

Wellbeing intervention for police officers and staff – Pause Point

Enabling staff members who work in high-risk policing areas to request a pause from their role.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Leadership, development and learning Organisation including workforce
Organisation	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Contact	Detective Chief Inspector Sherrie Nash
Email address	sherrie.nash@cambs.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2018
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Workforce

Aim

- Ensure prevention is at the heart of workforce wellbeing.
- Enhance leadership by placing an active responsibility on supervisors to have wellbeing discussions.
- Ensure staff in high-harm roles understand that their welfare is a top concern for leadership throughout the organisation.

Intended outcome

- A reduction in long-term absences linked to work-related trauma.
- An increase in retention of staff in high-harm roles.
- An increase in recruitment to high-harm roles.
- Improved results in workforce satisfaction surveys from those in high-harm roles.

Description

Background

Pause Point is a dedicated wellbeing intervention for officers and staff in high-risk areas of policing, such as child abuse investigation and the paedophile online investigation team (POLIT). These staff are committed and dedicated. They safeguard the vulnerable people of Cambridgeshire with passion, focus and drive. It's essential that these staff are nurtured and retained.

The nature of these investigations, the risk they carry and victim care can impact the health and wellbeing of officers and staff in high-risk roles. This can be detrimental to the long-term health of the individual. It can also potentially have a negative impact on the service provided to the victim.

Pause Point was introduced in Cambridgeshire Constabulary in 2018. It was first used within the protecting vulnerable people (PVP) department, but more recently the process has been encouraged within other high-harm roles.

The initiative was created internally with input from the force occupational health unit to ensure it was the right way to address wellbeing in the department. Trauma responses are not immediate and can build up over time. Pause Point therefore acts as an ongoing and transparent assessment to check staff are thriving, with an emphasis on welfare as opposed to performance.

How Pause Point works

All new starters to the teams have Pause Point explained to them as part of their induction. This ensures it is embedded at the start of their tenure and is seen as normal. Everyone goes through the assessments to ensure fairness and transparency. It does not single out any staff member, so sets a culture that dispels any concern around stigmatisation. It encourages open and honest discussions between colleagues, staff members and line managers.

Assessments

Within the first year of being in a high-harm role, the staff member is seen for a Pause Point assessment by their line manager at three, six, nine and 12 months. The assessments ensure that staff have settled into their role and the nature of the work is not affecting their wellbeing.

Following this initial 12-month period, an assessment is completed again each year.

Absence data suggests that three years is the point at which officers either ask to leave the department or start to exhibit some trauma-related symptoms. In response to this, the staff member is seen by their second line manager at the three-year mark (and subsequent three-year milestones). This is to ensure the staff member is thriving and that staying in the role is suitable for both the officer and the team.

All assessments are recorded on a dedicated form for accountability. A staff member or their line manager can also conduct Pause Point interviews outside of these timeframes.

Requesting a pause from a role

A staff member can request a pause from their role at any point during the assessments. If they do so, this is supported by the senior leadership team.

In consultation with the staff member, a suitable posting is found for them for either three or six months. This aims to give them some respite.

They can either return to their role refreshed and suitable to carry on, or allow time for honest discussions about whether a permanent move is best for their long-term wellbeing.

The short-term posting allows for secondments to other teams and so also supports any future lateral career progression. If a permanent move is the overall decision, this allows the staff member

time to apply for roles without pressure.

The vacancy left when a three- or six-month Pause Point move takes place is carried by the team from which they left, with no backfill. This requires ongoing consideration and management, so as to not adversely affect the wider team.

Welfare-focused discussions

Pause Point encourages honest conversations. The overall aim is a collaborative decision on whether a move is needed. Rather than following a formal question set, the assessment is an informal welfare-based discussion between the officer and their line manager. The discussion is based on understanding trauma impact, knowing the officer and nuances of the particular post the officer is in.

Line managers are prepared for this conversation through training on having courageous conversations and having opportunities to engage with their own line managers.

Enforcing Pause Points

The department superintendent can enforce a three- or six-month Pause Point and (in some cases) a permanent move. This may be used if:

- the need for a Pause Point cannot be agreed with the staff member
- there is suitable evidence and concern that the staff member's wellbeing is being detrimentally affected

Throughout the assessment and any subsequent move, the staff member is kept fully updated and all decisions are transparent.

Other considerations and costs

The Federation and Unison (the public service union) were fully consulted before the process was launched. They support its use and application.

There are no upfront costs associated with this process, but loss of assets is encountered.

Evaluation

Evaluation took place six months and 12 months after the process was introduced. This involved both quantitative wellbeing data (such as absence rates and typology) and qualitative data (via staff surveys and engagement events).

Responses suggested that staff felt Pause Point was a valuable addition to the overall wellbeing support offered. They commented on how it removes stigma associated with opening up to their line managers.

The PVP department has a low absence rate when comparing the nature of the work against other force departments.

Overall impact

Pause Point is now fully embedded as a process within the PVP department. It has allowed staff to actively seek respite from the role. Many have returned refreshed and continued in the department for several years after.

It has also led to some staff members being moved against their wishes. Feedback obtained afterwards was that upon reflection, they valued this and it allowed them time to recover when they didn't realise they needed it.

We have identified that Pause point has achieved the following.

- A reduction in long term absence linked to work trauma. This has been reduced, especially in terms of psychological illness. Currently, PVP average days lost is half that of response colleagues and those in the criminal investigation division (CID).
- An increase in retention of staff in high-harm roles. Compared to other investigative teams within the organisation, retention of staff is high. Staff tend to move on to other specialist teams within the PVP department or for career progression to major crime or promotion.
- An increase in recruitment to high-harm roles. This is currently difficult to assess due to overall detective numbers, but certain roles that use Pause Point are frequently over-subscribed when advertising. However, the direct impact of Pause Point above other job satisfaction aspects cannot be accurately measured.
- An increase in scores on workforce satisfaction surveys for those in harm-harm roles. However, Pause Point cannot be singled out as the driving factor.

Learning

Successes

- The key to the success of Pause Point is communication with staff. Staff were consulted from the start. The potential for concern should management not be consulted on its design and delivery was recognised early on. Pause Point was seen by some as another 'token wellbeing initiative' and took time to be fully supported. Within 18 months it was fully embraced.
- Cambridgeshire found that staff value the process and line managers feel empowered to have open and honest discussions. It provides a safe way for staff to acknowledge they need some respite without fear of judgement. Such is the normality of the process that requesting a Pause Point move is used as common language.

Risks

- There is the potential for staff to misuse the process to seek a move that would otherwise have been rejected. However, the force has genuinely not found that to be the case. This is suspected to be down to respect for the process and the impact its misuse would have on those who genuinely need it.
- There is a risk in managing the vacancy left when a staff member is moved for a three- or six-month respite period. This has caused some issues in terms of managing the vacant post, but is an accepted concern when viewed against the risk of leaving an officer in post. Generally, Cambridgeshire has had no more than one to two Pause Point moves per year.

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Tags

Wellbeing Mental health Child abuse