

Government put on 'national security' alert as civil nuclear officers jump ship in pensions parity fallout

MPs urge ministerial intervention to bring down 'morally indefensible' rising retirement age.



Armed officers: CNC is 142 'understrength'

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By - [Nick Hudson - Police Oracle](#)

Worried MPs have called on the government to resolve an "issue of national security" by agreeing pension parity as one in eight Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers are leaving for other forces or heading for civvy street.

Nearly three years after a High Court ruling denying them the right to retire at 60 was branded "unreasonable, morally indefensible and cynical", the 1,250-strong force remains trapped with current legislation.

The five MPs, all of whom have nuclear establishments in their constituencies, have contacted Business and Industry Minister Richard Harrington directly to try to speed up the progress on change with recruitment numbers halving as applicants become aware of the impending increase in the retirement age up to 68.

They cite a "deterioration" in turnover of CNC personnel rising to 12 per cent while the Civil Nuclear Police Federation says the force is 142 authorised firearms officers understrength and, in addition, has seen 79 "unscheduled leavers" since April 2018 and 32 signalling their intention to quit in the last month.

The mounting exodus has been fuelled by a bizarre classification that places CNC officers in a public-sector category for the purposes of their pension. Full benefits only kick in at 67 or 68 compared to police officers in Home Office forces able to retire from the age of 60.

It means officers potentially having to carry five different weapons and 30kg of heavy equipment at the age of 65 plus, as they protect UK nuclear assets and act as a vital armed reserve force.

The CNPF lost a High Court case in August 2016 to grant its members the same retirement rights as officers in other forces.

At the time CNPF chief executive Nigel Dennis argued: "It should be self-evident that the retirement age for any employment group should be set within realistic reach of the employee.

"The simple fact is that for government to insist on a retirement age that our officers have little or no hope of reaching would be unreasonable, morally indefensible and cynical.

"Retirement at 60 is based on their objective knowledge of what is the physical limit for officers pursuing a lifetime career as highly trained weapons and fitness specialists."

Last February the federation thought it had won ministerial backing for a "fair" retirement age for CNC officers in a campaign which included lobbying the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to get the issue addressed.

A year on MPs Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran), Trudy Harrison (Copeland), Mike Hill (Hartlepool), Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) and Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) are now demanding the government acknowledges that the higher retirement age is posing "insurmountable" difficulties for CNC officers.

Urging the minister to progress meetings with all interested parties including the federation, the CNC, the Civil Nuclear Police Authority, the Treasury and Cabinet Office, the MPs told Police Oracle: "The issue is becoming increasingly pressing for national security and for the welfare and wellbeing of the 1,250 officers, many of whom are our constituents.

"The deterioration in turnover of CNC officers has now risen steadily towards 12 per cent with officers leaving for other police forces or for more civilian employment where the retirement age is attainable.

"Recruitment numbers have halved as applicants become aware of the impending increase in the retirement age to 67 and 68 as outlined in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

"Such a situation cannot continue without serious and potentially immediate consequences for national security as it becomes steadily more difficult for CNC to fulfil its mission of protecting the UK's civil nuclear assets at home or in transit and to supplement the resources of armed home department police as part of the Strategic Armed Policing Reserve and Operation Temperer.

"At a time when the CNC's role in national security is increasing, the knock-on effects from an unrealistic retirement age must be addressed urgently."

It took the CNPF nearly 40 years to win pay parity – from the publication of the 1979 Wright report.

The federation president fought for a decade to overturn the "outdated pay structure" – from the moment he came into office in 2008 until the "milestone" agreement in December 2017.

Before the historic collective agreement CNC officers had been paid 95 per cent of their Home Office colleagues' salaries through to federated ranks.

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