

Agenda Item 7c

Meeting	Police and Crime Panel
Date	4 th June 2020
Report Title	Operation Uplift – COVID-19 Implications
Report presented by	Angus Macpherson, Police and Crime Commissioner
Author	Kieran Kilgallen, Chief Executive

Purpose of report

1. This report provides an overview of implications on Operation Uplift and recruitment due to the COVID-19 outbreak

Introduction and background information

2. The national Uplift programme is an opportunity to increase resourcing and re-invest in policing further to a ten year period of austerity and a fall in police officer numbers.
3. The service has been asked to introduce 2,000 extra officers by March 2020, rising to 6,000 extra officers by March 2021.
4. At the last Police and Crime Panel, a paper outlined the local implications for Wiltshire, stating that Wiltshire has to recruit 49 extra officers by March 2021. High level assumptions continue to be made on financial and workforce plans for beyond March 2021, which suggest a total number of 147 extra officers by March 2023.
5. In order to achieve the uplift numbers, in addition to maintaining the numbers required due to officers leaving the organisation, Wiltshire will be required to recruit over 400 officers up to March 2023. It is estimated at this stage that one in eight applicants get through the process, resulting in needing approximately 3,200 applicants for police officer jobs in Wiltshire – this is a huge requirement.
6. The current intakes and 'landing' dates are as follows:

Start Training	Officers	Landing in teams	Finish Tutorship
Oct-19	37	Apr-20	Jun-20
Feb-20	20	Aug-20	Oct-20
Jun-20 (first PEQF)	40	Nov-20	Jan-21
Oct-20	20	Apr-21	Jun-21
Jan-21	40	Jul-21	Sep-21
Mar-21	20	Aug-21	Oct-21

Figure one: Officer intake timeline

7. As was outlined in previous Panel reports, the process to bring in new officers is extensive and multi-faceted. It is important that we attract, recruit and train the highest quality candidates in order to carry out such an important role in our society. However, COVID-19 has impacted on every aspect of this. The report will now provide a summary of impacts for current officers in training, adjustments of the curriculum, the most recent campaign in March 2020, pre-medical assessments, biometrics and entry assessments.

Current officers in training

8. On the 18th March, the Chief Executive Officer of the College of Policing communicated that due to an inability to comply with College reaccreditation and Continual Professional Development requirements, Forces were able to derogate other training, ensuring accreditation for an initial period of three months until 18th June 2020.
9. The Chief Constable agreed that from 18th March, only essential training should continue and the derogation should be taken. It is likely that the derogation will cause a number of challenges for the Force when this ends and a backlog of accreditation needs to be resolved.
10. Essential training was defined as Police Officer intakes currently in training having started in October 2019 and February 2020 Initial Police Learning Development Programme (IPLDP) 34 and 35 respectively) and fitness tests for new police officer recruits (June 2020 – Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) and the Special Constables in training intake 35). This effectively means that all other training which requires face to face delivery has been paused, including Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) (originally scheduled in May 2020) and Local Crime Investigator (LCI) (originally scheduled in June 2020) recruitment and training.
11. The College of Policing have said the following in relation to IPLDP:
 - Under normal circumstances, the College would expect IPLDP to be delivered and assessed in line with all relevant guidance issued for the programme
 - The current extenuating circumstances may mean that some delivery and assessment methods are not appropriate, and that changes need to be made in the short to medium term
 - The College supports changes to the delivery and assessment methodologies that are used to encourage social distancing during the time the national COVID-19 virus emergency measures are in place
 - Any changes to IPLDP delivery and assessment should be considered and risk managed locally.
12. Outlined in figure one, October 2019 shows that the Force received and started training 37 officers who were due to arrive within community policing teams in April 2020. On 17th March, the Force made the decision to end IPLDP 34 three weeks early in order to release officers into CPTs across the County, providing additional resilience at a time when the workforce would likely be under strain.
13. Officers joined their Community Policing Team (CPT) on 23rd March and missed out on practical scenario and role-play sessions that will be addressed through tutorship, assessment and further inputs as required during their probation.
14. IPLDP 35 was also assessed to see if this course could be finished earlier to provide resilience to the frontline. Where at all possible, IPLDP 35 initial learning was delivered online, or remotely (i.e. not face-to-face). Where face-to-face delivery was unavoidable, social distancing and universal hygiene measures (and if relevant, Personal Protective Equipment), were in place. However due to COVID, there were limitations to the level of training that could be provided.

15. In early April, Gold Command made the decision to reduce this course by 6 weeks, with students therefore leaving training and starting in CPT on 1st June 2020. This was due to the limitations that the COVID situation would enforce on the training. Students would predominantly lose guest speakers, a trip to Court and role play exercises. Options to mitigate this include online learning packages, knowledge gained from workbooks, covering of topics during tutorship and/or returning to class (or webinar when developed) later in probation. Of the 20 students on IPLDP 35, 18 are former Special Police Constables (SPCs), PCSOs, Detention Officers (DOs) or LCIs. They are an experienced group with practical familiarity.

Emergency Curriculum

16. Due to the resilience challenges faced by some Forces, the College of Policing released an emergency curriculum for early deployment of student officers. This covers the learning associated with the basic operations expected of constables on patrol, such as ethics and values of the service, use of police powers, professional standards expectations, providing public support, protecting the vulnerable and legislation relating to common policing incidents that officers are likely to encounter. After 7-8 weeks, student officers will be able to be deployed on accompanied patrol only.

17. With the next intake in June 2020, the Force reviewed whether this was something to utilise however decided to continue with the Police Education Qualification Framework as this kept consistent joining expectations, improved the quality of training and utilised the partnership with the University. Although the emergency curriculum would work for many larger Forces, it was not felt to be something that would support Wiltshire at this time. When considering these options the force decided to move the start date for the June 2020 intake, from the 1st June to the 29th June. This affords Recruitment more time for pre-employment checks to maximise the intake numbers, and it provides Professional Development with more time to convert the learning materials to online delivery.

March 2020 Campaign

18. Wiltshire Police launched a campaign on the 9th March which aimed to bring in 300 applicants to support the next phase of Uplift recruitment. This was achieved within 5 days and is likely to support the next 12 months of recruitment.

19. It is currently unknown how COVID will impact on recruitment figures and processes in the long term. There is a chance that candidates could be more likely to not want to join due to factors such as instability, finances or risk. Alternatively it could attract more positive attention in the way policing has supported the Country through COVID and how the roles can provide some stability in these uncertain times. Only time will tell on this.

20. In the 2019 campaign, awareness events were carried out which proved to be very positive and beneficial to candidates to get an insight into policing. Under the current environment, the Force hosted awareness events via webinars which took place on the 12th, 14th and 16th of May. This was made up of a 1.5 hour session covering a 'Day in the life of a police officer', the PEQF entry route and assessment processes. A high proportion of the candidates attended the three sessions.

Pre-employment medical assessments

21. To enable Occupational Health (OHU) professionals to progress the police application medicals to achieve Uplift objectives, amendments to face-to-face medicals were made by the College.

22. An additional questionnaire has been devised by the OHU team. The questionnaire is triaged to identify the need for further clinical investigation of declared health problems and to progress those applicants with no declared health problems through the recruitment process. The assessment is performed by a telephone consultation. Prior to the appointment the applicant is required to complete a number of questionnaires providing in-depth medical history and biometric detail. A declaration relating to honesty and integrity is also completed. The College of Policing are due to review this interim process on the 30th June 2020.
23. This questionnaire temporarily replaces the following assessment performed by the biometrics, preventing face to face contact: Height, weight, BMI, urinalysis, blood, protein, sugar, blood pressure, spirometry visual acuity and colour vision, audiometry and muscular skeletal assessment.
24. This questionnaire is to be risk managed by Forces and on appointment the recruit will require a face to face assessment on all the aspects above. The candidate will be asked to self-declare which cannot completely replace objective testing. Should it be later found that the candidate has been dishonest with their disclosure, then the force has the discretion to deal with this robustly. This must be included in the offer letter to the candidate.
25. Applicants with declared health problems requiring further assessment should be assessed by the appropriate occupational health practitioner when appropriate and this will have to be deferred until this can be undertaken.
26. As far as possible, the force's occupational health service should reach a decision about fitness without recourse to seeking reports. Where there are doubts about an individual remaining fit enough to serve until normal pension age, the Force Medical Advisor should assess the applicant and, based on their medical knowledge, experience and careful assessment of the prognostic indicators known, give an opinion about fitness to join the pension scheme. It is recognised that this will be the best possible judgement based on the available evidence.

Biometrics

27. Regulations state clearly that biometric vetting checks must be made prior to appointment. The College cannot advise Forces to test on appointment.
28. Questions were raised as to whether candidates and staff would be unsure as to whether attending biometric screening is an essential activity for which they should travel. The coronavirus restrictions regulations permit travel for the purposes of work, and having discussed this with the Home Office, their clear advice is that this permission also applies to biometric screening activity for candidates and the staff who administer them.
29. COVID-19 issues may however mean that the usual staff are not available to carry out the process. Wiltshire therefore put a process in place where Biometrics can be carried out custody units, with the appropriate PPE used, to enable this essential recruitment activity to continue.

SEARCH Assessment

30. The ability for forces to continue to recruit new officers during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to maintaining police officer numbers and keeping the public safe. To enable the service to continue with planned recruitment, the College of Policing have worked at pace, with colleagues

across the service, to develop an interim solution that enables all forces to continue the recruitment of police constables without the need for face-to-face contact.

31. An online assessment process has been developed that enables effective assessment of the required competencies and values and meets the current standards for assessing new recruits. This temporarily replaces the existing SEARCH assessment process for new recruits. The College has put in place a testing and development process and has started the initial roll out to a small number of forces through which they will conduct benchmarking and validate standard setting.
32. The College are working closely with the Police Uplift Programme team and forces on an implementation plan so that the online assessment process is available for all forces by the end of June. Wiltshire is due to use this new system in June which was in the original plan to train officers from the recent recruitment campaign.
33. An online assessment is a positive for Wiltshire as there was always a challenge to get enough spaces in a neighbouring Force, and ensure travel is not an issue for candidates.
34. To ensure consistency and fairness to candidates throughout the period of the pandemic the online assessment process will remain in place throughout the remainder of 2020. The College will conduct a full review later in the year and give forces notice well in advance of any reintroduction of face-to-face assessment centres.

Summary

35. Overall, there has been a significant amount of change for the Uplift programme due to COVID. It has been a clear priority from the College and the Government to continue with this programme and as outlined in this report, the majority of amendments have supported Forces to continue recruiting new officers, and in some cases provided new opportunities.
36. The true impact on the Uplift programme will not be felt for some time to come, however Wiltshire continue to plan and expect to meet the Uplift numbers required.