

Getting the right people for the Western Australia Police

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SUMMARY OF KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Work-life balance impacts our whole society – the community, government and business.

Our organisation faces the challenges of trying to achieve work-life balance in an operation that runs 24/7. Naturally, we have some big challenges and the biggest emerging for us are in recruitment and retention.

We are looking to fill a vast number of policing positions with the right people for the job – people who not only have the necessary skills we are looking for, but who are representative of the community we serve and who have the kind of character that befits working for our organisation.

We want to attract the highest calibre job candidates available and we are trying to do this in a job market that is incredibly buoyant in this state at the moment.

Attitudes to work in our community have shifted and from a recruiting perspective, lifting the profile of the WA Police in the minds of the community has never been more important for the agency than it is right now.

Frontline First has been a major contributor to the improvement of our public face over the last 18 months.

166 officers from a reserve of over 6000 statewide have been shifted from desk jobs to working on the beat, to meet the new service delivery standards we've set for ourselves and that the Western Australian public expects of us. Police visibility in our community is better now than it has ever been.

Frontline First is also geared at getting the right people at the right time in the right place doing the right thing, deploying our resources and effectively putting in place systems that will effectively service our community in a consistent manner.

As part of this philosophy, we have renewed our focus on training and development, integrity, expertise and leadership, diversity, skills, ideas and experience. We need personnel who are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver these services and practice the highest standards of professionalism. We want people who want to deliver a great service.

While this new operational philosophy has become the nexus of our thinking, it has also provided us with significant resourcing challenges. Our

management now has to balance the spread of increased patrol hours, night shifts, weekend work and overtime on their rosters, across the entirety of our policing workforce.

As a result, considerations such as child-care, family commitments, personal and annual leave time have become an issue for a high percentage of our officers, when they were less of an issue before. There are now more pressures to meet job requirements than ever and for this reason, work-life balance has become a topical issue within our organisation right now.

In response to this and in recognition of the important value our officers and public service staff represent to our policing capabilities, we are continually looking at ways in which we can improve the retention of our employees and support work-life balance.

Exit Interviews help our managers to monitor trends in resignation rates and reasons for leaving, and Induction 'success development' Interviews help them to understand what new employees' needs are and how these can be met within the work environment.

The WA Police has many initiatives currently in place that assist employees in maintaining a balance between responsibilities at work, pursuing personal interests and caring for their family.

Some of these include provision of training, education and scholarships; study leave support; managing childcare arrangements for employees working in country towns and remote areas, along with a variety of Flexible Work Options (FWO) that include part-time employment and home-based work and telecommuting options; flexi leave, family, parental, carers' and purchased leave policies and flexible working hours.

We are always keen to find ways in which we can enrich the quality of our employees' work life, which adds to their overall wellbeing and sense of being acknowledged and rewarded at work.

We've been able to demonstrate this by supporting our Reservist officers, in allowing time off for their defence duties. We've supported the development of the Women's Advisory Network (WAN), which provides a voice for women in Police in WA. Formal reward and recognition of employees, improving the working and living conditions for officers working in the remote parts of the state and promoting diversity within the organisation have all significantly contributed to improving the culture of our workplace.

We place a tremendous value on those members of our organisation who have worked for us for long periods of time. Ensuring we are in a position to meet their changing work-life needs is critical for us if we are to preserve policing stability on the frontline. We don't want our officers to leave, but recognise that policing isn't an easy career and is often regarded as a stressful occupation.

We are continually looking at ways in which we can minimise the occupational stress in policing, as its potential negative consequences affect our community in more direct and critical ways than stress in most other occupations.

I'm a strong advocate of exercise and personal fitness and I can't emphasise the virtues of each enough to our officers and staff. As the first Commissioner for some time who is the father of small children, I know more than most what it is like to juggle a demanding job and parenthood. My physical health and fitness have played a vital role in achieving a balance in both and this philosophy is something I'm hopeful our employees will voluntarily adopt themselves during my term as Commissioner.

Over the next 12 months, the WA Police will initiate a variety of new health and fitness programs throughout the organisation. These will be promoted through our internal communications network and endorsed by the WA Police Sports Federation, which play a central role in facilitating the roll out of any fitness-related programs we undertake.

We are utilising a variety of research tools to help us better understand the realities of policing work and what our officers' perceptions are of this. We're developing and using innovative solutions as we go. In doing so I believe we are making progress. Not only in work-life balance, but in improving our service delivery to the community - the two are inextricably linked.

Ultimately, we are striving to become an employer of choice. This is a vision that is driving diversity and the highest standards of professionalism in our workplace.

We're developing solutions to help our people enjoy the benefits of policing while reducing occupational stress and some of the other negative impacts on work-life balance.

While we are not afraid to continue placing our community's satisfaction in the way we deliver our services to them at the top of our strategic charter, we realise we have some way to go yet before we achieve more sophisticated work-life balance policies for our officers.

I don't believe we will ever be able to achieve workplace 'nirvana' within the WA Police, due to the very nature of our work, but I do believe in the importance of continually developing the relationship with our employees to implement the solutions needed to achieve a harmonious balance.

The State Government is currently developing policy to promote work-life balance as a public sector priority and the WA Police is one of the largest public sector employers in this state, with the role of policing the world's largest single policing jurisdiction. We have a significant responsibility to our employees and as a major employer in WA, to lead by example on this issue.