staff Side proposed an acceptable first year figure of around 3%.
- That there are watertight clauses in any agreement that would allow renegotiation at agreed trigger points should economic conditions change and police officers become financially disadvantaged.

The dangers of accepting a three-year pay settlement

For the government there would have been no dangers. For them it would have allowed a fanfare to the public sector that they had secured a multi-year deal with a group of extremely important workers and it would have allowed them to focus on the inevitable battles and strikes they will face with other workers.

For police officers the dangers were very clear;

- There was no acceptable clause in any three-year deal being discussed that would have allowed Staff Side to renegotiate should inflation increase rapidly thereby making the award financially unacceptable at any point during the three years.
- After the betrayal last year, can police officers accept anything the government actually says? What is to stop them renegeing on any promises made now?
- Any three-year deal should have some compensatory weighting built into the first year's payment to balance the unacceptably low settlement the government imposed last year.
- There is a very real chance that with the inevitable looming industrial unrest, in the coming months the government may agree to higher pay settlements for other workers, and police officers would be locked into a three-year deal.

The dilemma faced by Staff Side

This year's pay talks were perhaps the hardest faced by police officers for 40 years.

Last year the government made the unprecedented move of not honouring a decision by the Police Arbitration Tribunal and imposed a 1.9% pay award on police officers.

Police officers across the UK made their views very clear, and in January this year 25,000 took to the streets of London to protest at the way they had been treated. This year police officers want a fair pay deal and will settle for nothing less.

When a three-year settlement was discussed at the Pay Working Group meetings, although not formally offered, the mood of police officers was at the forefront of the Staff Side negotiators' minds.

Talk of figures around 2.6% was therefore not acceptable.

However, in rejecting this, Staff Side was very aware that they face the prospect of being damned if they do and damned if they don't. There may be some officers who would settle for the 2.65%, 2.6% and 2.55% multi-year deal but it was agreed that the vast majority would not. However, by referring to the independent arbiters there is a risk that their recommendation could be lower than the percentages offered in a multi-year deal.

Particularly as the failure to agree was based on a one-year offer of 2.325% and not the multi-year offer which was never formally proposed.

However, by refusing to accept a three-year pay settlement, we have the chance to fight again next year and the year after. If other workers get better deals in the next 12 months then the Staff Side case for a higher percentage is even greater next year, and police officers will not be locked into a three-year settlement.

What happens next?

Now that a failure to agree has been registered at the PNB and the independent Chairman has determined conciliation would have no realistic prospect of achieving a settlement, the Staff Side and Official

Side of PNB will agree terms of reference and the matter will be referred to the independent Police Arbitration Tribunal.

As we all know only too well, the decision of the independent arbiters is then referred to the Home Secretary who can make whatever decision she wishes.

The fight for binding arbitration

Earlier this year, through a survey of police officers throughout England and Wales, the Police Federation asked if police officers want binding arbitration.

93% of officers who responded replied "yes".

The Police Federation of England and Wales has therefore written to every Member of Parliament asking them to support our call for binding arbitration. In turn, Staff Side of the PNB will also be writing to the Home Secretary asking for a written assurance that any Home Secretary would honour the decision of the independent Police Arbitration Tribunal.

The fight for industrial rights

The poll of members throughout England and Wales has given the Police Federation a mandate to pursue a change to legislation to introduce full industrial rights for police officers, should there be a refusal to implement binding arbitration.

Rest assured, if binding arbitration is not agreed by autumn then the Police Federation will commence proceedings to seek to introduce full industrial rights for police officers.

What can you do?

We must all stand united and ensure our collective voice is heard.

We would encourage you to lobby your MPs – write to them, attend the local surgeries they hold and voice your opinion.

We certainly have no intention of giving up this fight and neither must you.