

Promoting a culture of wellbeing

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Staff health and wellbeing is a top priority for Warwickshire Police

Case study 4 mins read

The National Police Federation conducted a wellbeing survey in November 2018. At Warwickshire Police, 21% of employees responded to the survey.

The strongest themes from the survey were excessive workloads, a lack of resources, time pressures and frequent single crewing. Employees also highlighted that they had limited opportunity for rest and refreshment breaks during their tour of duty.

Of the employees who responded to the survey:

- 92% of respondents stated they had experienced symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression
- 37% stated that they had taken at least one day of sickness absence due to these symptoms
- 45% stated there were negative perceptions of mental health struggles and believed they would be perceived negatively
- 7% described their health as being poor

Changing the culture

As a result, the chief constable announced a year of wellbeing in 2019 and processes were arranged to ensure the focus was visible through all performance and business structures.

An inspector was appointed to work with a sergeant and police constable specifically around the force action plan on health and wellbeing.

The force drew upon the data held locally by the charity MIND to understand the problems identified from employees. Concerningly, there was a high level of suicidal ideation amongst colleagues. This required a structured action plan to address these issues. The force was able to highlight the link between physical and mental health.

A health and wellbeing board was established with inspector, chief inspector and superintendent ranks, as well as police staff equivalents. Six strands under this board focused on:

- officer safety training
- mental health
- employee contribution
- healthy lifestyles
- physical health
- leadership

To ensure full collaboration and legitimacy within the workplace, each of the six strands was underpinned by staff engagement at all levels.

Each strand was also allocated time in a wellbeing calendar of activity for the year, with an itinerary designed to ensure maximum coverage across the force. The activity around this area was also bolstered by the national campaigns around the health agenda and local input.

Officer safety training

Officer safety training and the national fitness test showed officers were struggling with time to exercise and understand their physical health and wellbeing.

Exercise time was therefore built in to working time and officers and staff were encouraged to make use of a two-hour time for physical exercise during a set of tours of duty. This initially saw staff hosting boot camps in open spaces near police stations and practising the bleep test.

Sessions were also supplemented by training within the force's fitness facilities. Specific advice about fitness and healthy eating plans were formulated for officers and inputs on sleep and timing of eating were also offered specifically for shift workers.

Officers were reminded they remained on duty and still had to respond to incidents if required. Physical activity was only approved if it would benefit fitness and wellbeing and was in line with force expectations about activity on duty. The time was only available if staff numbers could still meet operational demand.

Mental health

The mental health strand saw three phases of activity:

- a proactive approach with supporting line managers to spot the signs of mental health challenges
- secondary approaches around mental health trauma
- a reactive approach about signposting

Peer supporters were established to offer assistance to colleagues who wished to seek advice for signposting and support. This also ensured officers and staff could openly talk about mental health to create a supportive working environment.

Leadership

The leadership strand ensured that all supervisory training focused on health and wellbeing and was an agenda item across force meetings and boards. The force ensured leadership training focused on supporting others with early recognition and support for mental health problems and trauma.

The force human resources department was also positive towards flexible working and granted requests while balancing operational and deployment needs. Police community support officers (PCSOs) were traditionally required to work until midnight but this was reduced to a finish time of 11pm.

The wellbeing agenda is supported by the force focus on legitimacy through the Ethics Committee. This discusses and gives advice about issues faced by its staff. It has wide representation including from independent members, police officers and staff, and colleagues from legal, communications, volunteers, human resources, learning and development.

The representatives meet quarterly to review practices in policing and to assist with ensuring collaboration and employee contribution to emerging issues.

As a result of this approach, Warwickshire Police was awarded the Leadership award in the [2021 Oscar Kilo Awards](#).

Wellbeing promise

Following their successful year of health and wellbeing in 2019, Warwickshire Police launched their revised vision and values in 2020, with a workforce promise to put health and wellbeing first.

To support this, the sergeant's development programme was introduced, with a specific input on health and wellbeing.

When the pandemic took hold of the nation, these initiatives had to evolve to be delivered across the workforce remotely, ensuring a clear focus on educating and protecting the workforce against COVID-19.

To support mental health and resilience, a dedicated COVID-19 microsite was developed. Through this and other channels – such as the workforce engagement group – they adapted more learning and training online, increasing communication with the workforce and allowing them access to more remote resources.

Some of the projects implemented were video blogs from the chief officer, sanitation stations, tips on physical fitness and keeping healthy, a new employee assistance programme, the introduction of [Emergency Services Trauma Intervention Programme \(ESTIP\)](#), and the promotion of [Mindfit Cop](#) and individual resilience sessions.

Using previously established benchmarks and listening to feedback from officers and staff, Warwickshire Police has maintained its focus on health and wellbeing and protecting the workforce.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing Wellbeing