

## **Chairman's Speech Friday 12 June**

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the WMP Benevolent Fund. This meeting has been called in accordance with the Companies Act 2006.

I'm happy to report that, since 1 June this year, the Benevolent Fund has been operating independently from Police Mutual Healthcare. It's a brave new world but we do still have the support of Stuart Collins, who has guarded our finances so ferociously in the past. He is still on hand to help us when needed and for that we are very grateful to the Police Mutual Healthcare.

There are three main areas for me to talk about today:

- Our performance during last year, as set out in the accounts
- Developments within the Fund during the first half of this year
- Our plans for the next twelve months

### Performance last year

Firstly, let's talk about last year's performance because this is why we're here today – to sign off the accounts.

The accounts were prepared under the direction of Simon Atkins, from Clement Keys, our newly-appointed auditors. Simon is here today to answer any questions you may have concerning these accounts. Please be kind to him as it's his first AGM, although in the absence of Pip someone needs to ask the tricky questions!

Also here is Stuart Collins, who we mentioned earlier, and is standing down as our Company Secretary following this meeting. Every year I say kind words about Stuart, and this year is no different. I can't begin to tell you how instrumental he has been in creating our independent Fund. His commitment and dedication has been appreciated by all of the management committee and we can only wish him all the very best with his career with Police Mutual.

We also have our retained Solicitor here today, Gareth Griffiths from Weightman's. Roz Payne is also here, as she is currently looking after the secretarial duties of the Management Committee, and has been overseeing all the work to create an independent Benevolent Fund.

As you are aware, the Benevolent Fund is managed by a committee made up of retired and serving officers from various representational bodies across the Force plus a couple of experienced individuals such as the Force chaplain who bring an extra dimension to the work of the board. The management committee elect Directors and, while they have no set tenure, there is a healthy balance of new and old experience to make sure that there is a consistent approach to decision making. Our newest Director, Julie Mason, is a police inspector who is also involved with the Police Federation. Details of the current Directors are on the back of today's agenda and can also be found on our website.

Currently the Fund has just over 6,000 members roughly split 50-50 between serving police colleagues and retired officers. During last year, the Fund assisted a wide range of members including:

- £31,000 in gifts and grants to help serving and retired members through difficult times
- Nearly £25,000 donated to widows and children of deceased officers
- Just over £8,000 at zero-interest to members who were in financial difficulties
- Over £4,000 has helped members with convalescence
- £7,000 in grants when unfortunately two of our members died

#### Developments during the last year

Just to reiterate, this year has seen us finally become independent from the Police Mutual Healthcare. However, we still consult with each other about the old Police Health Care scheme over such things as membership, subs increases and levels of benefit. So, if you do have any issues you would like us to raise on your behalf, let us know and we'll raise them when we meet which is around two or three times a year.

We have a new office and a new member of staff called Jan Burchell. Jan works from Monday to Wednesday at Guardians House. Some of you might know her as she worked for a number of years at Solihull police station in the administration department so she is no stranger to the ways of the Force.

Our new website launched last autumn is proving invaluable in giving members access to benefits and essential information. We do, however, recognise that a large number of our members don't use computers or the internet and we know how important it is for people to be able to speak to a real person. The office is staffed Monday to Wednesday 8.30 – 4.30pm. Roz Payne continues to look after the committee and deals with the debt counselling, loans and grant applications.

As we promised, last year, we have written to all our members updating them on developments within the Fund. Our summer newsletter was sent out at the end of May. It's fair to say that a lot of them didn't know they were members, let alone what they were entitled to. This is because, historically, the Police Health Scheme and the Benevolent Fund were part of the same organisation and the focus of the membership was health care. I'm happy to say that we've now been able to address this since becoming independent and I am confident that we will start to see more benefits being given to more people as we move forward.

To help us spread the word about the benefits, we've launched a new marketing campaign rewarding members when they sign up a police colleague. We've also joined the online world of social media to help us connect with other police partners such as the Federation and the Credit Union as well as younger members of the Force. We know that the local NARPO branches are also actively using social media as a way of communicating. So it's important for us to connect with them and share information. This way we can react more quickly to vulnerable members who need our help.

### Looking forward to the future

Over time, we want to increase the level of benefits but it's crucial that they are affordable and sustainable – and that they meet the needs of all our current membership which, after all, goes from teenagers to people in their 90s. We would like to hear your views, what would you like to see us add to our list of benefits?

By the end of this year we hope to have a second member of staff to give us more resilience in the office and to make sure we can respond to our members when you need us. Now we've finished with the majority of our internal changes the focus going forward will be to promote the Fund within the Force.

I'm sure that Mr Cann will be telling us shortly of all the changes and challenges that the senior team of WMP face. But, in the absence of a welfare department and a depleted budget for occupational health, it's more important than ever that our officers and police support staff have somewhere to turn in times of difficulty.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people for the changes that have taken place – Roz Payne has been responsible for implementing some of these changes. I would like to thank all the Police Mutual team upstairs for doing sterling work for our members, despite all the changes that have been made to their working lives. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Stuart Collins again for everything he has done over the years.

I would like to thank all elected members who frequently give up their own time to attend the management meetings as well as competing with the demands from their day job. Not many people know that they don't receive any payment for their work on our behalf. I'm confident that the staff, Directors and Management Committee are the right people to take us forward in the coming months and years.

And finally, before I hand over to ACC Gary Cann, I would like to say a personal thanks to him for all his support over the last couple of years. I know he has difficulty getting to meetings but when we've called on him, he has always done everything he can to help.