

CONNECT

Summer 2026

News & Views from West Mercia Police Federation

Inside:

- Meet the new branch team
- A family's courageous sea rescue
- Chris Walsh reflects on 30 years of service
- Gareth's story: understanding his ADHD diagnosis
- Unity Tour: remembering fallen officers



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Transform. Trust. Transparency. Together.



As we begin this new chapter for West Mercia Police Federation, I want to start by saying something simple: thank you.

Thank you to our members for the trust you have placed in this new Federation executive, and thank you to those who have challenged us, questioned us and shared their experiences. We are here because we believe your voice matters - and because we believe the Federation can, and must, do more.

This is the first edition of this magazine as your new chair, with Stu as our official secretary, and I'd like to explain a little more about our mission, vision and drive.

Our approach is built around four words: Transform. Trust. Transparency. Together

Transform means being prepared to do things differently. Policing is changing rapidly, and the Federation needs to change with it. That means looking honestly at how we represent members, communicate, use our resources, and how accessible we are to the people we serve. We want a Federation that is visible, relevant and focused on the issues that genuinely affect you, whether that is pay and conditions, conduct and performance processes, wellbeing, workload or the day-to-day realities of being a police officer.

Trust is earned. It comes from listening, keeping our promises and being prepared to stand alongside members when they need us most. But trust also means being honest. Representation is not about blindly defending everything an officer does - it is about ensuring every

member is treated fairly, has their voice heard and is given the support and representation they are entitled to. That principle is at the heart of good Federation work.

For us, transparency is key. You deserve to know what your Federation is doing, why we are doing it and where your money is being spent. We want to communicate more openly, explain the decisions we make and give members a genuine opportunity to influence our priorities.

And finally, together. This edition includes a powerful example of what collective action can achieve elsewhere. The campaign surrounding PC Andrew Harper's killers demonstrated what can happen when officers, Federation members, politicians and the public speak with one strong voice. More than a million people signed the petition, and that collective voice helped bring about change.

Together, we are stronger than we are individually.

This magazine also celebrates the people behind the uniform - those representing colleagues, those going above and beyond to help others, those remembering fallen officers and those reaching the end of proud careers. Their stories remind us what policing is really about: people looking after people.

That is what we want this Federation to be about too. We will listen. We will challenge. We will be accountable.

And above all, we will work to build a Federation branch that you can trust.

This is your Federation. Let's make it better, together.

Collective voice helped keep officers' killers behind bars, says Fed



West Mercia Police Federation's chair said the successful campaign to prevent the early release of PC Andrew Harper's killers showed the power of policing's collective voice.

Gareth Spreadbury welcomed the Government's decision to exclude those convicted of unlawful killing, including manslaughter, from the early release scheme.

It means two of PC Harper's killers, who had previously been eligible for consideration for early release, will remain behind bars and serve the sentences handed down by the courts.

The move, announced by Prime Minister Andy Burnham, follows a national campaign, led by Thames Valley Police Federation.

The campaign saw police officers, Federation members, politicians and members of the public come together to demand justice be upheld.

A petition calling for PC Harper's killers to serve their full sentences attracted more than one million signatures, while Federation members were also encouraged to contact their MPs and make their

views known.

Gareth said: "This is really positive news and a powerful example of what can be achieved when policing speaks with one strong, collective voice.

"PC Harper's death sent shockwaves through the police family, and the prospect of the early release of two of his killers would have sent a deeply troubling message to brave officers serving communities across the country.

"But this campaign showed the power of standing together. When police officers, staff, their families and communities speak with one voice, that voice cannot be ignored.

"I want to thank every one of our members who supported the campaign, contacted their MPs and signed the petition. Your collective voice made a difference.

"More than a million people signed the petition, sending an extraordinary and unequivocal message that the early release of PC Harper's killers was unacceptable. That message was heard - and, importantly, it was acted upon.

"This is what can be achieved when people come together, stand together and make their voices heard."

PC Harper, a Thames Valley Police officer, was killed in August 2019 after being dragged behind a car while attempting to stop a group stealing a quad bike in Berkshire. Two of those involved in the incident, who were both 17 at the time, were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 13 years in prison.

The Prime Minister told the BBC: "I heard obviously what Andrew Harper's family were saying, I mean, who couldn't?

"Nobody would want a position to arise where those guilty of killing a police officer are let out early from prison."

Thames Valley Police Federation chair Aileen O'Connor said in a statement on LinkedIn: "We are pleased that the Government - despite what was frankly initial reluctance - has eventually listened, seen sense and made the right decision to keep these lowlives behind bars.

"The weight of public and policing opinion against such plans was overwhelming.

"The fact that more than 1 million people signed our petition over this was a historic public backing for police officers.

"The fact that 50 Chief Constables across the UK wrote an open letter calling for the Government to reconsider was unprecedented.

"The right and proper decision has been made."

Meet Gareth

As we welcome our new branch chair and secretary, we thought we'd get to know the people behind the roles with a quickfire round of 15 questions. From favourite films and first concerts to the more unexpected questions, here's a chance to find out a little more about them away from the day job.

Branch chair, Gareth Spreadbury



1 Favourite sandwich filler?
Fishfingers

2 Window or aisle?
Depends. Window on a plane, aisle everywhere else

3 Cats or dogs?
Cats

4 Sweet or savoury?
Savoury

5 City break or beach?
Mix of both

6 3 things on a desert island?
My guitar, vinyl player, and a vinyl.

7 If you could have dinner with any celebrity, living or dead, who would it be?
Bruce Springsteen

8 Favourite biscuit?
Shortbread

9 Worst fashion choice?
The fact that I don't follow fashion in any way shape or form - just give me something with plenty of colour or crystals.

10 First thing you'd buy if you won the lottery?
An animal shelter

11 Best piece of advice you've ever been given?
The greatest gift in life is that life is meaningless, so we get to decide what we bring meaning to in our life.

12 Tea or coffee?
Coffee, hot, with milk, no sugar.

13 Favourite takeaway?
Chinese

14 Karaoke song?
California Dreaming

15 One thing on your bucket list?
Haven't got one because I intend to live forever!

Meet Stu

Branch secretary, Stu Bott



1 Favourite sandwich filler?
Fish fingers and tomato sauce

2 Window or aisle?
Aisle - easy exit to the toilet!

3 Cats or dogs?
Dogs

4 Sweet or savoury?
Sweet

5 City break or beach?
Beach holiday

6 3 things on a desert island?
A map, a satellite phone and a speedboat!

7 If you could have dinner with any celebrity, living or dead, who would it be?
Sir Alex Ferguson

8 Favourite biscuit?
Chocolate Hobnob

9 Worst fashion choice?
I don't make fashion errors, I set trends!

10 First thing you'd buy if you won the lottery?
A house for each of my family

11 Best piece of advice you've ever been given?
If you get abandoned on a desert island, ensure you have a means of escape!

12 Tea or coffee?
Tea, milk no sugar or a caramel macchiato from Starbucks

13 Favourite takeaway?
Pizza

14 Karaoke song?
I don't do Karaoke!

15 One thing on your bucket list?
To travel Highway 1 around Australia

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Rep says policing experience vital in supporting officers



West Mercia Police Federation representative PC Dave Hussey says his frontline experience gives him valuable insight when supporting colleagues facing misconduct proceedings.

A Federation representative since 2021, Dave is trained in conduct, discipline and performance, as well as Post-Incident Procedure (PIP). The Leominster-based officer combines his Federation work with being a full-time response officer, tutor constable and specialist operational roles.

At one point, Dave was one of only two trained conduct representatives within West Mercia. "It was a massive workload," he said. "I was still working as a response officer, doing my normal shifts, tutoring and doing the Federation work as well.

"I don't know how I functioned because I never seemed to stop."

Despite the workload, Dave wanted to remain a serving frontline officer

rather than move into Federation work full-time.

"I like the role that I do because I'm still on the ground. I see everything that goes on and understand what's happening. When I'm representing officers, I've still got that hands-on experience."

He believes that experience is particularly valuable when challenging assumptions about how policing works in practice.

"You can have somebody from Professional Standards saying, 'What about such and such?' and I can say, 'that doesn't happen'.

"I can explain how a particular procedure actually works because I'm still doing the job."

Dave says his Federation work is driven by fairness. He does not believe representatives should automatically defend officers, but believes every officer is entitled to have their case properly heard.

"There are officers who shouldn't be in the job. I accept that, and I don't condone wrongdoing," he says.

"But officers who have made a genuine mistake, who haven't detailed something properly or are going through difficulties which have led to them making a mistake - there is a story behind it.

"I like that officer to get their story out and explain their way of thinking and what the circumstances were, so we can best look after them."

Dave began his policing career with the Met in 2002, aged 21, before transferring from the Metropolitan Police to West Mercia six years later in 2008. He is a Taser officer, Level 2 public order officer, public order medic and method-of-entry officer, as well as initial pursuit trained and a tutor constable.

"Knowledge of regulations and the rights and entitlements of officers was limited, and often I was not completely satisfied with the answers previous reps gave.

"I basically became an unelected, unofficial Fed rep in my own right in finding out about the rights and regulations to help and support the colleagues on my team.

"And then people were saying that I should be a Fed rep."

He encourages more officers to become Federation representatives: "I would encourage people to give it a go."

It can be rewarding to help those who are going through misconduct proceedings - usually because it's a mistake, an error, or there's a lack of explanation or justification for something.

"There's a lot of satisfaction in, as I say, looking after the little man and getting their voice heard."



'Proud dad moment' as PC and daughters honoured for sea rescue



A West Mercia Police officer and his two daughters are being recognised for their bravery after saving a man from drowning during a family holiday in Cornwall.

PC Shaun Lyle and his daughters Macey, 19, and Poppy, 16, were swimming at Treyarnon Bay when they spotted three people in difficulty, including a man in his 70s struggling to stay above the water.

The family helped get all three to safety and will receive recognition from the Royal Humane Society for their actions in August 2025.

Shaun said his family regularly visit the area, which is known for dangerous rip currents.

They were bodyboarding when they spotted the man, his wife and daughter caught in a current.

"At first, we thought that they were just swimming in that area, and then it became quite apparent that the man was really beginning to struggle," said Shaun.

He added "He was disappearing under the water, and each time the

amount of time he was going under became longer."

Shaun and his daughters immediately swam over to help. He said: "I've previously described it as absolute fear in his eyes, and he disappeared under the water.

"We managed to reach him and pull him back to the surface, and then I gave him my bodyboard to hold on to.

"There's no doubt in my mind I was going to die, and you guys saved my life."

"We thought he was going to be okay at that point, and we'd be able to guide him out of the current and take him back to shore. However, he kept going in desperation and let go of my board.

"My daughter was close by, and he grabbed hold of her and pushed her under the water. It was like an act of self-preservation."

Macey, a trained lifeguard, broke

free, while Poppy looked after the two women. The family eventually got the man holding the bodyboard and manoeuvred all three back to shore, where lifeguards took over.

The family then returned to the water.

"It was kind of one of those events where you do the right thing, what you think needs to be done at that time," he said.

The rescued man later found the family on the beach and thanked them.

Shaun said: "He said, 'I just want to thank you. There's no doubt in my mind I was going to die, and you guys saved my life.'"

Shaun said it was a really 'proud dad moment'.

"They're comfortable, confident swimmers," he said. "They acted so maturely and did what needed to be done and acted so calmly."

The rescue is another remarkable chapter in Shaun's 25-year policing career. He began with West Midlands Police, spending 18 years in various teams before joining West Mercia Police in 2019.

He has since worked in response, firearms, police liaison and football operations, and supported policing at public events. He is now part of the Madeley neighbourhood team.

In 2017, Shaun travelled to the British Virgin Islands as part of the police and disaster relief response following Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

He said he was 'really fortunate to have experienced a lot' in his career and still thoroughly enjoys policing.

Grab bags provide vital support for women fleeing domestic abuse



Grab bags containing essential items for women fleeing or experiencing domestic abuse have been provided by West Mercia Police, as part of an initiative aimed at supporting victims and strengthening links with local communities

Inspector Jodie Davies, who works in the Prevention Hub and has 25 years' service in policing, organised the initiative after seeing an opportunity to use charitable funding to support people disadvantaged by crime.

The project was supported through the PC Fund, with bags given to Herefordshire County Council, Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council, and Worcestershire County Council.

A total of 100 bags were distributed across the four local areas, with 25 provided to each.

The bags contain basic toiletries including toothpaste, toothbrushes and shower gel, as well as items such as a nightie and socks.

The aim is to provide women arriving at refuges with everyday

essentials they may need after leaving their homes at short notice.

Jodie said leaving an abusive relationship can be an incredibly difficult decision, and that having access to basic items can provide a small amount of comfort at a challenging time.

"Women can be at rock bottom when they make the decision to leave a relationship," she said, adding: "To flee somewhere safe and have a bag of things that we take for granted can make a difference."

"To flee somewhere safe and have a bag of things that we take for granted can make a difference."

She added that the bags were about more than the practical items inside them.

"It's not about knowing who it's gone to. It's just knowing that it's available."

Jodie said the initiative was particularly important during the football World Cup, having previously seen research highlighting the link between major football events and domestic abuse.

Research by Lancaster University found domestic abuse cases increased by 38 per cent when England lost a match and by 26 per cent when England won.

As a football fan herself, Jodie said it was frustrating to see a sport she enjoys potentially contributing to an increase in harm against women.

"For me, it's frustrating that football can - in some cases - actually cause more harm to women," she said.

The initiative is also close to Jodie's heart because of her wider commitment to tackling offences against women and supporting victims.

She supports the White Ribbon campaign, which seeks to challenge violence against women and promote positive change.

Jodie hopes the initiative can be repeated and expanded in the future, including at Christmas if further funding can be secured.

She said initiatives such as this also play an important role in building relationships between policing and the communities officers serve.

"It's great to have this opportunity to be able to support people," she said.

"It's a great thing to do, and hopefully it will help and support people."



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A passing out ceremony like no other



PC Molly Middleton has spoken of the 'special' moment her terminally ill dad was able to watch her 'pass out' as a police officer - after a ceremony was held at the hospice where he was receiving end-of-life care.

For 20-year-old Molly, joining the police was something she had always wanted to do.

She applied to join West Mercia Police last year and began her training in March, driven by a simple desire to be there for people when they were at their lowest and to make a difference.

But as Molly's Passing Out ceremony approached, her family was facing an incredibly difficult time.

Her dad, Paul Middleton, 61, was receiving care at St Michael's Hospice, in Hereford, and had only days left to live.

"One of dad's final wishes was to see me pass out as a police officer," said Molly, who told her trainers at Hindlip what was happening.

Knowing how important it was to her and her family that Paul could see his daughter achieve her dream, trainer Mark Johnson and

Chief Inspector Carrie Solomon came up with an idea.

Why not bring the passing-out ceremony to him?

On 24 July, just days before Molly's official passing-out ceremony on 6 August, a special ceremony was held at the hospice.

Molly's family travelled from Hull to be there. Her certificate was presented to her, a professional photographer captured the moment and a speech was given about her achievement.

For Molly and her family, it became a special celebration, a mini passing-out ceremony created especially so her dad could be there.

"He saw the moment my certificate was presented to me."

"By the time the ceremony came, Dad couldn't speak. But when the ceremony took place, he opened his eyes - I know he knew what was happening," continued Molly.

Paul, aged 61, had been diagnosed with bowel cancer nine years earlier. In recent years, his

cancer had progressed to stage four and spread to his liver and lungs.

Despite his illness, Molly describes her dad as one of the most positive people you could ever meet.

"He was so brave and amazing. His illness would not define him," said Molly, who was incredibly close to her dad, and his pride in her stayed with her throughout her training.

Paul died shortly after the ceremony.

For Molly, knowing her dad witnessed that achievement is something she will carry with her throughout her career.

"It means the world to me. It's hard that I can't tell him all about the job, but he lived through my training," said Molly, adding: "For him to see that, it meant so much to us."

She added: "The hospice and my colleagues at West Mercia Police made those moments possible."

Molly ended by thanking Mark Johnson and Chief Inspector Carrie Solomon for making the ceremony possible, as well as everyone at West Mercia Police.

Proud detective shares 'rewarding' primetime TV experience



When Federation member Gareth Lougher took over the south team of West Mercia Police's Major Investigation Unit (MIU) two years ago, he expected the role to come with its usual challenges. What he didn't expect was to have a film crew following him around for national television.

critical decisions to make. However, as he settled into his position as DCI, Gareth found himself being filmed as part of the BBC's *Murder 24/7*, a series offering viewers unprecedented behind-the-scenes access to the police response to major crime and homicide.

of the role – the crew have been working with the Force for a few years now. Compared to my incoming priorities, though, I just didn't give it that much thought," he admitted.

"Besides, I knew it was something I would just have to get used to – and that's exactly how it played out. It was certainly a strange feeling at first, but over time, you just adapt to it.

"What's come out of it is an excellent set of episodes which I am really proud to have played a part in."

Stepping into the biggest role of his policing career to date – a decade in the making since he first became a detective in 2014 – Gareth's attention was naturally on the responsibilities that came with it. He had colleagues to lead, complex cases to oversee and

He wasn't the first MIU south lead to experience it. His predecessor, Leighton Harding, had also taken part in the series, giving Gareth some idea of what to expect.

"When I took over from Leighton, I was aware this would be part

"What's come out of it is an excellent set of episodes which I am really proud to have played a part in.

"They show not only the work of myself or the MIU, but the work of the call handlers, first responders, crime scene investigators and more, and how the whole organisation comes together to get the outcomes we did."



“They show how the whole organisation comes together to get the outcomes we did.”

The third season of Murder 24/7 aired over the summer, with Gareth featuring in its fourth, fifth and sixth episodes. He explained that, like the crew, he had little idea which cases would make the final cut, with countless hours of footage reduced to just a fraction.

The only thing decided before production was that, following the success of the previous two seasons, the show would move from BBC Two to BBC One, bringing even more primetime attention to the likes of Gareth.

“You can’t get much more of a national audience than that,” he continued.

“There was no way of knowing for sure which cases would be covered, but with the particular one at the centre of episodes five and six, I had a strong suspicion early on. I am captured saying that the videos we found of the incident were some of the worst I’d seen in my career.

“My team were brilliant in how they handled that, and in fairness, so were the crew. You have to

remember they are not police trained, so I felt it was important to make sure their welfare was being picked up too by their employers.

“By the end of filming, the mutual trust we had built with them as professionals was strong and was one of the most rewarding aspects of the whole process for me.”

As well as a sense of care and respect for his film crew counterparts, Gareth added he was also mindful of the victims at the centre of the cases put under the microscope by Murder 24/7.

The seasoned detective, who originally joined the Force in 2005, went as far as to say his favourite parts of the entire programme were the moments it heard from the loved ones of these victims.

“For me, they were the most impactful, because in all the shock and mystery, these people don’t usually have much of a voice. The show gave them one, and I think that deserves a lot of credit.

“As for my appearances on screen, I’ve had quite a few

messages from family and friends saying they’re sick of seeing me all over their iPlayer accounts.

“Aside from the banter, everyone has been really lovely and supportive about it. I’ve even had a few friends outside of policing tell me they didn’t know exactly what I did at work, and now they do.

“Overall, I think the show continues to portray West Mercia Police in a positive light, and in a time when everyone has something to say on how our profession does things, that is extremely valuable.”

CATCH UP ON BBC iPLAYER

Missed Gareth on Murder 24/7? Catch up with Series Three and watch episodes 4, 5 and 6 on BBC iPlayer.

Gareth on Screen

Programme: Murder 24/7

Channel: BBC One

Series: Three

Episodes: Four, five and six

Role: DCI, Major Investigation Unit South

Joined West Mercia Police: 2005

Became a detective: 2014

Chris Walsh: 'proud' retiring Fed member looks back on 30 years of service



After 30 years with West Mercia Police, Chris Walsh is preparing for retirement with a mixture of pride, emotion and excitement about what comes next.

Chris's last working day was 30 August, just two weeks before his 55th birthday. It marked the end of a career that began in August 1996, when Chris was approaching 25 and, by his own admission, was 'a little bit lost'.

"I thought the police seemed like a great career," he recalled. "I like helping people. If you're a people

person, the police is brilliant."

Three decades later, that desire to help others remains at the heart of his career.

Chris has spent his entire policing career with West Mercia, working across a remarkable variety of roles including response policing, proactive units, covert policing, intelligence, work with vulnerable adults and sex offenders, and an early attachment to CID.

He retires as an impact sergeant, dealing with handovers, having also spent around five years

working on and off as a temporary inspector.

"I've had the ability to do anything I want to do in policing," he said. "It's just been amazing."

Looking back, it is the people he encountered and worked alongside that have made the biggest impression.

"The people that surround you are everything."

Chris says colleagues and supervisors invested time in him, encouraged him and helped him develop. He remembers an accident early in his career when he was off work and his sergeant contacted both Chris and his partner to check they were okay.

He has also witnessed significant changes in policing over the past 30 years. When he joined, officers spent much more time visibly out on patrol, completing paperwork at the roadside rather than being tied to computers and systems.

"When I started, you were visible," he said. "You did your paperwork on the side of the road and people would ask why you were in the station."

Technology has transformed policing, bringing clear benefits but also changing the way officers interact with the public.

"In some respects, it doesn't feel quite as human. But technology has improved a lot, which is good."

Chris has also seen the workforce become more diverse, with people joining from increasingly varied backgrounds and a significantly positive increase in the number of

women entering policing.

"We've come a long way, which is a good thing," said Chris, who believes that changing workforce is important because officers bring different experiences and perspectives to the job.

"Society is changing. Policing needs to change. The younger officers are our future."

One of the most positive developments he has witnessed is the changing attitude towards mental health.

Earlier in his career, after being involved in two car crashes in close succession, Chris experienced significant mental health challenges. He felt there was an expectation that seeking help should remain private.

"For 30 years, being a police officer has been more than a job. It has been part of who I am."

He believes that stigma has reduced significantly: "There's no shame now, no stigma. I feel like it's talked about. It's out there, no shame."

He has also seen greater

awareness of officer wellbeing and the support available to colleagues.

"We've lost colleagues along the way, which is very sad," he said. "But hopefully it's better. It's great to see that there is support there and the job is constantly trying to change that."

During his career, Chris has also gained a greater understanding of himself. Early on, he was nicknamed 'Flash' because he was always on the move. Years later, a counsellor told him he displayed a number of ADHD traits, helping him make sense of characteristics he had always recognised in himself.

He believes policing is becoming more accepting of neurodiversity, although there is still progress to be made.

Chris admits that retiring has been an emotional prospect.

"The biggest thing for me was the loss of identity when I go," he said.

"For 30 years, being a police officer has been more than a job. It has been part of who I am."

There is also a sense of relief,

however, with Chris saying he expects retirement to be 'an instant weight off my shoulders'.

"But my head is in a good place." And retirement certainly will not mean slowing down. The day after his official retirement, Chris will start a new role as a full-time team leader at Marks and Spencer, allowing him to continue doing something he has always enjoyed: working with people.

"The people that surround you are everything."

Outside work, it is also a significant year for his family.

Chris and his wife, Lexi, have been together for 12 years and married this year. He has a 25-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old stepdaughter, who is beginning to think about her own career as his policing career comes to an end.

After 30 years, Chris feels he has achieved what he set out to do.

And as he prepares to leave West Mercia Police, he does so with enormous pride.

He ended: "I'm extremely proud to have been a police officer."

1996

Joined West Mercia Police

Early career

Response policing and CID attachment

Career progression

Proactive units, covert policing and intelligence

Leadership

Temporary inspector and impact sergeant

2026

Retirement after 30 years

Unity, remembrance and honouring those we have lost'



The West Mercia Police team played a key role in leading the West Midlands chapter of this year's Police Unity Tour (PUT), helping bring riders together to honour fallen officers while raising more than £6,300 for Care of Police Survivors (COPS).

The 14th UK edition of the PUT took place in August, with hundreds from across the police family completing a long-distance bike ride in remembrance of officers who died in the line of duty.

While starting points varied, every rider shared the same destination: the National Memorial Arboretum near Lichfield, Staffordshire. The weekend concluded with the Annual Service of Remembrance, organised by COPS, which supports families left behind by fallen officers through financial assistance and grief counselling.

As part of the West Midlands chapter, which included Warwickshire and Staffordshire, West Mercia participants were responsible for coordinating this

year's event for the four-force team.

Federation members PC Jamie Guest and PC Alison Evans helped ensure all 200 miles of the ride ran smoothly. They were assigned PC Robert Owen of Staffordshire Police, who died in 1985, and PC Phillip Sanderson of West Midlands Police, who died in 1978, as their central tributes. Each wore a wristband bearing their fallen officer's name.

Jamie, who was joined at the Service of Remembrance by his two sons, said: "It was absolutely vital that these few days took place both for fallen officers and to raise money for COPS - there was no other word to describe it.

"The remembrance service really brought it all home, when you sat there and listened to stories of mums and dads who had gone to work for the day and not come back - especially when you had your own family present with you."

Describing the bike ride, Jamie

added: "You could be a keen cyclist, but this was still not something you would do every day. Each time you got back on the saddle after a stop, whether it was for food, drink or a mechanical issue, it was that little bit harder to get back going again - but it was all worth it in the end, of course."

West Mercia Police staff member Jon Strelitz led on organisation,



devising a route to the arboretum for himself and the 12 other riders in the chapter.

His aim was to cover all four force regions, beginning at Force headquarters in Hindlip, Worcestershire, before travelling through the West Midlands, Warwickshire for an overnight stay in Kenilworth, and Staffordshire for the second night in Tamworth.

A five-person support crew helped keep riders safe throughout the journey.

"My main aim was for everyone involved, both riders and support crew, to leave with a memorable and enjoyable experience

expectations were met. Knowing that participants had a memorable and worthwhile experience made the role especially rewarding for me.

"And that sense of reward went to another level at the arboretum, which combined everything the PUT was all about: unity, remembrance and honouring those we had lost.

"I rode for West Mercia's PC Paul Symonds, who lost his life on duty in 1991, and this was an absolute privilege."

Ahead of the event, Deputy Chief Constable Damian Barratt spoke to the Federation about the PUT.

After riding for a mix of fallen officers in his previous six efforts, Damian cycled for West Mercia Police's PC Andy Boardman, who died in April 2023 after collapsing while responding to an incident in Broseley, Shropshire. He was 43.

"It was a privilege to ride in Andy's memory. His passing had a significant impact on the Force – he was a treasured colleague who was missed every day," Damian said.

"I recently met his wife, Luci, who was also an officer in the Force, and it was great to hear how much value she placed on what

we did and the work of COPS.

"For Andy, and for every officer who lost their life on duty, we honoured them for the incredible people they were."

Looking ahead to 2027, Damian hopes more people will take part.

"There was such a togetherness among riders to get you

"The Unity Tour was about unity, remembrance and honouring those we had lost."

through it, and it was always an opportunity to meet like-minded people, both in terms of policing and cycling," he said.

"The Annual Service of Remembrance on the Sunday is always a unique and fitting way to end the weekend. I would encourage anyone to get themselves to the Arboretum for it, as it was a great way to commemorate our late colleagues even if you had no involvement with the PUT.

"It was an incredibly poignant service, which meant something a bit different to everyone, depending on who you were remembering."



PC Jamie Guest

across all three days. From that perspective, the event was a great success," Jon said.

"Our support crew looked after us exceptionally well, and the evening meals were filled with conversation, laughter and camaraderie, reflecting the spirit of the Unity Tour.

"It was a real honour to represent the Force as chapter leaders. Officers and staff invested their own time and money to take part, particularly during a period of rising living costs, so it was important to be organised, manage every detail and ensure

The Road of Remembrance





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Fed member hopes Knife Angel will leave a lasting legacy



The iconic Knife Angel's seven-week visit to the Force area has been hailed a huge success by a West Mercia Police Federation member.

The National Monument Against Violence and Aggression was on display in Shrewsbury throughout the summer.

It provided the Force and its partners with the chance to strengthen work to prevent knife crime and educate young people about the dangers of carrying weapons.

Federation member and Shrewsbury's Safer Neighbourhood Inspector Ingrid Tozer said: "It went really, really well. It was there for seven weeks in the end, and it was quite a tourist attraction."

Standing at 27ft and weighing 3.5 tonnes, the Knife Angel has been created from 100,000 knives and blades that have been surrendered to or seized by 43 UK Police Forces.

It stands as a national memorial to victims of knife crime and an educational tool against violence.

The Knife Angel's presence was supported by an extensive programme of activity.

Shrewsbury Town Council delivered seven knife crime awareness training sessions, reaching 131 staff, councillors and other Team Shrewsbury partners.

The council also hosted the Bloom Roadshow, which focused on youth safety, alongside celebration events to mark the sculpture's arrival and departure.

Rangers played a particularly significant role, engaging with more than 11,000 young people during the Knife Angel's stay.

This provided opportunities to have conversations with young people about safety, choices and the risks associated with carrying a knife.

Police officers from the town

centre also took the opportunity to engage with the public in the Square. Events included the police engagement van, conversations with members of the community about knife crime and the promotion of the 'Steer Clear' message.

A knife surrender bin was also available, providing an opportunity for people to dispose of knives safely and without judgement.

Ingrid said the town council had been 'absolutely fantastic' in supporting the initiative and organising activity alongside partners.

Ingrid said: "It's always good to raise awareness and to keep that message in the forefront of people's minds.

"Anything that makes people stop and think is a good thing, and it's provided an important foundation for continued work to prevent knife crime."



Not a myth: what my ADHD diagnosis gave me



After being diagnosed with ADHD at 40, West Mercia Police Federation chair Gareth Spreadbury reflects on four decades of self-doubt, the impact of stigma and why understanding neurodiversity can transform lives.

When I first saw the title of Channel 4's new documentary, *The Great ADHD Myth?*, it stopped me in my tracks. Not because I object to questions about ADHD - after all, research should continue, and debate is essential to better understanding.

What troubled me more was what those four words might mean to someone who has spent years questioning themselves.

And I know, because I was one of them.

I was diagnosed with ADHD-

attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder- at the age of 40. Before that, I had spent four decades trying to understand why some things seemed inexplicably difficult. Why could I achieve extraordinary things one day and struggle to answer a simple email the next? Why did my mind never seem to switch off?

Why did rejection, criticism and emotional setbacks sometimes feel disproportionately painful? At the time, I had no desire to have ADHD. None.

Nobody chooses years of anxiety, exhaustion, guilt or shame. Nobody chooses to feel different without understanding why.

Nobody chooses to spend their life wondering whether they are lazy, incapable or simply not good enough.

Yet, for much of my life, I believed exactly that.

Looking back, I became very good at surviving without an explanation. I worked harder. I stayed later. I took on more responsibility. I said yes when I should have said no. I tried constantly to prove that I belonged.

I masked and overcompensated because I thought that if I tried hard enough, everything would eventually click into place. Then came the diagnosis.

ADHD had not suddenly appeared. What changed was that, for the first time, I had a framework through which to understand myself.

The impulsivity. The hyperfocus. The racing thoughts. The forgotten conversations. The

emotional intensity. The burnout.
The constant guilt.

Suddenly, 40 years of confusion
began to make sense.

What I didn't expect was the grief.

I grieved for the child who
thought he wasn't clever enough.

For the teenager who wondered
why life appeared easier for
everyone else. For the young
police officer desperately trying
to fit in. For the supervisor who
questioned himself after every
difficult day.

I also grieved for the
conversations that would never
happen. My mum never knew. My
dad never knew. They never had
the opportunity to understand
why their son experienced the
world differently. That remains
painful.

This is why headlines matter.
Most people won't watch an
entire documentary or read every
argument surrounding it.

They will see a headline, hear
a conversation or encounter a
comment online.



That's how stigma works. It
doesn't have to stop everyone.
It only has to make some people
hesitate.



I've experienced that stigma
myself. I've heard ADHD
dismissed as fashionable or
trendy. I've heard people question

**"My diagnosis didn't
change who I was. It
changed how I saw
myself."**

diagnoses when they know very
little about the condition.

Each comment might seem
harmless to the person saying
it, but to someone already
questioning themselves, those
words can land very differently.

My own experience in policing
taught me something important.
When somebody tells you they
are struggling, you don't begin
by questioning whether their
struggle exists.

Instead, you listen.
That means remembering the
human being at the centre of the
discussion.

My ADHD has brought challenges,
but it has also brought strengths:
creativity, passion, empathy,
problem-solving, pattern
recognition and a willingness to

challenge what is wrong.
I often wonder how different
my life might have been if
somebody had recognised ADHD
earlier. Would school have been
different? Would I have been
kinder to myself? Would I have
spent less of my life apologising
for being me?

I'll never know.

But I do know that my diagnosis
didn't change who I was. It
changed how I saw myself.

Behind every diagnosis is a
person. A family. A childhood.

A lifetime of experiences that
cannot be captured by a label or
reduced to a headline.

For me, ADHD isn't a trend,
an excuse or a myth. It is an
explanation that arrived after
forty years of searching. An
understanding.

And understanding changes lives.
It changed mine.

If you can relate to this article
and would like further support,
then please reach out to me,
personally, or West Mercia Police
Federation.