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**To:** [whittle0305@btinternet.com](mailto:whittle0305@btinternet.com)

**Subject:** Chief Constable Mike Veale's Monthly Column: May 03/05/2016 11:24:22 [144985]



## Chief Constable Mike Veale's monthly column: May

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**Message sent by**

Siobhan Stayt (Police, Media Officer, Wiltshire)

The issue of mental health is still a taboo topic for many, despite great efforts to encourage people to talk about it and break down the stigma surrounding it.

As Chief Constable it is something which I have to be very aware of for a number of reasons. Not only do our day-to-day operations put our officers in direct contact with members of the public who may be suffering from a wide range of conditions or problems, but I also have to be mindful of the ever increasing stresses my officers can be experiencing.

Later this month it is National Mental Health Week (16 May to 22 May) so I thought I would take this opportunity to get the ball rolling and start the necessary discussions around the subject.

This police force, like all others around the country, deals with a huge amount of demand that comes into us because of mental health problems. From missing people to anti-social behaviour, public disorder to violent assaults, these incidents often involve someone, either victim or offender, battling personal issues. All of this means we have to be sympathetic and sensitive to these issues, and have an ever greater understanding of what they are going through.

However, we also need to be aware of this rising demand, and the fact that it often falls on the shoulders of the already-stretched police service. Like all public services we are facing reduced budgets and have to be astute and intelligent about how we continue to meet, and hopefully exceed, the public's high expectations of policing. The only way we can do this is by continuing to

work even more closely with partner agencies, such as local authorities and the health service. We need to share the responsibility for this demand.

It is particularly worrying when we are looking at the number of people with mental health issues who are detained in police cells. This is something Wiltshire Police has been working hard to resolve over the past few years and we have had success in making sure this is only a last resort if no alternatives are available.

The wellbeing of my staff and officers is always at the forefront of my mind, and that includes both their physical and mental health. A study looking at the national picture of the rising numbers of police staff and officers taking psychological sick leave hit the headlines recently.

Here in Wiltshire we have signed up to the Blue Light Time to Change Pledge, which commits the force to ending the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health problems in the workplace.

The very nature of the work police staff and officers carry out, means they often deal with traumatic or stressful incidents, and they need to know we have the appropriate care and support to help them cope. Of course policing is a high-pressure, sometimes stressful, job, but that does not mean that our staff and officers should become unwell because of this.

I am personally committed to this Pledge, and want everyone to know I will lead from the top to make sure they are confident that we are doing everything we can to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health problems, as well as offering a helping hand where needed. That is why we have made significant investment in increasing and improving our occupational health facilities. I need to look after my people, so they can look after our communities.

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