At last, some concrete figures to support what front-line officers have been feeling over the last few years: police officers off sick with stress is up a whopping 35% in flat numbers despite a decrease in overall police numbers.

When I joined Blandshire Constabulary in 2003, there was never a shortage of people putting their hands up for voluntary overtime, to stay on dealing with shoplifters, doing scene watches, or just covering shortages on the next shift. In recent years as a sergeant, trying to find people to stay on was like pulling teeth. In the end, we’d just draw straws. Gruelling shift patterns, reduced staffing levels and reduction in rest day working payments, have all contributed.

All these measures were designed to save money and alter police conditions to bring it more in line with a ‘normal’ job. Instead, they are forcing overtime budgets up and now we are seeing the consequence of trying to treat police officers like any other employees.

Police work is not ‘normal’. That’s not me having an inflated view of myself or my colleagues. That’s fact. In any other job, if someone swears in your face and threatens you, you call a manager or for the police. If there’s a fire alarm or bomb alert, you evacuate to safety. If a colleague is attacked and seriously injured, someone else will come to help you and deal with it. In the police, you are the one that deals with these situations. I have tended to injured parties while fights go on around my head. I have been assaulted and threatened on numerous occasions. I have reassured people who were dying, even though it was hopeless. I have crept alone through darkened houses looking for intruders, because the householders were too afraid. […] I have taken decisions that no one else wanted to take, when all my managers were asleep in bed. I have been blamed for mistakes I’ve made and the mistakes of others. I have seen good men and women drawn to desperate acts that lost them their jobs, due to a lack of supervision and support.

Policing is not a normal job, but it is done by normal humans. The moment you forget that, police officers will lack the support and respect needed to stay motivated, healthy, and honest. If you think that’s an excuse, show me that you would be any different.

Like it or lump it, we will get the police force we pay for.

Fed up with what she saw as unfair portrayal in the press and on TV, ‘Sgt Ellie Bloggs’ wanted to tell the world about what it is really like to be a frontline police officer. She set up an anonymous blog to write about her experiences. In the extract on page 149, she explains why she thinks we need to spend more money on the police.

Key term

sentence structure: how a sentence is put together, including word and punctuation choices and word order

Ready, set, go!

As you read the extract opposite, think about the impression you get of the work that police officers do.

Extract from ‘Off With Stress’ by Sgt Ellie Bloggs

425 words

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Like it or lump it, we will get the police force we pay for.

front-line: dealing directly with the public
voluntary overtime: extra hours that an employee chooses to work on top of their normal contracted hours. Often these are paid at a higher rate than normal hours
draw straws: decide something by picking at random from straws of different lengths
shift patterns: working arrangements, e.g. two early shifts (07:00–15:00), followed by two late shifts (15:00–23:00) and two night shifts (22:00–07:00) with three rest days before starting the pattern again
parties: a legal term for people
like it or lump it: whether you like it or not
Word power

Re-read the extract on page 149. Pay particular attention to the target words listed below. As you read, think about what the words might mean in this extract.

Your target words for this section are:
1. concrete
2. gruelling
3. inflated
4. desperate
5. motivated

These target words have been highlighted in blue in the extract on page 149.

Key term
adjective a word that describes a person, place, object or sound

Concrete is a hard substance used in the construction of buildings and roads, but the word can also be used to describe anything real that isn’t just an idea. Look at how it is used in the opening sentence of the blog post.

Complete these sentences using the word ‘concrete’ in the same way.

1. I don’t want to hear any more of your vague ideas, I want…!
2. There’s no point in you accusing me of the crime, unless you have…!

In the 19th century, prisoners were given gruel (watery, tasteless porridge or soup) to eat. This led to the word ‘gruel’ being used as an adjective – ‘gruelling’ – to describe any horrible punishment. Find it in the extract and explain what it means there.

We inflate a bicycle tyre by pumping it full of air. Look at how the word ‘inflated’ is used in the extract. What do you think it means there? Use the Target word list on pages 174–175 to check the different meanings of this word.

If you act desperately, you are under so much pressure that you don’t care what the consequences of your actions might be. Which of the actions below might be thought of as desperate acts?

1. Walking out of your job
2. Running away from home
3. Asking a friend for advice

When you are motivated, you want to take action. Which of the following words is closest in meaning?

- relaxed
- uninterested
- keen

At the end, Sgt Bloggs says: ‘we will get the police force we pay for’ Explain what she means.

Knowledge and understanding

Look back at the extract on page 149 and answer the following questions.

1. Has the number of police officers off sick with stress increased or decreased recently?
2. Re-read the second paragraph.
   a. How have attitudes to doing voluntary overtime changed since 2003?
   b. Why has this happened?
3. How do the police officers now decide who is going to work the extra hours?
4. Why does Sgt Bloggs say that being a police officer is not a normal job? Choose two answers from the following statements.
   - Police officers have to work longer hours.
   - The job that police officers do is not appreciated by ordinary people.
   - It is more dangerous, violent and emotionally draining.
   - Police officers have more responsibility than people in most jobs.

What does Sgt Bloggs mean?
Sgt Bloggs chooses her words very carefully and uses a range of language features to support her argument that police officers should be paid more.

At the start, she uses some striking adjectives.

a. What effect does the adjective ‘concrete’ have in the first paragraph?

b. Now look at ‘whopping’ in the same sentence. How does this adjective strengthen her argument?

In the second paragraph, she compares the situation in 2003 with the current situation. Bloggs includes an anecdote from her own experience as evidence of how things have changed.

a. Copy and complete the table below to explain the effect of her language choices. The first one has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language to describe 2003</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘putting their hands up’</td>
<td>This image makes the police officers sound like eager school children who are keen to answer a teacher’s question. They’re full of energy and optimism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘dealing’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘doing’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘covering’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language to describe now</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘like pulling teeth’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘trying’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘draw straws’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘gruelling’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the fourth paragraph, Sgt Bloggs argues that police work is not normal. To demonstrate her point, she describes what ordinary people do ‘in any other job’ if they face frightening or challenging situations. She uses a range of language and grammatical choices to make her writing effective. These have been annotated in the paragraph below, along with notes to show how these language features work.

Using these notes and any of your own ideas, explain how Sgt Bloggs uses language effectively in the fourth paragraph to help us understand what it is like to be a frontline police officer.

Presenting examples as a list: this is the first in a list of three examples of what police officers encounter.

Repetition of a single word ‘if’: draws attention to all the awful things that often happen to police officers.

Directly addressing the reader: makes us take notice.

Repeated sentence structure and presentation: each sentence is divided in two by a comma, creating a repeated rhythm.

Key terms

- present tense used to describe things that are happening now
- rhythm the pattern made by the ‘beats’ in language or music
- verb a word that identifies actions, thoughts, feelings or a state of being

Using the present tense of dramatic verbs gives an immediate sense of danger.

Using the present tense of dramatic verbs gives an immediate sense of danger.

Re-read the fifth paragraph. How does Sgt Bloggs use language effectively to describe what it’s like to be a police officer so that we feel sympathy and admiration for them? Comment on:

- sentence structure (e.g. repeated structures and punctuation)
- use of evidence to support views (e.g. examples from a police officer’s experience)
- language choices (e.g. lists, repetition, verbs, adjectives).