

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO:

AP19/42

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL -
6 SEPTEMBER 2019**

SUBJECT: SICKNESS AND LIMITED DUTIES - UPDATE

SUMMARY:

1. This report provides a further update as to sickness and limited duties within the Constabulary, following an initial report to the Accountability and Performance Panel on 8 March 2019.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Accountability and Performance Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

DETAIL OF THE SUBMISSION

1. KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Sickness levels within the Constabulary

- 1.1 As previously outlined in the paper to the Panel on 8 March 2019, the Constabulary monitors sickness absence in comparison with its Most Similar Group (MSG), regionally, nationally and prior performance. Table 1 shows the Constabulary's sickness levels for police officers and staff expressed as a percentage of working hours lost to sickness over the last three years (last financial year not included previously).

Table 1

	Suffolk Police Officers	Suffolk Police Staff
2016/2017	4.5%	4.5%
2017/2018	5.1%	4.7%
2018/2019	4.0%	4.3%

- 1.2 The table shows that the percentage of hours lost to sickness absence reduced from a peak the previous year. For the complete financial year, 33% of sickness for police officers was attributed to Psychological Disorders, 17% Miscellaneous reasons (which include hospital operations) and 17% Musculo-skeletal. For police staff, 27% was sickness was attributed to Psychological Disorders, 21% to Miscellaneous reasons and 15% Respiratory. This information, which is monitored monthly and by area of the Constabulary, provides an evidence base for Workplace Health, Wellbeing and HR intervention.
- 1.3 Data compiled by the Home Office, shows that as at the 31 March 2019, the proportion of police officers on long term sick leave (which is regarded as sickness absence which exceeds 28 days in duration) was 1.3%. This is lower than the national average (1.9%) and lower than the other forces in the Constabulary's MSG such as Devon and Cornwall (1.7%), North Wales (1.8%), Wiltshire (1.5%), Norfolk (1.7%), Warwickshire (1.8%), West Mercia (2.2%) and North Yorkshire (3.5%).
- 1.4 The outlook for the first few months of 2019/20 is that sickness for police officers is higher by 0.3% on the corresponding point of the previous financial year, whilst police staff sickness is 0.8% lower.

Limited Duties

- 1.5 As previously outlined, there are two broad categories of Limited Duties; recuperative duties and adjusted duties. Definitions of these categories were detailed in the paper presented in March 2019, but are replicated below:-
- 1.6 Recuperative Duties - Recuperative duties are defined as "duties falling short of full deployment, undertaken by a police officer following injury, accident or medical incident, during which the officer adapts to and prepares for a return to full duties and the full hours for which they are paid, and is assessed to determine whether he or she is capable of making such a return." A period of recuperative duties should normally last for up to six months although, in exceptional cases, this may be extended to twelve months.
- 1.7 Adjusted Duties - Adjusted duties are defined as "duties falling short of full deployment, in respect of which workplace adjustments (including reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010) have been made to overcome barriers to

working.” Officers will normally only fall within this category when they have been in a recuperative phase for a period of 12 months or where workplace health advice suggests that the restrictions will be prolonged or permanent.

- 1.8 The Constabulary remains an outlier for the high proportion of officers on recuperative duties. Figures published by the Home Office show that the Constabulary reported the highest proportion of officers on recuperative duties across the country (10.8%).
- 1.9 There are a number of factors in relation to this. Firstly, most officers undertaking recuperative or adjusted duties are still effective in their role. The number of officers who are considered non-effective for workforce planning purposes as at the end of July 2019 is 18.61 FTE which represents 1.6% of officer strength. This has remained stable throughout this calendar year, and is monitored on a monthly basis for any changes. The data outlined above shows that the numbers of officers who are long term sick has remained lower than the national average. This has an effect on the number of officers undertaking recuperative duties, as the Constabulary works to accommodate restrictions to support individuals to return to work sooner and complete meaningful duties rather than extend sickness absence.
- 1.10 Secondly, the Constabulary is currently (and during the period from when the data was taken) in the process of re-categorising individuals on recuperative duties in line with the new Limited Duties policy, with the aims of establishing the new category, moving the individual to adjusted duties or closing the record as the officer is now completing full duties. This is currently having an inflationary effect on the number of officers being reported as undertaking recuperative duties in both Suffolk and Norfolk Constabularies. A streamlined process is now being used to accelerate and progress this work, with an expectation that it will be completed by the end of September.

Workplace Health

- 1.11 The Constabulary continues to use evidence from the data to inform interventions to reduce absence from the workplace owing to sickness. The services provided by the Constabulary for officers and staff to improve their mental and physical health have been previously provided to the Accountability and Performance Panel, and therefore detail is provided below in relation to the utilisation of these services for the first part of the financial year.
- 1.12 Management Referrals remain an established route for officers and staff to access services from the Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing Department. Over the first three months of the financial year, 120 referrals were made by line managers. 43 of these were in relation to psychological disorders and 40 were related to musculo-skeletal injuries, whilst the rest are spread amongst the other sickness categories.
- 1.13 The number of referrals has increased by 12 from the corresponding three months of the previous financial year. During this period there were 20 fast track physio appointments which support officers and staff to return to full duties promptly following an injury.
- 1.14 Utilisation of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) continues to be high. The EAP offers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year access to telephone counselling, information services and short term face to face counselling close to home or work. The EAP Freephone number is available for help with a wide range of problems. Officers and staff can access qualified counsellors face to face, by telephone and online as well as specialist debt counsellors, qualified solicitors and financial specialists. From January to March 2019, the total call placed by Suffolk

Constabulary officers and staff was 96m, resulting in 14 cases of face to face counselling.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

2.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

3. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS:

3.1 There are no further implications and risks associated with this report.

ORIGINATOR CHECKLIST (MUST BE COMPLETED)	PLEASE STATE 'YES' OR 'NO'
Has legal advice been sought on this submission?	No
Has the PCC's Chief Finance Officer been consulted?	No
Have equality, diversity and human rights implications been considered including equality analysis, as appropriate?	Yes
Have human resource implications been considered?	Yes
Is the recommendation consistent with the objectives in the Police and Crime Plan?	N/A
Has consultation been undertaken with people or agencies likely to be affected by the recommendation?	N/A
Has communications advice been sought on areas of likely media interest and how they might be managed?	No
Have all relevant ethical factors been taken into consideration in developing this submission?	Yes