

The Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister of Wales
Welsh Government

Sent via email: Correspondence.Mark.Drakeford@gov.wales

Friday 5th February 2021

Dear First Minister

From the very beginning of the pandemic, policing has been right at the forefront of helping protect the communities of Wales from the deadly coronavirus. Police officers, police staff, Special Constables and volunteers on the frontline have not had the opportunity to work from home and on many occasions have not even been able to socially distance because of the nature of their roles. Day and night, weekdays and weekends, these dedicated individuals have said goodbye to their loved ones to go out and protect everyone else's family and friends, putting their health at risk while also fearing picking up the virus and taking it home with them.

Beneath the uniform, behind the steering wheel of that police car, at the other end of that 999 call is a dedicated public servant who, in reality, is just like you; a human being.

On 5 April 2020, you tweeted, as First Minister of Wales: *"As we face coronavirus together, I'd like to thank our police officers and forces across Wales for their hard work helping to keep us safe."*

On 9 April 2020 an 'unprecedented letter' from you, signed by Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services, and Chief Medical Officer Frank Atherton and sent to the people of Wales stated: *"Our public services are working around the clock to care for and keep people safe during the coronavirus pandemic. Frontline workers are putting our health and care first, every day. We must continue to do everything we can to support them."*

It is due to this last sentence that we now find ourselves in a position of absolute frustration, disappointment and anger because our members – the constables, sergeants and inspecting ranks of the four Welsh police forces - are being treated with such apparent contempt by the Welsh Government.

Across all corners of Wales, we have countless examples of police officers who, disgustingly, have been spat at and coughed over by people who claim to have Covid-19. This, of course, has health implications and puts our hard-working policing teams at further risk. No other key workers face such vile circumstances in the execution of their duties.

Yet, when it comes to offering some protection to policing in the form of the Covid vaccination, the police service seems to be seen as the bottom of the pile, the inconvenience, the not worthy. At no point during this pandemic has any recognition being given to the risks frontline police officers face while protecting the public. They cannot socially distance while arresting someone or dealing with public disorder. They cannot do their job while isolating from everyone but their own family.

It has been repeated, many times, that the Welsh Government is following the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority list yet we are hearing, daily, of people being vaccinated who are not on the list including staff within the health, social care and local authorities who have exclusively worked from home since the start of the pandemic.

For example, the JCVI states that "frontline health and social care workers" are under Number 2 on the list, however, we are told of many people within health and social care who are not frontline receiving their vaccinations. Every single one of us agrees that the most vulnerable people in our communities and our

frontline health and social care workers should be protected. But, if non-frontline workers are now being vaccinated, then surely those working in frontline policing should also be prioritised.

Policing is the one service which can never say “no”. When other agencies say that a matter is not in their remit then where does that caller turn to? The answer is always the police. Policing picks up the slack when other services struggle. Police officers are the ones who cannot refuse to go to a tragic death of a human being. Policing can never put up the ‘closed’ sign. As part of their duties, police officers, multiple times a day, attend hospitals across Wales to calls for assistance from medical staff. Police officers have to accompany social workers to home visits for the most vulnerable victims. Police officers accompany ambulance crews to volatile situations; to protect the lifesavers, Yet, with all these instances, those agencies have been, or are being, vaccinated while policing, despite working being side-by-side, are left vulnerable and do not appear to have even been considered for protection.

There is also a strong case for policing to be offered any spare vaccines, however, there are reports that this is even being blocked by Welsh Government:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-vaccine-police-wale-glamorgan-19720131>.

If this is true, then it is an absolute insult to the very same people who you publicly praised last April.

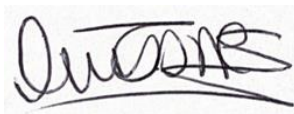
You will have seen, with a Senedd Petition reaching over 10,000 signatures of support and letters being sent by constituents to Members of the Senedd, there is widespread, unquestionable support from the public for vaccinations to be offered to police officers in return for the risks they take to keep their communities safe.

On behalf of all frontline police officers, staff, Special Constables and police volunteers in Wales, we demand that Welsh Government now steps up and makes a commitment to protect the protectors. This would not be a sign of weakness but one of strength and solidarity to the brave women and men who literally put their lives on the line every single day to serve the public.

First Minister, now is your opportunity to make a visible commitment to backing policing and reaffirm the statement you publicly made in April last year: *“We must continue to do everything we can to support them”*.

Now is the time. Protect our frontline. Do everything **you** can to support policing. Ensure that frontline workers in the police service are given some kind of priority as the roll-out of the vaccination continues.

Yours sincerely



Gareth Jones
Chair, Dyfed Powys Police Federation



Nicky Ryan
Secretary, Gwent Police Federation



Mark Jones
Secretary, North Wales Police Federation



Steve Treharne
Chair, South Wales Police Federation