



Metropolitan Police Service

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is London's largest employer and due to the nature of their work is always in public view. Yet its very progressive human resource policy is largely unknown.

The MPS wants to be an employer of choice and the work-life balance policy has been designed to ensure that the staff stay with the service as their life commitments change and that any impediments to progression are removed.

Debbie Bishop is the MPS Childcare Co-ordinator and Work-Life Balance Adviser: *"Flexible working had been around since the early 1990s but was largely aimed at women staff with children. There was concern about how individual needs for flexibility could be managed in a 24/7 service. There was little or no promotion or management training. The policy was effectively marginal."*

In 2004 the MPS launched two separate but linked initiatives - the childcare strategy and the work-life balance toolkit. These policies apply to both police officers and staff. The childcare strategy is comprehensive and involves childcare vouchers, discounts at many nurseries and emergency back-up. The toolkit was designed to help balance operational needs for service delivery against the very real individual needs for flexibility. It was widely promoted by the work-life balance team with 160 voluntary representatives based in the boroughs that act as champions. The toolkit has become a key part of overall human resource strategy:

"Amongst other things the toolkit gives the opportunity for managers to say no to requests to work flexibly. The decision should be made on business needs. There are areas of the service, such as specialist crime units, where working part time hours can be difficult. Nevertheless, we do ask managers to have trial periods of three to six months. Then it is possible to make an informed decision about the viability of an option."

There are other clear benefits of the policy. The work-life balance policy has contributed towards a reduction in staff turnover of police officers from 5.3 to 4.5 % and of police staff from 7.4 to 6.2 %. These figures are very low for public sector staff. Fewer employees are now using career breaks as the opportunities to work reduced hours increase. This has considerable benefits for the MPS as it keeps trained and skilled people in the workforce.

"Everywhere I look the figures are increasing. More senior jobs are now being worked flexibly, admittedly from a small base. This is a massive cultural change in quite a short space of time."

The MPS policy has been designed to be wide ranging. Not only do they offer flexible working but they provide support with childcare and other care responsibilities. Increasingly they also have a range of programmes including management training to help women progress in the service. Together this holistic policy has helped increase the representation of women at all levels within the MPS particularly in more senior grades.

One sign that the culture of the MPS is changing is that the take up of more flexible working opportunities by men is increasing all the time. There are now 200 men as opposed to 1,000 women police officers working part time. Compressed hours are also becoming popular with more senior officers.

In 2009 the MPS is planning a big push on promoting the benefits of the childcare strategy. In the past promotions like these have contributed to doubling the uptake. In addition there is a new focus on the needs of carers. *"We see the work as being unfinished. We need to continually promote the policy to new and existing staff as their life circumstances change."*

Supporting Statement

Organisation: Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Approximate number of employees: 50,700

Sector: Public

Brief description of nature of business: Policing London

1. Why is your organisation a good place for parents to work today? We are looking for evidence (eg, maternity return rate, men working flexibly, extra support for carers, senior level diversity) as well as any programmes or initiatives which mark you out from your competitors

The Metropolitan Police Service is London's largest employer and prides itself on innovation and best practice in the workplace, whether policing the streets of London or in a variety of support roles across the capital.

The MPS Flexible Working Policy is available to every member of staff and no one has to give a reason as to why they wish to work more flexibly. In 2004, a 'Manager's Guidance to the Flexible Working Toolkit' was produced to guide managers and individuals through the process. In 2009, over 11% of MPS staff work flexibly (a 2% increase from 2007) and in addition to this the majority of police staff are able to work flexi time.

The Special Leave Policy allows individuals to be granted paid time-off to deal with a short-term crisis, emergency or other family/domestic commitment. Career breaks can be taken throughout an individual's career for a variety of reasons for a total of five years.

The Carers' Policy entitles carers to five days paid carers' leave per year. An additional five days has recently been added, for exceptional circumstances when individuals have multiple caring responsibilities.

The MPS Carers' Support Group was set up in 2006 to provide support and advice for carers. The Group organises regular drop-in days where carers can raise any concerns and meet other carers. It also works with HR and Occupational Health to ensure carers are well supported within the MPS. A Carers' Awareness Day has been held for the past two years, where carers and their line managers could speak to members of the Group and the Work-Life Balance Team and receive advice and information from caring organisations and charities.

An Emergency Back-Up Childcare scheme is available to all parents, enabling them to book a nanny, childminder or day nursery for emergency use. Recently, the scheme has been extended to offer Emergency Homecare which enables staff with adult caring responsibilities to arrange for caring services to be provided.

The MPS offers a generous maternity leave and maternity support leave entitlement. These entitlements are mirrored for adoption leave and adoption support leave. Expectant mothers are sent maternity packs which contain information on work-life balance policies and childcare initiatives.

Childcare vouchers were introduced in 2005 and discounts have been negotiated at over 200 nurseries and holiday clubs. Since the introduction of vouchers to the MPS, over 2,200 parents have made a financial saving and the number has grown steadily over the years due to ongoing promotion of the scheme. These initiatives assist our parents in finding affordable registered or approved childcare. The MPS currently holds the contract for the Westminster Holiday Playscheme. The cost is heavily subsidised by the MPS. Since Easter 2008, a trial Teen Club has been run for the older children.

The MPS offers a variety of career development training packages to support women and enable them to maximise their skills and achieve their potential. Over the last ten years the number of female senior police officers has increased from 4.8% to 9.2% and the recruitment rate has risen from 20.2%

to 40.4%. During this period, the turnover for female police officers has decreased from 6.4% to 3.7%. The number of female senior police staff has increased during this time from 31.4% to 41%.

The MPS understands how important it is for parents and carers to be able to come to work knowing that their dependants are well looked after, that they can take time off when they need to, and that they can work the hours that suit them and their families. The options available to our staff ensure that when they are at work they are able to focus on their jobs and this, in turn, feeds motivation and productivity.

2. Please describe up to three milestones, changes or initiatives which helped the organisation become the great place for working parents that it is today.

In 2004 a Childcare Co-ordinator and Work-Life Balance Adviser was appointed and staff were surveyed to find out what assistance parents wanted from the MPS. Later on in the year a 'Dancing on the Glass Ceiling' event was held for women to establish what obstacles they were facing within the MPS. The results from this work underpinned all the initiatives which have been introduced over the last few years by the Work-Life Balance Team.

In 2004 a 'Manager's Guidance to the Flexible Working Toolkit' was produced. The toolkit explains the benefits of flexible working and offers full guidance on the process and dealing with applications. It was designed to assist managers and individuals to balance operational needs against personal needs and to encourage both to 'Think Flexibly'. Additionally, the Work-Life Balance Team began to provide presentations to managers across the MPS to ensure they fully understood the business benefits of flexible working and how appropriate interpretation of the policy could result in a more productive and satisfied workforce.

In 2007 the MPS introduced work-life balance representatives on each borough. These representatives were volunteers who wished to share their knowledge and commitment to work-life issues on their local borough. They are provided with full support from the Work-Life Balance Team, with seminars to update them on work-life balance policies and to encourage networking. To date there are over 160 work-life balance representatives in the MPS.

3. What was the driving force behind these initiative(s)? This might have been, for example, a particular business challenge, internal or external; leadership shown by an individual; employee demand for change, etc.

Before the Toolkit was introduced in 2004, it was clear that some managers considered that flexible working was a threat to operational capability. Therefore it was essential for managers to be educated in the benefits to the MPS of offering individuals flexible working and to ensure that they understood the need to balance operational needs against personal needs.

The work undertaken in 2004 (as explained in 2 above) enabled the MPS to have a clearer understanding of what issues were preventing individuals from achieving their potential and contributed to the significant increase in female representation at a senior level over the last few years.

The driving force for all of our Work-Life Balance policies and initiatives is to promote the MPS as an employer of choice and a family friendly organisation.

4. How do you think that your initiative(s) or practice, past or current, have influenced other employers?

Since introducing a childcare voucher scheme in 2005, the MPS has encouraged other police forces to join our scheme which has enabled them to benefit from our low negotiated management fee. The MPS is proud that we have many policies and procedures in place e.g. paid carer's leave which other public sector organisations seek advice on and incorporate into their own practices.

The MPS was extremely proud to win the Working Families and NSPCC Family Friendly Employer of the Year Award in 2007. The MPS always strives to be innovative and lead the way for the public sector in introducing initiatives which ensure the organisation is creating a family friendly environment and continues to be an 'employer of choice'.