

Innovation in Flexible Working

West Midlands Police

February 2009



EFA overview

West Midlands Police has been judged the leading metropolitan police authority in the UK based on a range of measures including crime rates and quality of service.

Police work is tough and demanding for officers and civilian employees. To remain successful, the Force has recognised that it has to encourage a better work-life balance. With an ageing workforce, the Force is also clear that it has to encourage experienced staff and officers to stay on in work. Having succeeded in bringing more women into the Force, it wants to reduce any risk of losing them to more family friendly careers.

Initiative

The Force set out to introduce a range of creative flexible working options with a view to retaining skills and experience while continuing to attract more women into the Force.

Aims of the initiative

By introducing flexible working, West Midlands Police was looking to address a range of issues that affect its ability to attract and retain key skills.

- Working for a police force often requires unsocial hours and long shifts and it can be hard to balance these demands with family responsibilities.
- West Midlands Police has successfully attracted more female police officers and staff many of whom have childcare responsibilities.
- The workforce is ageing and many older workers have caring responsibilities outside the workplace.
- Staff can now work beyond the age of 65 but many who do prefer more flexible working patterns.

Approach taken

West Midlands Police has used networking opportunities with other employers to share best practice and now offers a wide range of flexible working options to all staff.

Flexible working

Staff and officers who are not employed on a shift system can work flexible hours. This allows them to work any hours between 08:00-18:30 as long as they work the core hours of 09:30-16:00. Staff can use flexible hours to accrue up to 10 hours leave a month, which they can take as flexi-days.

Compressed hours

Staff and officers can work five days over four enabling them to take one day off a week. This reduces travel costs as well as freeing people to spend more time with their families and leisure. Compressed hours have proved increasingly popular over the past three years.

Case Study



Case Study

Annualised hours

Staff are contracted to work a given number of hours each year, rather than each week. It enables people to work flexibly when it suits them while the Force continues to benefit from their expertise and commitment. This option is mainly for very experienced staff nearing retirement.

Term time working

All officers and staff with at least six months' service who are the parents or carers of school-aged children are entitled to apply for term time working. Staff take their annual leave plus additional unpaid leave during the school holidays.

Part-time working

This is the most popular flexible working option on offer and takes many forms. Managers and personnel teams endeavour to accommodate the needs of staff and be as innovative and creative as possible to suit individual circumstances and operational requirements.

Job share

Job sharing involves two people performing a single full-time post and sharing the hours equally. Job share partners are treated as part-time workers with pro rata annual leave and pay.

Flexible workplaces

This is proving increasingly popular. Participating employees and officers are provided with laptops so they can work from home or any other location. They also have access to a desk in their team office or another convenient police location.

Excessive hours policy

While not strictly speaking a flexible working option, the Force strives to avoid a long hours' culture. It encourages managers to monitor their team members' working hours and address any staffing issues that might be the cause or result of working excessive hours.

Challenges

Introducing flexible working can be challenging and West Midlands Police had to overcome a range of barriers including:

- The nature of police business is 24/7 and the demands of the job don't allow employees to clock in and out.
- The impact of major incidents means officers can't just walk out.
- The changing age profile of the communities the Force serves and their differing needs.
- Management attitudes to flexible working.

Outcomes and benefits of the initiative

West Midlands Police analyses flexible working data bimonthly and has seen a steady increase in the uptake of flexible working. This in turn has resulted in a range of benefits to individuals and the organisation. For example:

- Staff have achieved a more satisfactory work-life balance.
- The Force has increased its awareness of work-life balance and the diverse personal circumstances staff of all ages face.
- Some staff have saved on travel costs, particularly those who work compressed hours and so make fewer journeys to work.
- Employees are reassured that the Force values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing.



Impact on the organisation

Flexible working is having a broader impact on the organisation as a whole. For example, 27% of officers are female, which is the highest percentage of any police force in the country. In addition West Midlands Police has won several awards for the success of its flexible working in attracting more female officers.

Lessons learned

In retrospect, West Midlands Police says it should have provided more awareness training around flexible working for staff and managers.

There was initially confusion about what different flexible working options were available and to whom, with many staff assuming flexible working was only open to parents of young children. In fact West Midlands Police has extended the entitlement to all staff.

To dispel the myths the Force organised conferences where staff presented their own flexible working stories. And it produced some simple leaflets explaining the different options in plain English. A further conference for line managers demonstrated the positive benefits that flexible working could bring including less absenteeism, higher productivity and greater workforce flexibility.

Case Study