

Devon and Cornwall Police Authority Human Resources Committee

17th September 2008

Open for the purposes of FOI

Report of Director of Human Resources

Attendance Management

Recommendation(s):

- (i) To note the position in terms of absence levels and the findings of the report.
- (ii) To note the progress under the Force Improvement Plan to address the key issues.

Introduction / Summary

1. This report provides the Committee with an update on absence levels within the Force for police officers and police staff for the period March to May 2008, detailing any significant trends or issues. It also outlines those steps that have been put in place to improve aspects of managing attendance.
2. The information provided is now in the format of percentage of contracted hours lost rather than average duty days lost to bring the Force in line with Home Office recording and allow for better comparison nationally and within the Force.
3. The Home Office categories for absence will be used for the purposes of analysing duration of absence. The categories are:
 - Short Term absence - Up to 7 days
 - Medium Term absence - 8 to 28 days
 - Long Term absence - 29 days and over
4. The data provided relates to the quarter March to May for 2006, 2007 and 2008, together with the three quarters June to August 2007, September to November 2007 and December 2007 to February 2008 to enable emerging and longer term trends to be identified.
5. Details of the salient points regarding the Force improvement plan aimed at improving attendance management are also included within this report.

Background Information

6. A summary of a statistical analysis is detailed in appendix 1. Appendices 2(i), 2(ii), 2(iii) and 2(iv) contain more detailed information as follows:-
 - Appendix 2(i) – Police officer absence
 - Appendix 2(ii) – Police staff absence
 - Appendix 2(iii) – Comparative Force data from iQuanta for police officers and police staff
 - Appendix 2(iv) – Police officer and staff exceeding capability trigger levels.
7. The key issues identified as a result of a statistical analysis are as follows:

Overall

8. From a national perspective regarding Police Officers, the latest iQuanta statistics available, for March 2008, showed Devon & Cornwall Constabulary as equal 26th ~~=(out of 43)~~ with 4.3% of contracted hours lost against a national average of 3.9%. This was a slight improvement on the position in December 2007 which placed the Force at 28th with 4.4% of contracted hours lost. The national average was 3.9%.

9. The police staff position has improved slightly from 39th in December 2007 to a ranking of 38th in March 2008. In percentage terms, Contracted Hours Lost to absence has also decreased marginally from 5.5% in December 2007 to 5.4% in March 2008. This is against a National Average of 4.4% which has remained unchanged.
10. The most common reasons for absence for both staff groups (police officers and police staff) over the three year period has remained static with the majority of absences reported as due to psychological disorders and musculo-skeletal conditions. Respiratory conditions (e.g. coughs, colds and flu) also feature highly for both groups which would indicate that seasonal factors would appear to have an impact on absence levels at certain times of the year.
11. The numbers of officers and staff outside the capability criteria has remained fairly static between February and May (fluctuating between a low of 885 cases and a high of 893 cases).
12. The capability criteria comprises one of more of the following criteria within a rolling twelve month period:-
 - More than 4 occurrences of absence
 - 28 days or more absence
 - A Bradford Factor score of 300 or more
 Any officer or member of police staff who exceeds these criteria should be reviewed by their line manager to ensure that the circumstances surrounding the absence for each individual is managed appropriately and action plans created.

Police Officers

13. The force wide year on year trend in respect of police officers has seen a steady increase from 3.5% contracted hours lost in March to May 2006 to 4.4% in the quarter this year. This has been due to a steady rise in long term absence levels from 1.8% to 2.6%, although this increase has slowed in the March to May period this year. Musculo-skeletal conditions and psychological disorders have been the main causes.
14. The force wide position for the 12 month period from June 2007 to May 2008 has seen an increase in the first three quarters of the period, peaking at 4.7% contracted hours lost in the December to February quarter with a slight fall in the March to May quarter this year. Seasonal factors may have contributed to this peak, where one of the categories contributing to the increase was short term absence, in particular Respiratory Conditions such as coughs, colds and flu. The main areas of exception are detailed below.
15. The percentage of contracted hours lost due to recorded absence in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly BCU was above the force average in all 6 quarters reported. Operations Department was above average in 5 out of the 6 periods.
16. Conversely, the percentage of contracted hours lost for police officers in Crime Department has remained consistently below the Force average throughout the 6 quarters.
17. For Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU, the year on year trend peaked in March to May 2007 at 5.2% of contracted hours lost to absence, dropping to 4.7% in the same period this year. Absence levels for the last 12 months (June 2007 – May 2008) peaked at 6.1% in September to November 2007, which was the highest level amongst all of the BCUs and Departments. The last two quarters in the period have seen a steady decrease in contracted hours lost finishing in March to May 2008 with 4.7%. This drop has been due in the main to a fall in short term absence in the last quarter. The BCU, certainly in the last 12 month period, seems to be suffering from high levels of long term absence, with the highest overall percentage seen in the Force. The quarterly percentage has remained above 3% throughout the period, peaking at 3.7% in September to November 2007. Psychological disorders and musculo-skeletal conditions were the two main factors contributing to the levels of long term absence, with both

categories making up 49% of the total absence within the BCU in the 12 month period. A number of long term cases have been managed through to ill health retirement with a further three cases part way through the process. Absence rates will fall with the removal of these cases.

18. Aside from March to May 2008, Operations Department has exceeded the Force average on 5 out of 6 occasions. The year on year position peaked in March to May 2007 at 5.4% of contracted hours lost to absence, dropping to a three year low of 4.1% for the period in 2008. The 12 month period from June 2007 saw absence levels peak in December 2007 to February 2008 at 6.2% before dropping significantly to 4.1%, its lowest level throughout. This drop in the last quarter has been due to a fall in all three categories (short, medium and long term), most significantly in the short and medium term absence. The main cause overall within the department is again long term absence levels, predominantly within the last 12 to 15 months. The main contributory factors towards long term absence have again been musculo-skeletal conditions and psychological disorders, with both categories making up 49% of the total hours lost over this period.

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Police Staff

21. The year on year trend for police staff has fluctuated, falling in March to May 2007 from 5.4% to 4.4% contracted hours lost before increasing to 4.9% in the same period this year. Short term absence has remained fairly static throughout the three periods, at 1.5% to 1.6%, whilst medium and long term absence both saw a drop in March to May 2007 before increasing marginally again in the period this year to 1.2% and 2.2% respectively.
22. As with police officers, the force wide position for the 12 month period from June 2007 to May 2008 saw a rise in absence levels for the first three quarters from 4.5% and peaking at 5.8% contracted hours lost. It has subsequently fallen back to 4.9% in the final quarter. The increase in short term absence over the first three quarters was the main contributory factor, again suggesting the influence of seasonal factors on absence levels amongst police staff.
23. The reported levels of absence in Territorial Policing (including Call Management and Communications) were above the Force percentage in all of the quarters. Absence levels have fluctuated throughout the 6 periods, starting with 8.4% in March to May 2006 and culminating in 9.5% in the March to May period this year. However, over the last 12 month period the percentage of contracted hours lost saw a significant increase in the first three quarters of the period from 7.6% to 9.7%, falling slightly in the March to May quarter. Whilst all three categories (short, medium and long term) have been consistently above the Force figures throughout, the department seems to be suffering most from a combination of short and long term absence. The main contributory factors to this were coughs/colds/flu and digestive disorders for short term absence and psychological disorders and musculo-skeletal conditions for the long term absence.
24. Criminal Justice Department and Other Departments were below the overall force percentage in all 6 quarters.

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Improvement plan

27. The following provides a summary of key progress made under the Force Attendance Improvement Plan:
 - The Attendance Management Working Group has been extended to form the Corporate Improvement Group and will be chaired by the Director of HR. The BCU and Departmental

- Single Point of Contact (SPOC's) for Attendance Management have now been identified and will be members of the group. Their primary role will be to act as a focal point for attendance management action on behalf of the Senior Management Team and to support their line manager colleagues on specific cases. The SPOC's will provide updates as to the management of attendance within their respective BCU/Department, on the management of cases exceeding the trigger points and will share good practice.
- Consultation continues to take place with the SPOC's including issues of reporting absence. Furthermore the range of supportive interventions have been highlighted to the SPOC's so they can assist in increasing line managers' awareness of their responsibilities and options for early interventions.
 - The nature of medial assessment support provided by the Force Medical Advisors is to be reviewed and clarified to ensure the necessary focus on activities that can be undertaken by officers and staff (rather than the restrictions) especially to support early return to work.
 - The revised reporting format (percentage lost time) has been approved by the Director of HR and has now been implemented for reporting during 2008/09 to Human Resources Strategy Group (HRSG) and the Police Authority, as reflected within this report. This action is now considered to be complete.
 - On the 16th July 2008 HRSG considered the issue of targets for reducing absence and supported the development of such targets at a forcewide and BCU/Departmental level. This was further discussed at PITG and will progressed with the establishment of bespoke targets for all units.
 - The revised Attendance Management Policy has been agreed in principle by HRSG and further guidance, frequently asked questions, template letters and flow charts are being developed to support the implementation of the policy. The Management of Ill Health – Police Officers continues to be researched and will be revised.
 - Further support arrangements are being implemented through Care First from September 2008 for specialist roles within the Public Protection Unit. This action is now complete and this is being rolled out by Occupational Health Support Unit (OHSU).
 - Work is underway on the Hampshire model of grading police officer roles to improve the management of recuperative and restricted duties. This is being taken forward by a joint force/Federation group.

Background Information

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Summary of Statistical Analysis

Appendix 1

Police Officers

Overall Trends

The main reasons for police officer absence identified across all quarters are as follows:

Long Term Absence	Medium Term Absence	Short Term Absence
Musculo-skeletal	Musculo-skeletal	Coughs/Colds/Flu
Psychological Disorders		Digestive Disorders
		Musculo-skeletal

In terms of absence levels across the six quarters, the following BCUs and Departments were found to be above the Force average on a majority of occasions:

Total Duty Days	Long Term Absence	Medium Term Absence	Short Term Absence
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU	Operations	Operations	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU
Operations	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU	Plymouth BCU	Operations
	Other Departments		Other Departments

Year on Year Trends

The percentage of contracted hours lost to absence in March to May has increased steadily over the last three years. In 2006, the figure stood at 3.5%, rising to 4.4% for the same period this year. Long term absence is the only one of the three categories to have seen an increase over the three years, from 1.8% in 2006 to 2.6% in 2008, although this trend appears to be slowing. Short and medium term percentages have remained fairly constant throughout, averaging 1% and 0.8% respectively.

From a BCU and Department perspective, the following key issues can be identified for the March to May period in the last three years in terms of absence levels: -

Absence	Year on Year Upward Trend	Year on Year Downward Trend
Overall	Plymouth BCU	None
Short Term	Devon BCU	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU
	Other Departments	Operations Department
Medium Term	Criminal Justice Department	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU
Long Term	Plymouth BCU	None

Last 4 Quarters' Trends

There was an upward trend in the overall percentage of contracted hours lost in the first three quarters of the period from June 2007 to May 2008, rising from 3.8% (June to August 2007) to 4.7% (December 2007 to February 2008). This trend was reversed in the final quarter of the period when the figure dropped to 4.4%. This trend was mirrored by short absence, which seems to have been the main cause of the upward trend as the other two categories fluctuated throughout the 12 month period. The percentage for short term absence rose from 0.8% in the first quarter to peak at 1.5% in the third quarter before falling back to 1% in March to May 2008. Seasonal factors could well have influenced the short term absence as a significant amount of absence within this category during the quarter was due to coughs, colds and flu.

From a BCU and Department perspective, the issues for the 12 month period centred around the short term absence as far as absence level trends were concerned: -

Absence	Quarterly Upward Trend	Quarterly Downward Trend
Medium Term	Criminal Justice Department	None

The remaining categories saw fluctuations across the BCUs and Departments.

Police Staff

Overall

The main reasons for absence amongst police staff during the periods are:

Long Term Absence	Medium Term Absence	Short Term Absence
Psychological Disorders	Musculo-skeletal	Coughs/Colds/Flu
Musculo-skeletal	Psychological Disorders	Digestive Disorders
	Coughs/Colds/Flu	Musculo-skeletal

The following BCUs and Departments were found to be regularly above the Force average for each category on a majority of occasions during the periods:

Total Duty Days	Long Term Absence	Medium Term Absence	Short Term Absence
Territorial Policing & Partnerships	Territorial Policing & Partnerships	Territorial Policing & Partnerships	Territorial Policing & Partnerships
Operations	Devon BCU	Operations	Operations
	Operations	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU	
	Plymouth BCU		

Year on Year Trends

The Force percentage of contracted hours lost for police staff saw a downturn in March to May 2007, falling from 5.3% to 4.4% but this position has increased in the period for 2008 to 4.9%. Short term absence has remained fairly constant throughout with an average of 1.6%, whilst both long term and medium term absence have fluctuated more noticeably in the three years. Both categories fell in 2007 and increased in 2008 to 2.2% and 1.2% respectively, although these are lower than the position in 2006 (2.5% and 1.3%).

From a BCU and Department perspective, the following key issues can be identified for the January to March period in the last three years in terms of absence levels: -

Absence	Year on Year Upward Trend	Year on Year Downward Trend
Overall	Devon BCU	Operations Dept.
		Other Departments
Short Term	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU	Operations Dept.
	Plymouth BCU	
Medium Term	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly BCU	Operations Dept.
		Other Departments
Long Term	Devon BCU	Plymouth BCU
		Other Departments

Last 4 Quarters' Trends

Overall, the trend in percentage of contracted hours lost for police staff in the 12 month period has mirrored the police officers in that the first three quarters saw a steady increase from 4.5% to 5.8% before it fell in March to May 2008 to 4.9%. The increases seen in the first three quarters were largely due to an upturn in short term absence which again would suggest a link to seasonal factors.

From a BCU and Department perspective, the issues for the 12 month period centred around the short term absence as far as absence level trends were concerned: -

Absence	Quarterly Upward Trend	Quarterly Downward Trend
Long Term	Devon BCU	

The remaining categories saw fluctuations across the BCUs and Departments.