

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**MEETING: 15 SEPTEMBER 2008**

SUBJECT: ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, FINANCE OFFICER, PERSONNEL ADVISOR AND CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs Members of the content of attendance management study report by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Communities and Local Government (CLG) in which this Authority was a participant.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2007 HSE and CLG commissioned a corporate study into the management of sickness absence within the fire and rescue service with the actual study work being undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research.
- 2.2 The study was designed to provide elicited comprehensive information on the following:
- The nature of current policies and practices;
 - Views and experiences of policies and practices among different types of staff;
 - The degree of which policies and practices reflect recent recommendations;
 - Barriers and facilitators to adopting recommended practices; and,
 - Practices that are considered useful and how policy and practice might be improved.
- 2.3 Five fire and rescue services were selected for inclusion in the research with the aim being to have a diverse set of organisations so that overall findings of the study would be relevant to as wide a range of fire and rescue services as possible. Key criteria for the selection of fire and rescue services covered the following:
- The need to select one organisation from each of the five FRS 'family groups'
 - Different patterns of sickness absence between the selected organisations
 - Different governance arrangements, selected from different geographical regions
- 2.4 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was selected due to its average level of sickness absence at the time of the study, its improving sickness absence performance from 2000 to 2005 and its governance arrangements.

3 REVIEW SUMMARY

3.1 The research work has now been completed and the report (which does not make reference to individual fire and rescue services) has been published and is available on:
www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr632.htm

3.2 In addition, the National Centre for Social Research has also prepared a confidential review for this Authority, as one of the five participants, which identifies key aspects of the Authority's approach to attendance management. It highlights issues that emerged as particularly relevant to the Authority in the further development of policy and practice.

3.3 The Tyne and Wear specific report is attached as appendix A and some of the positive areas to note in the report were that:

"Tyne and Wear has the most robust approach among the five case studies (in respect of contact during sickness absence) and serves as a good example of effective practice".

"Tyne and Wear place more emphasis on early referral to occupational health ... and this compares well with other case study services".

"Tyne and Wear appeared to have progressed further than other services in embedding a change in attitude to modified duties and phased returns".

3.4 The review also concluded that:

"Tyne and Wear has a clearly documented policy for the management of sickness absence, and interviews with staff confirmed that occupational health arrangements were both effective and highly valued by line managers and employees".

3.5 The review did also highlight some areas for improvement and these are as follows:

- Further guidance and training for managers on the implementation of sickness absence policy, focussing particularly on helping managers understand the importance of consistency in the application of trigger point interviews for both supporting and monitoring employees' attendance, and the role of occupational health;
- Continued emphasis on the interrogation and utilisation of performance management information to support performance targets;
- Auditing and evaluating outputs and outcomes relating to resourcing of the accelerated medical support scheme and trauma support team to maximise the prevention and reduction of sickness absence.

3.6 The Chief Fire Officer considers this report to be a positive reflection of the attendance management policies of the Authority providing the additional assurance of an external accredited audit. The proposed improvements are now being implemented within the Authority in a further attempt to continue to reduce absence due to sickness.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 A risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the risk to the Authority has been minimised as far as practicable. The assessment has considered an appropriate balance between risk and control; the realisation of efficiencies; the most appropriate use of limited resources; and a comprehensive evaluation of the benefits. The risk to the Authority has been assessed as medium utilising the standard risk matrix based on control measures being in place. The complete risk assessment is available on request from the Chief Fire Officer.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are some financial implications by virtue of this report which are considered to be minimal and can be met from within existing budgetary headings.

6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of this report;
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

Attendance Management in the Fire and Rescue Service