



South Wales

POLICE
Federation

Officer assaults: ‘not part of the job’

A seven-point plan setting out how police officers and staff should be treated if assaulted while on duty has now been signed-off by the Force.

The plan follows an initiative first launched in Hampshire following a campaign by its Federation branch.

The South Wales Police plan will make the recording and investigation of assaults on officers more robust and professional and will cover:

- Improved training
- A commitment to treating and investigating assaults on police officers and staff as seriously as an assault on a member of the public
- Keeping the officer/staff member informed and updated
- Providing support and welfare
- Giving sufficient evidence – as a result of poor evidence or personal statements, cases sent for prosecution too often fail to meet basic evidential needs.

Steve Treharne, chairman of the South Wales Police Federation Constables’ Branch Board, explains: “The message needs to go out that an assault on an officer is not to be accepted as part of their job. An assault on an officer is an assault on society and any sentence given needs to send out a strong message that acts such as these will not be tolerated.”

A national campaign calling for better protection for police officers has gathered momentum after Halifax MP Holly Lynch led debates on the issue in Parliament in October and again in November.

During the summer recess of Parliament, the MP joined West Yorkshire police for a 2pm to 10pm shift to gain an understanding of the demands of front-line policing.

Ms. Lynch accompanied PC Craig Gallant and it was not long before she witnessed an event that led her to call 999 as she was so concerned for the officer's safety. PC Gallant had pulled over a vehicle and asked the driver to get out of the car. The driver refused and within seconds a crowd of hostile people gathered around PC Gallant. The officer was forced to draw his baton to keep the crowd back and thankfully back up arrived quickly enough to help manage the situation.

Steve explains: "This is the sort of danger that you can, and do, find yourself in on a regular basis. Research has found that an officer is assaulted every 22 minutes with a total of 23,394 assaults in England and Wales last year. This may not be a definitive picture as the method of collecting data by the Home Office for police assaults can be described as poor. The Federation is currently working with the Home Office to work to a more robust method of collecting accurate data.

"Unfortunately, officers who have been assaulted often do not bother reporting or recording the incident or feel they are not taken seriously and often they even have to interview the offender themselves which can't be right."

It was this situation that prompted John Apter, the Hampshire Police Federation chairman, to drive through his Force's seven-point plan. This has now been taken up by most of the 43 forces in England and Wales

Below is a copy of the signed 7-point plan



ASSAULT ON POLICE OFFICERS

INVESTIGATION STANDARDS: WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU SEVEN POINT PLAN

- 1 Assaults on police officers and police staff should be investigated with the same care, compassion and commitment as an assault on a member of the public. This sounds obvious, but too often our response to assaults on officers and staff can be rushed or treated as secondary to other offences.
- 2 The Victim Code applies to all victims and therefore to assaults on police officers and staff. Complying with the Victim Code means keeping the victim updated, discussing outcome options, and taking account of the victim's point of view before imposing an outcome. This is crucial because we know that we don't always get our response right, with assaulted officers and staff reporting dissatisfaction and even resentment.
- 3 The assaulted officer must never be the OIC for the investigation into their own assault. This is not appropriate on any level and even taking statements from witnesses may be inappropriate. The integrity of the investigation and the impartiality of the officer could be called into question, which could undermine the case and/or heighten the impact on the victim.
- 4 Victims recover better and more quickly if they receive the right welfare and supervision. This also helps to avoid long-term negative consequences. The assaulted person's supervisor should meet with them as soon as it is practical to do so. The victim may downplay the impact on them, but supervisors must recognise the potential effects of the incident.
- 5 The supervisor must ensure that the senior manager is informed to provide continuity of welfare support. The Police Federation must also be contacted to provide valuable additional support to the victim.
- 6 The assaulted officer and the supervisor must complete the F64b form. It will not always be possible for the victim to do this, in which case another person can complete the report.
- 7 To achieve a successful prosecution, the best evidence must be presented. You should use Victim Personal Statements and whoever is investigating the assault needs to fully understand the "points to prove" for assaults on police officers or staff. An officer's self-written statements, provided straight after the events, could be made in haste and might not contain all of the key facts. As a result, cases sent for prosecution sometimes fail to meet basic evidential needs.

Chief Constable Peter Vaughan

South Wales Police Federation Chair, Steve Trigg