

SPECIAL PRIORITY PAYMENTS SCHEME

Joint Report of the Chief Constable, Clerk and Treasurer

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the introduction of the Special Priority Payments Scheme within Northumbria Police.

2 BACKGROUND

The Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed in May 2002 that a scheme for Special Priority Payments (SPP) would be introduced nationally.

Under the agreement, the posts which are eligible for payment and the levels of payment which they attract are to be determined by the Chief Constable and the Police Authority. There is no right of appeal against this determination.

The PNB agreement recognised that the contribution of all police officers is valuable, regardless of the post they fill. However, it also acknowledged that those officers in the most demanding and difficult front line operational posts should attract additional rewards.

Payments are to be made annually on a one-off basis and are to be no less than £500 and no more than £3,000 normally, although exceptionally, payments of up to £5,000 may be made.

Payments will be taxable but not pensionable and will be paid in a single sum in December each year. For those officers who qualify, the first payments will be made in December 2003 and annually thereafter.

The PNB expects that no less than 20% of force strength will benefit from the scheme and no more than 30%, save in exceptional circumstances. This is to ensure that the scheme is used to reward officers in posts that meet the national criteria, not to address other pay and condition issues.

In the first year, at least an additional 1% of the force's annual basic pay bill, for ranks below chief officers, is to be spent on the scheme; in the second year at least 1½% and in the third year, and thereafter at least 2%. Funding will be provided centrally by the Home Office to meet these minimum costs only.

The scheme is targeted at front line/operational officers in particular and posts may qualify for payment where they fulfill the following criteria:

- carry a significantly higher responsibility level than the norm for the rank; or
- present particular difficulties in recruitment and retention; or
- have specially demanding working conditions or working environments

3 PROPOSALS

Subject to members' approval it is intended to adopt the PNB agreement in full and set the payment at £1,000 per annum per eligible officer.

This is based on an assessment of the overall funding which will be made available to the Force to fund the scheme, balanced against the number of officers who can access the payment.

All posts within the Force have been considered against the criteria for qualification. In addition to the criteria for qualification for payment the Force has, in reaching a determination of which posts should qualify, had regard to the following;

- i) the importance of individual posts to national and local policing priorities; and
- ii) the relative importance of continuity in the post.

Based on an assessment of the criteria it is proposed that the following posts should attract payment under the scheme in the first year;

- i) Uniform patrol constables working in area commands on a 24 hr/7 days a week shift pattern who have completed over 5 years service on 1 December 2003. **(858 posts)**
- ii) Community Beat Managers with a minimum of 2 years service working within area commands. **(142 posts)**
- iii) Central Support Unit constables working on a 24 hr/7 days a week shift pattern. **(77 posts)**
- (iv) Central Support Unit sergeants working on a 24 hr/7 days a week shift pattern. **(8 posts)**

The total number of posts that would be eligible to receive the payment under this scheme would therefore be 1085 (26.8% of force establishment).

Whilst some superintendents may have been eligible for the scheme, given its limitations, the Superintendents' Association has indicated they wish to be excluded to allow federated ranks to receive the maximum benefit.

To qualify for payment, officers must demonstrate that they are fully competent in, and highly committed to their duties and responsibilities.

In order to ensure the scheme is operated fairly and consistently in force, it is proposed to use the following criteria:

i) Attendance Criteria

Commitment to duty will be measured by attendance. It is intended that the application of Northumbria Police's sickness policy, including appeals procedure, will be the determining factor in relation to commitment to duty. The determining period will be 2 years prior to the assessment date for payment.

ii) Conduct

Under the national standard "professional competence and results", officers are required to demonstrate compliance with the Code of Conduct. In this respect the sanctions of no action taken, informal advice/warnings, formal advice/warnings or Superintendent's warnings will not alone prohibit an officer from attaining a special priority payment. It is further proposed that findings from a misconduct hearing within a period of two years preceding the date of application for payment will be considered on the merits of each case.

iii) Qualifying Criteria

Payment will be pro rata in the case of a post holder who has been in a qualifying post for less than a calendar year. Whilst officers can hold posts on a permanent basis, it is recognised that there can be short term abstractions from those posts in respect of acting duties, specific operations, training courses, temporary placements or projects.

No officer will be disadvantaged by virtue of performing an acting rank. Where appropriate, part payment of the allowance will be added to the acting up allowance to ensure this.

In order that officers on such short term abstractions are not penalised financially, it is proposed that only such abstractions exceeding a period of 28 days on any one occasion would lead to suspension of the payment, and then only in respect of that period of time which exceeds 28 days.

In order to ensure all officers who are in or who have been in a post qualifying for the award receive payment, a notification procedure will be adopted.

4 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The scheme has been agreed nationally and is designed to be fair and consistent in its application to ensure that there is no discrimination. Application for payment under the scheme is open to all officers who meet the criteria.

5 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

Nil.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated cost of these payments for 2003/4, inclusive of National Insurance contributions, is £1.18 million. Provision for this sum has been included within the draft Revenue Budget 2003/04.

The funding of Police Reform announced within the Police Financial Settlement for 2003/04 does not include SPP's. However, a separate special grant will be available to underpin the PNB proposals for SPP's.

The special grant is to be funded at 1% of the Force's annual basic pay bill for ranks below chief officers. Funding is estimated at £1.18 million for 2003/4, and this sum will be included within the draft Revenue Budget 2003/04.

The Treasurer confirms that the cost of the proposals will be fully met from the anticipated additional special grant.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Police Authority is asked to:

- i) Note the contents of this report.
- ii) Approve the local implementation of the Special Priority Payments Scheme as outlined.