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Dear Minister,

CNC Pensions Westminster Hall Debate

I am writing to you following the Westminster Hall debate where you spoke on the vital and pressing issue of the impending changes to the pension arrangements of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) prompted by the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

It is clearly evident from your response, that you are earnestly seeking to resolve this matter as quickly as possible. Your personal experience of visiting the Sellafield nuclear facility and the CNC Firearms Tactical Training Centre with briefings from our Chief Constable and other officers, have clearly gone some way to giving an informed understanding of the challenging physical and weaponry requirements to be a CNC Armed Firearms Officer (AFO).

However, I wish to pick up on key points employed in your response to justifying the CNC joining the Alpha pension scheme with a normal retirement age (NRA) of 67/68 on 1st April 2020.

Capability

It is correct that the tests of fitness and weaponry skills determine whether or not an officer is deployable, and it is the officer's capability rather than age that is the determining factor. But this conclusion overlooks the inverse correlation between ageing and physical fitness, with age the main determinant of capability. All empirical evidence from the National General Practitioners Medical Framework suggests that it would be probable for the AFOs to be able to perform at the mandated level of fitness to 60. But crucially, there is no cited medical evidence to support the possibility of officers, particularly female officers, serving beyond 60.

The medical evidence points to musculoskeletal deterioration beginning in the mid to late 50s so the prospects of serving beyond 60 are highly remote. The mandated tests were devised for the College of Policing by the highly respected expert in this field of physical performance, Professor John Brewer, Pro Vice-Chancellor of St Mary's University London, and have been adopted as the national standard for AFOs for the entire UK police service. Maintaining these standards throughout a career is so challenging that out of the UK's 6000 AFOs only about a dozen are believed to be over 50 (0.2%). Even if a few officers of exceptional fitness and dexterity were to pass the tests beyond 60 it hardly justifies using the few exceptions to insist on a NRA of 67/68 for all CNC AFOs.

Employment

You acknowledged that there were few back office and unarmed roles for CNC AFOs and drew attention to how this contrasted with numerous opportunities for Home Department police AFOs to be redeployed once they surrendered their firearm duties. Without these same opportunities, the rural nature of CNC employment and their narrow specialist skills, it is unlikely that CNC officers failing to reach the new NRA will find new employment opportunities as you suggested. This is significant as CNC officers leaving on health grounds will have their pensions reduced by 6% for each year they fall short of 67/68, as much as 25-30% of a full pension.

[All correspondence to chief executive](#)



Equality Analysis

You referenced the Department's Equality Analysis of the impact of the Alpha scheme on AFOs but did not acknowledge its adverse findings. The imposition of Alpha scheme with a NRA of 67/68 would appear to ignore the public sector equality duty of the 2010 Equality Act and would, in effect, institutionalise discrimination by age and sex. The Government must be aware that the Act requires the legal compliance of employers.

Attrition

With regard to the high attrition rate of 12%, the CNC is right to assure the Government that despite the recent loss of officers it can still fulfil its mission, but it is not ideal if this depends upon systematic overtime. Prolonged spells of overtime lead to tired and demoralised officers and to reduced alertness and are undeniable evidence that the CNC is already below strength. Overtime can be only a short-term palliative for what is becoming a structural problem caused by officers leaving and recruitment diminishing in numbers and quality. The Government is in denial if it does not accept that the proposed new Alpha scheme with an NRA of 67/68 is a significant financial disincentive to retention and recruitment. It will eventually lead to the situation as described by our outgoing Chief Constable that the CNC will become "unsustainable" and will be at the detriment of the security of crucial infrastructure assets.

Finance

The Government has also failed to take account of the financial case which the CNC presented detailing the uneconomic costs of managing officers in their sixties. For our part, the Federation will countenance increased pension contributions in order to secure an NRA of 60 as applies throughout the rest of the UK police service.

Conclusion

The Government, understandably and prudently, has introduced a public service pension policy which reflects the pressures on the public purse and the longer lifespan of the general population. But by applying the Alpha Pensions scheme to this group of 1250 specialist police officers the Government are in conflict with irrefutable medical, military and police professional advice.

I commend you for your efforts to see the issue resolved as soon as you can but we are disappointed with the Government for its inability to make a sensible decision in the interests of national security that would protect the operational integrity of the CNC and be fair to the officers who are prepared to put themselves in harm's way to protect national assets and the wider public.

On behalf of my members and in the interest of UK national Security, I urge you to treat this as a matter of some urgency and implore you to organise the long-awaited meeting between the relevant Government Departments, the CNC, CNPA and Federation representatives to resolve this issue.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nigel Dennis'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Nigel Dennis

CEO

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