

Case Study: Emergency Services



London Ambulance Service **NHS**
NHS Trust

London Ambulance Service

Executive summary

London Ambulance Service (LAS) are the busiest emergency ambulance service in the UK & provide healthcare that is free to patients at the time they receive it. Furthermore, LAS are the only London-wide NHS trust & have over 4,500 staff, who work across a wide range of roles based in 70 ambulance stations within 22 complexes. LAS serve more than seven million people who live and work in the London area.

Funding for the trust changed in 2014 and LAS needed to evidence their ability to meet the demands for frontline healthcare in the London area prior to securing full funding. In order to achieve this and as part of an over-arching modernisation programme, LAS used the services of Working Time Solutions (WTS) to assist in the development of new rosters for double crewed ambulances (DCA), fast response vehicles (FRV) and motor-cycle response units (MRU).

Key Drivers

- To be "A world class ambulance service that responds appropriately to all our patients"
- Address misaligned working patterns and spend money wisely
- Match station rosters to new ORH demand levels for the trust & protect training time
- Improve response times at evenings and weekends
- Match station rosters to new ORH demand levels for the trust
- To improve the quality of care LAS provide to their patients, whatever their clinical need, so that they get the best health outcome
- To develop their staff so that they have the skills and confidence to provide the high-quality care that patients expect and deserve

Key Challenges

- Over 100 rosters required as design agreed at station and vehicle level
- Existing shift patterns were not in line with demand requirements
- Huge overtime expenses and use of private ambulance services (PAS)
- High levels of staff utilisation while at work had huge impact on work/life balance and staff attrition
- Large number of stakeholders
- Difficulties in gaining acceptance in previous roster review projects from some complexes/stations.

Key Outcomes

- Successfully proved to commissioners ability to meet demand
- Improved patient care - variable cover that met intra-day demand 365 days a year
- Manageability of resources - maximum 4 rosters per station, reduction from current levels
- Better work/life balance for employees through reduced utilisation rates and improved planning
- Minimised overtime
- Reduction in use of PAS
- Training time provisioned.

Key Learnings

- Commitment from key management is vital to ensure success
- Involve representatives from all areas of the business from the beginning
- Consider all options-be responsive to suggestions & alternatives from the work group
- Communicate clearly, consistently and constantly
- Utilise an objective third party such as Working Time Solutions for expertise, insight and credibility

Background

In order for LAS to receive their full funding from commissioners, they needed to be able to demonstrate that they had a future proof process to meet the demands of the London area for front line healthcare. Part of the modernisation project incorporated new ways of working, based on demand led rostering which was agreed by LAS commissioners, senior LAS management, unions (GMB and Unite) and staff.

The Challenge

In order to improve the patient experience and reduce high levels of staff utilisation, LAS committed to change a number of key areas regarding how patients were responded to. This process was analysed from the initial call into the service, to how patients were categorised, and the kind of response that was subsequently provided.

One of the areas investigated was with relation to shift patterns. Rosters would need to meet the patient demand for specific CCG's and take into account parameters provided by LAS, which included contractual obligations, estate sizes and vehicle capabilities (ambulance, car, motorcycle and bicycle).

Part of the challenge was that once the data was provided to WTS and utilised within the WORK Suite software the project team were aware that the initial data set had not accounted for estate sizes. A 2nd iteration needed further work to ensure that no station ran without at least 1 DCA 24x7 and no pattern was night work only. These updates did not affect the overall demand requirement, however, they did impact where the demand would be serviced from.

The Solution

Working Time Solutions were briefed to support the creation of new shift pattern designs. LAS stipulated that the patterns must not exceed the existing 37.5 hour weekly equivalent contract, must provide an allocation of 24 hours for training purposes (Individual Learning Account) for each employee over a 12 month period, meet the demand requirements of the service and be in keeping with the contractual obligations of the employees.

Internal roster reviews in the past suffered from high levels of mistrust in the data and the process from staff. Consequently, many of the rosters designed were either imposed or implemented late meaning they were no longer in line with demand, and in some cases not implemented.



The Solution - continued.

In light of this the organisation took an engaging approach to the project which involved three key meetings, plus interim sessions to work through specific rosters with workgroups from the 22 complexes. The workgroups included representation from central management, complex management, staff-side union representatives and staff from each of the 70 stations. In total, 88 meetings were conducted over a 6 month period which gave employees the opportunity to direct questions and thoughts to the project team.

Using its Work Suite scheduling software, Working Time Solutions created alternative shift demand 'templates' that could be presented at the initial meetings to enable the workgroup to seek preferences from staff back at station. Employee feedback was collated and shift pattern designs were created with these preferences in mind. Following further modifications with work groups, two different shift pattern options were selected and staff were invited to vote for their preferred option.

During the process it was agreed that there could be multiple rosters per complex to increase flexibility and meet local requirements. For example, preferences may differ regarding shift length (12 hour shifts or shorter shifts), number of night shifts and shift design (longer runs of shifts with longer, less frequent breaks or shorter runs of shifts with shorter, more frequent breaks).

The Outcome

92% of the new roster patterns were signed off during the working time change project, with only 8% requiring escalation to Joint Secretaries in order to progress through to implementation. This was a significant improvement on previous internal roster reviews which had successful sign off of less than 50% of the roster patterns. LAS expect to implement the new working patterns in summer 2014.

Working Time Solutions worked closely with the project team, senior LAS management, the trade unions and staff to ensure that the options generated took into account the aspirations of the employees while ensuring they met the underlying demand. This was key to improving patient care, staff utilisation levels and future funding levels.

