

ETAP Review of Staffordshire Commissioner’s Office (SCO) response to the Covid pandemic: Workforce, Welfare and Wellbeing

What did we review and why is this important?

The SCO has had to balance potentially conflicting aims – continuing to provide a public service for the people of Staffordshire and looking after the welfare of its 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 had two detailed briefing sessions with Victoria Farrar, SCO Head of Governance. Following the first we had access to all available policy documents and procedures. We had a second follow up conversation to get into greater detail and find out about staff feedback to a recent wellbeing survey.

What did we find?

We found that the SCO:

- Acted swiftly based on business continuity plans already in place to set up communication tools, including Zoom and Huddle (a secure online shared workspace) allowing people to still be productive working from home.
- Worked in close partnership with Staffordshire Police and Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that premises were shared in a way that maximised Covid compliance for those unable to work from home.
- Was involved in some good cross-fertilisation of learning with Police and FARS, supported by the coming together of People Services across all three organisations –to provide human resources support – which had happened just before the pandemic.
- Quickly identified the most vulnerable members of staff to discuss their support needs on an individual basis, coordinated weekly by line managers.
- Provided equipment for all staff to allow them to work from home, with information on this captured in the SCO Asset Register.
- Drew on excellent support from Staffordshire Police Occupational Health. Assistance was always available and there was a weekly blog called *Ebb and Flow* produced by the head of occupational health which talked about issues in a very personal way as well as providing information about services available to staff.
- Did not furlough any members of staff.
- Continued to recruit and to bring new starters on board during the pandemic.
- Put in place arrangements to roll over leave from the previous year, raising this from 5 to 10 days.
- Identify significantly positive trends in staff satisfaction based on the engagement survey which the SCO had run at the beginning of the year and from this there was the opportunity to identify trends.

What comments/questions do we have?

We have reviewed a lot of evidence that tells us how the SCO was proactive and focused on delivering its duty of care towards its people with considerable support from People Services and Occupational Health and evidence of partnership working with the Force and FARS.

Our questions:

1. How is the SCO managing the additional leave being carried forward to make sure it does not impact on service delivery, in a relatively small office with limited room for cover?
2. How and when will the SCO look back at its handling of communications about wellbeing to learn for the future?
3. What steps has the SCO taken to build on its engagement survey to recognise trends and to make sure that it continues to get and act on feedback from staff on wellbeing and other concerns?
4. The engagement survey showed that there was interest in maintaining a mix of working from home and being based in the office, in part because the saving in travel time contributed to staff wellbeing – how has the SCO responded to this?
5. We heard that a staff development and review process was being put into place. What progress has been made on this and when will it be fully embedded?
6. What policies is the SCO putting in place to provide continuing support for people affected by Long-Covid?
7. What benefits have there been/will there be from joint working across the SCO, the Police Force and Fire and Rescue Service and how are these being measured?

Response from SCO Chief Executive.

1. **How is the SCO managing the additional leave being carried forward to make sure it does not impact on service delivery, in a relatively small office with limited room for cover?**
That has been a challenge but yes, we have allowed 10 days maximum carry over and paid off any further leave. I anticipate year-end issues this year as well, but have encouraged staff to take their annual leave.
2. **How and when will the SCO look back at its handling of communications about wellbeing to learn for the future?**
As part of the next stage of a Franklin Covey workforce development piece of work, this will be in Q1 of 2022.
3. **What steps has the SCO taken to build on its engagement survey to recognise trends and to make sure that it continues to get and act on feedback from staff on wellbeing and other concerns?**
As above. Next stage of Franklin Covey work is being planned alongside staff survey learning plan, which has been finalised.
4. **The engagement survey showed that there was interest in maintaining a mix of working from home and being based in the office, in part because**

the saving in travel time contributed to staff wellbeing – how has the SCO responded to this?

By rolling out new and better technology and continuing to allow flexibility in work places. We have ensured that there are sufficient desks in the office to meet need (recently the number has been expanded as part of the Covid risk assessment) as a number of individuals prefer to be office based for their own wellbeing. This will be a continuing challenge in the future for different reasons, we have a small number of staff that appear resistant to strike a balance i.e. they want to work at home all of the time. Unfortunately, because of the nature of working with blue light services this isn't always possible and we are working through that.

5. We heard that a staff development and review process was being put into place. What progress has been made on this and when will it be fully embedded?

Covid unfortunately slowed progress in this area but this item is being picked up as part of the Franklin Covey work and is in its final stages.

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

SCO follow Force policy on this as we utilise their HR function. The Force is very sensitive to this issue and developing its policy and guidance. The office does not yet have any Long-Covid cases.

7. What benefits have there been/will there be from joint working across the SCO, the Police Force and Fire and Rescue Service and how are these being measured?

Many in real time, but none of the organisations have yet properly reflected on learning, cultural impact and the benefits / disbenefits experienced. I would see this as a piece of work for later in 2022.

Follow-up actions

An update from the SCO regarding the Franklin Covey work and any learning taken from the Covid-19 pandemic to be given to the ETAP Ethics Review Panel.

Date for further review/checking on completion

Mid-point of FY 2022/23.