



Rt. Hon Nick Herbert MP
Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice
2 Marsham Street
London SW1A 4DF

27th January 2011

Dear Nick,

Police Pensions

Thank you for your letter of 12th December written in response to my letter of 30th November. I copied your letter to those members of the Suffolk Constabulary who had written to me on this matter and I subsequently met a number of them to discuss the possible changes to the Police Pension Schemes which may arise out of Lord Hutton's Review of Public Sector Pensions. This meeting was arranged by Sergeant Nigel Tompsett who has launched a national campaign calling for Police Pensions to be exempted from any increase in employee contributions, in light of the already high contributions and in recognition of the arduous and often hazardous conditions of police work.

The meeting was extremely helpful and provided me with a valuable insight into the work that police officers do and the conditions in which they perform their duties. Among other issues the following were drawn to my attention:-

1. Working as a police officer does lead to there being various restrictions on an officer's private life. For instance an officer needs to obtain approval as to where he or she lives (for instance they cannot live above a Public House) and there are elaborate procedures that he or she needs to go through if they wish to join clubs or associations. They are in effect never off duty and have to respond to calls from the public at all times of the day and night.
2. Another aspect of the job is that they can be transferred at any time to work from another location within their forces area with no increase in remuneration being received. For instance in Suffolk an officer living and working in Lowestoft could be transferred to either Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds which are 44 miles and 55 miles away respectively. With the cost of fuel and car servicing this could amount to an estimated extra cost of £3000 for which there is recompense.

3. Officers also have to face the fact that days off are often cancelled at short notice to police special events. For instance it has just been confirmed that the Suffolk force cannot take any leave on 21st April (Maundy Thursday) when Ipswich Town play Norwich City and there are blanket periods (e.g. April-October 2012 during the Olympics and the Queen's Golden Jubilee) when they are not able to book leave.

It should also be borne in mind that as today the Suffolk Constabulary employs a higher percentage of civilians (including Police Community Support Officers – approximately 50% as opposed to 25% in the past) there is a greater cancellation of rest days.

4. In other professions the changing nature of life expectancy and pension provision means that people may well retire later and work for longer. This is an option that police officers cannot pursue.

As you are aware officers have to retire after 30 years service. There is no desire to change this requirement because the nature of policing is such that it would not be appropriate to have officers in their late 50s and 60s carrying out much of the potentially dangerous and hazardous work that they accept has to be done from time to time.

Retired police officers looking for another job after retirement are faced with the problem that the skills they have acquired in the force are often not transferable and they often possess few qualifications for obtaining alternative well paid work.

These are a few of the reasons why many police officers believe that it would be unfair to increase the employee contributions to their pension funds, which are already high when compared to other public sector workers. When they join the force officers accept that there will be restrictions on their personal lives and limitations on their second career prospects which go alongside the fact that they are likely to be placed in dangerous and quite possibly life threatening situations at some points in their careers. They have always accepted these aspects of police life, though this was on the understanding that there was a good pension scheme which recognised these aspects of police life.

They are disappointed that police pensions are being reviewed again so soon after they were last changed in 2006 when the Police Pensions Scheme (PPS) was closed to new entrants and was replaced by the New Police Pensions Scheme (NPPS). Whilst the officers did not say as much, I felt that there was a feeling within the force that advantage is being taken of them as they do not have the right to strike.

Nigel Tompsett's campaign to keep the contributions at their existing levels of 11% for the PPS and 9.5% for the NPPS has attracted considerable support across the force and across the county.

In the 14th January 2011 edition of Jane's Police Review, Paul McKeever, the Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales states:- "It is frustrating that there are some people in government and elsewhere who have a profound lack of understanding of what it is to be a police officer. The pension was set for a good reason, to recognise the difficult work that we do, the shift work, the type of threats that we are subject to, the routine acts of bravery and heroism that officers carry out on an almost daily basis".

Nigel would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide you with further information about his campaign and the feedback that he has received from his fellow officers. I would be very happy to arrange this meeting and I look forward to hearing from you as to whether you would like to meet him.

With Best Wishes,
Yours Sincerely

Peter Aldous
MP for Waveney