

ETAP Review of Staffordshire Police Force's response to the Covid pandemic: Workforce, Welfare and Wellbeing.

What did we review and why is this important?

The force has had to balance potentially conflicting aims – continuing to provide a public service for the people of Staffordshire and looking after the welfare of officers and staff. We wanted to understand the measures they put in place to support people's physical and mental health

How did we go about the review?

We looked at the self-assessment which the force submitted to the national Inspectorate (HMICFRS) and read the relevant sections of the Inspectorate report on *Policing in the Pandemic*. Justine Kenny, Director of People and Resources, gave us a presentation to tell us what the force had done. We had a follow up conversation to get into detail and find out about staff feedback to a recent wellbeing survey.

What did we find?

We found that the force:

- Invested in IT (including the roll out of 800 additional laptops) to allow people who could (including those shielding), to work from home.
- Moved people around buildings to make Covid-compliant space for people who had to be on-site, including control room staff.
- Made existing spaces safer for those who needed to attend offices, through the provision of screens and distancing, one-way systems, sanitiser issue and provision, masks, tests, wipes etc.
- Provided support through risk assessments, 'check-ins' by line managers and Occupational Health advice – with 24-hour access to the employee assistance programme and more recently through the Thrive App which provides mental health support.
- Monitored absence every day to identify where people need more support.
- Changed how sickness is managed so that being absent because of Covid did not impact on people's pay.
- Set up a Wellbeing Group with a budget used to provide healthier food in vending machines, outside seating areas, wellbeing days and other support.
- Gave talks and presentations on wellbeing and a regular newsletter.
- Produced lots of guidance and tried to share it widely – a challenge in a large, dispersed force.
- Early on, put in an internal test and trace system to help people isolate as soon as possible.
- Set up a 7-day working team to book PCR testing in advance of the national roll-out and provided lateral flow tests for people still coming in to work and for those in key areas who were working from home.
- Changed leave arrangements to allow people to carry over 10 rather than 5 days and offered up to 14 days special paid leave for people who needed time to manage their caring responsibilities.
- Continued to recruit using online assessment tools for officers which meant that pace has not slowed down.

What comments/questions do we have?

We have reviewed a lot of evidence that tells us how the force was proactive and focused on delivering its duty of care towards its people. It showed leadership at all levels and its People & Organisational Development and Occupational Health teams rose to the challenges.

It would be helpful to have some follow-up information on:

- Monitored absence every day to identify where people need more support." - "Did absence increase? What was the support offered?"
- "Produced lots of guidance and tried to share it widely – a challenge in a large, dispersed force" - with this challenge in mind, how successfully did the guidance actually land with staff?"

Our additional questions:

1. How will the force manage the additional leave being carried forward to make sure it does not impact on service delivery.
2. How and when will the force look back at its handling of communications about wellbeing to learn for the future.
3. What steps is the force taking to make sure that it continues to get and act on feedback from staff on wellbeing concerns – recognising the consistently low response to staff surveys.
4. What policies is the force putting in place to provide continuing support for people affected by Long-Covid.
5. What benefits have there been/will there be from joint working across the force, Fire and Rescue Service and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office.

Jane King & Craig Brown, ETAP, wish to give thanks to Justine Kenny for her input and the documentation provided to support the understanding and ability to frame questions.

Response

The force is pleased that wellbeing is a topic that has been considered by ETAP and really welcomes this review. We are pleased with the positive report, and continue to focus on wellbeing as a particular priority as we move forward. We recognise that while there are a number of interventions that we can use to improve wellbeing, the single most critical factor that improves people's wellbeing is the approach of their line manager.

Our Modern Policing Strategy focusses on the development of a culture whereby people can have more control over their lives, with greater empowerment and ownership over the contribution they make to the force. Now that we are coming out of Covid and the associated restrictions, we are launching our new Inspired Leadership Programme to focus on leadership development.

Further information and questions are posed above, and the response is outlined below:

1. **Monitored absence every day to identify where people need more support." - "Did absence increase? What was the support offered?"**

Absence did fluctuate as per the national absence profile however due to the interventions, including the Rapid Lateral Flow Test, Track and Trace Internal team, extensive People Guidance this was managed to low levels. Support

offered included Occupational Health referrals/interventions and case management by HR/line managers to review and consider how colleagues could be supported. Monitoring was initially done daily and more recently has moved to weekly. That monitoring tells us that although there have been spikes throughout, absence due to Covid now sits at 1.62%, compared to 14.85% at its height in March 2020. August 2020 saw the lowest rates of sickness absence due to Covid when it was 0.38%

2. "Produced lots of guidance and tried to share it widely – a challenge in a large, dispersed force" - with this challenge in mind, how successfully did the guidance actually land with staff?"

Guidance was prepared and updated regularly and agreed through the Operation Jafar governance route. It was then cascaded through the structure with all leads taking responsibility to share and discuss the guidance with their teams. Line managers were provided with a Briefing slide-deck to share with their teams and HR colleagues attended Directorate meetings to ensure that the messages were being communicated. Given the subject matter and the need for people to understand the force approach for their own safety and wellbeing, we think it landed well, something that is borne out by a recent survey in relation to wellbeing, which indicated positive results in relation to communication. We know that Covid guidance and the Covid hub were in the top five most read pages on the intranet consistently from April 2020 through to last month. We also know that 1544 new unique users visited the Covid hub in the last 12 months.

3. How will the force manage the additional leave being carried forward to make sure it does not impact on service delivery?

We are confident that it was the right thing to do to enable people to carry more leave forward, as a result of Covid but also as a result of significant events commitment over the period, which include the European football tournament, G&, COPS26 and the re-emergence of football, increased levels of protest activity (a national trend), and the Commonwealth Games next year.

There is of course there is always the risk that it creates further problems in the subsequent year. For this reason, it is being closely monitored by the Resource Coordination Group (RCG), the Corporate Resourcing Unit, and by monthly management information provided to directorates and Op Jafar to understand and manage leave balances. Annual leave balances for all staff are reported on at the RCG, which is made up of senior representatives from all areas of the force. It reviews annual leave balances at half way and the end of year periods. This is filtered to identify high balance owners and is linked into ensuring our people get sufficient time away from work for their wellbeing.

The SLT leads are responsible for monitoring and managing this with force oversight through the RCG. There are a number of scalable interventions that take place, including force wide communications encouraging people to plan and book annual leave in advance, RCG oversight, senior leadership team review and personal meetings with staff members and their supervisors where required to encourage and ensure they take sufficient periods away from work.

As an example of the three and half thousand people in Staffordshire Police only 559 currently have more than 2 weeks annual leave left to take above the carry

forward balance allowed in April 2022. There is over 6 months of the annual leave year remaining and Christmas leave has not yet been approved due to the annual cycle of Christmas operations planning, in a similar way to many other school holidays Christmas usually attracts and receives the granting of annual leave for our people.

4. How and when will the force look back at its handing of communications about wellbeing to learn for the future?

To date feedback from colleagues and from staff associations about how we communicated in relation to wellbeing through the period has been very positive. We have conducted a Hive survey in relation to Covid and wellbeing, which indicated that 82% of respondents were aware of the health and wellbeing support available, and comfortable accessing it. We are planning to conduct a further survey in the new year to further assess the force support in relation to wellbeing.

In the broader sense, our newly appointed Head of Communications Caroline Tozer, is planning a review of internal communications in its entirety, which will take place in the coming months. In the meantime, we ran an internal comms survey in January 2021 and have developed some next steps, including:

- to introduce content standards to keep content short and to the point where possible.*
- identifying opportunities for topic specific bulletins where possible to increase relevance (this has certainly increased as we did more around Covid-19, Niche (the force record management system) when it launched and other bulletins as and when they have been needed)*
- refine the navigation and introduce an A-Z (the A-Z has now become the most popular page on the intranet to help people find content)*
- look into alternative search engines (unable to progress due to IT not able to complete at this time)*
- redesign our internal communications bulletin, 'The Beat', to make it simpler (we have introduced section headers to try and break up the content and also special focus spaces to give some bits more attention and more opportunity to enhance the look).*

5. What steps is the force taking to make sure that it continues to get and act on feedback from staff on wellbeing concerns – recognising the consistently low response to staff surveys?

The health and wellbeing strand of the Modern Policing Strategy is overseen through the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee. That Committee has responsibility for ensuring that we continue to hit the right mark in relation to health and wellbeing and has relatively recently set up a subgroup specifically to focus on wellbeing, with a budget of £70k for this year to focus on wellbeing activities. Depending upon need we may extend that into the next financial year. That group has pulled together a further Wellbeing Innovation Group, made up of people from across all directorates, who provide ideas and feedback in relation to wellbeing. We also have a number of Wellbeing Champions who continue to engage with local colleagues to understand concerns and feedback

their comments and ideas.

6. What policies is the force putting in place to provide continuing support for people affected by Long-Covid?

Long Covid is a challenge as it is not yet a recognised medical condition. However, we have developed a force policy which has been jointly developed with HR and OH and is currently in consultation.

7. What benefits have there been/will there be from joint working across the force, Fire and Rescue Service and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office?

Throughout the Covid period we have benefitted from a very joint approach to people guidance and the associated processes, creating one set of documentation rather than two for both organisations. We have also been able to share learning, ideas and support across the services, and have been able to disperse staff across joint sites to ensure Covid safety.

Follow-up actions

ETAP would welcome an update on the actions the force is taking – as outlined in responses 1-7 above, as part of ongoing reporting through our usual governance arrangements.

Date for further review/checking on completion

January 2022.