

TAYSIDE JOINT POLICE BOARD

PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE

29 May 2001

Report by the Chief Constable No. PB 26/2001

SUBJECT: MANAGEMENT OF ATTENDANCE

Abstract: This report provides a summary of absence trends within Tayside Police and the steps the Force is taking to address this matter.

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Board note the terms of this report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Reference is made to Paragraph 15 Minute of Meeting of Tayside Joint Police Board of 21 August 2000 wherein the Board approved Report PB 39/2000 by the Chief Constable and the Clerk.

Tayside Police, in line with all other police forces, has a statutory responsibility to report annually the number of working days lost due to sickness. At present information is requested from HMCIC, the Scottish Executive and Audit Scotland. An added complication to these requests for information is that each organisation asks for the details in different formats and different breakdowns. Tayside Police, in common with most Forces, are re-examining the data capture of absence management information with a view to improving systems and procedures and information available to managers.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Absence trends within the Force have shown an increase in recent years and considerable effort has been invested at a local and corporate level to address both short and long term absence. During the past two financial years the number of working days lost are detailed below.

Year	Police Officers	Support Staff
1/4/99 to 31/3/00	16,431	6,424
1/4/00 to 31/3/01	16,003	7,114

Apparent from the above figures is that whilst there has been a small reduction in the number of working days lost for police officers there has been an increase for support staff. A significant proportion of these days lost was attributable to long term absences, including hospitalisation.

However both figures require further investment of time and resources to achieve a situation whereby all staff are at work for an optimum number of days each year.

The number of ill-health retirals in the corresponding period are:

Year	Police Officers	Support Staff
1/4/99 to 31/3/00	19	2
1/4/00 to 31/3/01	14	3

Whilst the last financial year has seen a drop in the number of ill health retirals for police officers, which is welcomed, it remains an area that the Force are continuing to invest considerable time and resources to improve.

Within the Force there is an Occupational Health Department consisting of a qualified Occupational Physician, one full-time and one part-time Nurse, two full-time Welfare Officers and a medical receptionist. This Department provides an opportunity for all staff to self-refer should they consider they would benefit from additional support. In accordance with the Force Absence Management policy staff are counselled during periods of sick leave and upon return to work and referred to the Occupational Health Department in order that appropriate support and assistance can be provided to assist with a recovery back to work. This Department has also arrangements in place with the health authority for rapid access to physiotherapy service to aid recovery and return to work.

In January 2001 a Best Value Review was initiated by the Chief Constable to commence with immediate effect with the following terms of reference:

- i) To examine the means by which sickness absence is recorded within Tayside Police, determine its accuracy and compliance with internal policy and externally set performance indicators
- ii) To assess the impact of sickness absence in terms of resource availability, cost, and hours
- iii) To identify improvements in recording practice
- iv) To identify the extent to which our current occupational health provision impacts upon sickness absence, ascertain the resource and cost implications, and suggest improvements
- v) To review current practice in relation to normal and ill-health retirals and identify improvements
- vi) To identify legislative changes which may impact upon the Force absence management policy
- vii) To benchmark and compare our practice with similar agencies

As members may be aware the terms and conditions of Police Officers are significantly different from that of their support colleagues.

Police Officers are appointed in accordance with the Police (Scotland) Regulations 1976 and the pension arrangements are outlined within the Police Pension Regulations 1987.

As part of these Regulations there is a provision for officers to receive a period of 6 months full pay and 6 months half pay should they experience a lengthy period of absence. In addition to these provisions an Officer can make a request to the Chief Constable to be retained on full pay if he/she considers that their absence is attributable to an "injury on duty". Unfortunately the Regulations do not detail what constitutes an injury on duty and the Force is guided in this respect by our Occupational Physician. Injuries of a physical nature do not present as many difficulties as the occasions when officers claim that their "injury on duty" is attributable to psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, debility, etc.

4. APPEALS

When an officer has been retired on the grounds of ill health the Occupational Physician will determine whether the reason for that officer's ill health is attributable to an injury on duty. This determination, in accordance with the Pension Regulations, provides for an additional financial sum to be awarded in the terms of an "Injury on Duty" payment. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number of officers who have gone on to exercise their right of appeal in respect of not being granted an injury award. The appeal is forwarded by the Clerk to the Police Authority to the Scottish Public Pensions Agency for the appointment of an Independent Medical Referee to adjudicate on the matter. The decision of the medical referee is binding on all parties.

Of the 19 officers ill health retired during 1999/2000 the following is a breakdown in regard to injury on duty:

4 injury awards were made by the Occupational Physician

5 were determined as non-injury on duty and no appeal was submitted

10 appeals were lodged and the appeals process determined that 7 should receive an injury on duty payment and 3 appeals were dismissed

Of the 14 officers ill health retired during 2000/2001, the breakdown is as follows:

4 injury awards were made by the Occupational Physician

5 were determined as non-injury on duty and no appeal was submitted

5 appeals were submitted, and to date one appeal has been dismissed and one appeal upheld

Other Developments

During the last 24 months considerable work has been undertaken in regard to counselling and supporting staff whilst on sick leave. This has resulted in a number of officers returning to work on a modified basis in order that a full recovery for operational duties can be achieved. In addition to the work ongoing internally, the Government have been examining the pension arrangements for police officers with a view to implementing changes to assist Forces and Police Authorities manage the aspect of ill health retirements and the rising costs associated with these. Draft proposals for change were issued during 1998 and considerable responses were received from all staff associations, Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers. A revised consultation document on the "Pensions Review" is still awaited.

- 4.1 The financial implications arising from working days lost due to absence is met from the revenue budget. Costs associated with additional training and development in regard to managing attendance and conducting the Best Value Review will also be contained within the current revenue budget.

5. CONSULTATION

The Clerk and the Treasurer have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

6. CONCLUSION

Tayside Police will continue to investigate ways of providing the necessary support and assistance to all our staff in order that working practices and procedures are not detrimental to health. The results of the Best Value Review will be examined and in consultation with the staff associations and unions an action plan for implementation will be drawn up.

The Force will continue to look at innovative ways of working and endeavour to assist staff balance work and family life. At present, the Force is also preparing and researching a Rewards and Recognition Policy that may help in this regard.



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NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report