

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Ged Fitzgerald
Clerk to the Authority.

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Meeting of the HUMAN
RESOURCES COMMITTEE to be
held in the Fire Authority Rooms at
the Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Nissan Way,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on
MONDAY, 10TH JULY, 2006 at
10.30 A.M.

AGENDA

Part I

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1.	Appointment of Chairman	
2.	Apologies for Absence	
3.	Appointment of Vice-Chairman	
4.	Receipt of Declarations of Interest (if any)	
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	(Copy for information herewith).	
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Our Vision Statement:
"CREATING THE SAFEST COMMUNITY"

Our Mission Statement:
"TO SAVE LIFE, REDUCE RISK, PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN SERVICES AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT"

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

The following reports are not for publication as the Committee is likely to exclude the public during consideration thereof as they contain information relating to any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual or information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matters arising between the authority, information may also relate to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Part II

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| 10. | To Note Minutes of the Personnel and Training Committee – Part II | 22 |
| | (Copy herewith). | |
| 11. | Single Status – Job Evaluation | 23 |

GED FITZGERALD,
Clerk to the Authority.

Civic Centre,
SUNDERLAND.

3rd July, 2006.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Ged Fitzgerald
Clerk to the Authority.

PERSONNEL AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
PERSONNEL AND TRAINING
COMMITTEE held in the Conference
Room, Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Pilgrim Street,
Newcastle upon Tyne, on MONDAY,
21ST NOVEMBER, 2005 at 10.30 a.m.

PART I

Present:-

Councillor Bollands in the Chair

Councillors Cooney, Huscroft, Reynolds and Young.

Appointment of Chairman

1. RESOLVED that Councillor Bollands be appointed as Chairman of the Personnel and Training Committee for the ensuing period to the next Annual Meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Forbes, O'Neill, Richardson, Rippeth and Woodwark.

Our Vision Statement:
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Our Mission Statement:
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Appointment of Vice-Chairman

2. RESOLVED that Councillor O'Neill be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Personnel and Training Committee for the ensuing period to the next Annual Meeting.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it contained exempt information relating to employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972, Part I, Paragraph 1).

(Signed) D. BOLLANDS,
Chairman.

Note:

The above minutes comprise only those relating to the items during which the meeting was open to Members of the public.

Additional minutes in relation to other business are included in Part II.

SUBJECT: FIRE AND RESCUE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK 2006/08 – HR ISSUES**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2006/08 includes fire and rescue staff issues.
- 1.2 Within chapter 5 of the document certain areas are designated as being within the remit of individual fire and rescue authorities, whilst others should be addressed via the Regional Management board. This report therefore provides an overview of the progress made and the future work programmes in respect of 'people' issues.

2 OVERVIEW

- 2.1 Paragraph 5.13 of the National Framework states:

Fire and Rescue Authorities, through Regional Management Boards, should:

- *draw up a regional HR strategy by Autumn 2006, encompassing recruitment, learning and development, occupational health, health and safety, medical advice services, sickness/ill health management, discipline, mobility and a regional equalities strategy;*
- *identify and implement the most efficient and effective means for the region to deliver these services, including through lead authorities or outsourcing where appropriate;*
- *ensure regional HR strategies are compatible with local IRMPs. (It is for each Regional Management Board to decide which issues, in addition to those set out above, are best dealt with in the regional strategy and those which fall within IRMPs and are best dealt with locally, and to ensure that there is a good fit.)*
- *ensure that they undertake appropriate Equality Impact Assessment of all their policies, plans, procedures or practices in accordance with legislative requirements.*

- 2.2 The Regional Management Board is to consider a Regional HR Strategy and a Regional Equalities Strategy which cover all relevant issues. Those Strategies are on the agenda for the meeting today, for consideration and approval by Members.

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- 2.3 The issues of recruitment and learning and development will be considered in a future reports, although Members are advised that this Authority leads the regional recruitment team for wholetime firefighting staff. One of the action points to consider within the HR Strategy is that of further developing recruitment and delivering on a regional scale for all fire and rescue service posts.
- 2.4 A statement detailing the Core Values has been developed for the Fire and Rescue Service by a stakeholder group led and facilitated by CFOA. The Core Values, set out clearly the principles which the Service considers are fundamental to the development of an organisation which values and supports all members of its workforce and provides an effective service to the whole community. The Core Values have been developed to apply to both the Fire and Rescue Service as an organisation and to all members of staff. They provide a clear statement of the expectation of the Fire and Rescue Service with regard to the attitudes and behaviour's of all staff whatever their role within the organisation. This authority has fully adopted the core values and integrated them into policies and procedures, with awareness development continually provided by the Equality and Diversity Officer.
- 2.5 The Authority also ensures that all members of staff are treated fairly and afforded equality of opportunity, including developing staff in a way which takes account of the differing needs of the individual, in order to deliver the Authority's aims and objectives effectively. We also ensure that that development opportunities are better tailored to the needs of each member of the workforce.
- 2.6 Development has been ongoing in the Service with regard to possible changes to duty systems and work routines. The Authority has now introduced flexible working to all corporate staff; all day shift related firefighting staff and all flexible duty officers up to and including Group Managers. In addition, the station work routine has been completely redesigned to provide more time and focus on community safety.
- 2.7 The Authority also has in place job share and part-time opportunities for staff and has recently introduced wholetime/retained contracts which enabled retained firefighters to work full time in the wholetime service whilst continuing to provide retained fire cover. This has increased opportunities for staff to further develop and better integrate many communities into the mainstream Fire and Rescue service.
- 2.8 The introduction of IPDS offers an opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge of all staff, including those on the retained duty system. Flexible working arrangements, job sharing, part-time service as well as the nature of working on the retained duty system may mean that some people may not have the same opportunities for development in the workplace as those working full time on the wholetime duty system. The Authority has embraced the Learning and Development Strategy which provides a flexible means of developing people and we have implemented initiatives such as e-learning, distance learning and the delivery of development opportunities during weekends and evenings to meet the needs of many members of staff.

2.9 Paragraph 5.37 states:

Fire and Rescue Authorities should:

- *Ensure that their occupational health arrangements including the provision of occupational health services are efficient and effective;*
- *Ensure that full consideration is given to the health and fitness of all staff and that they are assigned appropriate roles;*
- *Introduce and administer effective absence management processes and procedures to facilitate the achievement of Government targets on the reduction of sickness absence and ill health retirements;*
- *Consider the cost and organisational benefits of operating their occupational health arrangements on a regional basis.*

2.10 With regard to the above:

- The Authority recently went out to tender for the provision of medical services. The tender was comprehensive in content and 'tested the market' in respect of value for money and the efficient and effective provision of that part of the Occupational Health service. A contract was awarded to be reviewed in three years;
- The Authority operates a redeployment policy under the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995, which provides for individuals who are not fit for firefighting duties, but are able to undertake a non-operational role in the Service to be redeployed. In addition, all facilities are not DDA compliant and a full consultation was recently undertaken with staff to determine by what means the Authority can further assist less able employees.
- A regional absence management framework is now in place. This Authority has recorded its lowest ever sickness absence figures which will be subject to a further report.
- Finally, Members will be aware that Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has entered into an agreement with this Authority to provide all Occupational Health facilities to their staff. We are now in the second year of that agreement and this has proved to be successful. It is now understood that Cleveland Fire Brigade are considering whether or not to enter into a similar agreement with this Authority. The Chief Fire Officer will advise Members on the progress accordingly.

2.11 The discipline and grievance issues contained within paragraph 5.12 have already been addressed with a regional framework in place which has been adopted, with minor alterations, by all four North East Fire and Rescue Services.

3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Progress has been made on a range of collaborative issues within the Region, although much further work needs to be completed. Should the HR Strategic be approved at the meeting today, then this forms a vital link in the chain to move HR issues forward on a more collaborative basis with this Authority taking the lead on many matters.

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4 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

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

5 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Members are is requested to:

- a) note the contents of this report and endorse the actions taken thus far:
- b) receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Strategic Plan 2006-2011

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 10 JULY 2006

Sunderland
City Council

Item No.7

SUBJECT: RANK TO ROLE – PAY PROTECTION REVIEW

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY,
THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that under the agreed implementation of rank to role (minute 68 of 2005 refers), the implications of pay protection be reviewed in 18 months (i.e. by June 2007) and advice be given accordingly with reports submitted on a six monthly basis.
- 1.2 This report provides an overall review for consideration by Members.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of the implementation of rank to role, the following formed part of the agreement:

“It remains the intention of the Authority to minimise, wherever possible, any perceived negativity with regard to the migration from rank to role. In addition, the national ACAS arbitration award puts in place the following:-

‘Pay protection should apply to uniformed employees covered by the scheme of conditions of service for the NJC Local Authorities Fire and Rescue Services on the substantive move from rank as follows: -

Those employees who, in the 2003 agreement, have specified pay protection points with a review scheduled in 2007 retain that position. For others

- a) the pay protection arrangements should have the status of an agreement*
- b) pay increases should apply during the period of pay protection*
- c) protection should commence from when an individual makes the substantive change from rank to role and last for three years from that date (i.e. 2nd January 2006 for this Authority).*

For clarification, employees on protected points referred to above are those detailed in the pay assimilation table issued for those in post on 7th November 2003: Station Officer (Rider Station Officer or specialist not on the flexible duty system), Fire Control Officer (not on the flexible duty system), Principle Fire Control Officer.’

For the avoidance of doubt, with effect from 2nd January 2006, all employees on protected pay points (including those substantive Sub Officers assimilating into Crew Manager roles, and those substantive Station Officers assimilating into Watch Manager B roles) will:-

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- a) *Be protected for three years, i.e. until 1st January 2009*;*
- b) *Receive pay increases in accordance with the national negotiating machinery during this period of pay protection;*
- c) *(a) and (b) above only applies where there has been no change to an employee's role in the three-year period.*

**In the case of Station Officers, Fire Control Officers and the Principle Fire Control Officer this arrangement will be reviewed following the outcome of national negotiations due to be completed by July 2007. It is emphasised that, regardless of the outcome of those negotiations, pay protection for these rank holders will be for a minimum of three years commencing 2nd January 2006.*

- 2.2 On the implementation date of rank to role, 2nd January 2006, there were 57 Sub Officers who were assimilated into a Crew Manager role but their salaries were protected at Sub Officer rate.

3 CURRENT SITUATION AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 In accordance with the local collective agreement, a meeting was held between Service Management and the Fire Brigades Union to review the current position.
- 3.2 There are now 41 personnel who were originally Sub Officers but who were assimilated into crew Manager roles, a reduction of 16 personnel from January 2006, primarily due to retirements and promotions. These staff remain on pay protection until 2nd January 2009.
- 3.3 To increase that protection period, the cost would be in the region of £42,927 per annum including on-costs.
- 3.4 In addition, there are 95 personnel who were originally Station Officers but who were assimilated into Watch Manager B roles, one Fire Control Officer and one Principal Fire Control Officer who were assimilated into equivalent control room roles, who have pay protection for three years, i.e. until 2nd January 2009.
- 3.5 To increase that protection period, the cost would be in the region of £425,830 per annum including on-costs.
- 3.6 Budgetary provision has been agreed and is detailed in the Medium Term Financial Plan to maintain the current protection arrangements. Under the present arrangements at the end of the protection period certain individual employees in specific roles will actually see a reduction in their annual salary, thereby providing savings for the Authority, e.g. using current salary scales, the salary of a protected Watch Manager B will reduce from £35,708 to £32,913 (-£2,795). This could however, create serious implications for those individuals concerned. It should also be noted that as negotiations for the pay settlement from 1st July 2007 unfold, there may be additional costs for the Authority to consider.

3.7 This report deals with the situation at this time however, the individuals concerned have a further two years of pay protection during which time the Authority remains committed to minimising the potential pay discrepancies as far as practicable whilst being cognisant of the budgetary position.

3.8 In addition, it is envisaged that the National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union will commence negotiations with regard to pay and conditions before July 2007 which is when the current pay agreement ends. The Chief Fire Officer, having consulted with Officers of the Authority, therefore proposes that it would be prudent to note and maintain the current pay protection arrangements at this time.

4 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

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

5 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) note the contents of this report:
- b) maintain the current pay protection arrangements
- c) receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Strategic Plan 2006-2011

SUBJECT: OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH UNIT - ANNUAL REPORT**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The role of Occupational Health has evolved dramatically over the past two decades, and has developed to add another dimension to health, safety and welfare by taking a holistic view of the work place. It is becoming increasingly evident that the face of Occupational Health is changing. For many years the sole focus has quite rightly been the prevention of work related ill health. E.g. the effects of noise, chemicals etc. with OH units typically being Doctor led. Many organisations did not fully practice this with only a minor injury and illness service being offered. However we have seen a steady change in the workplace in recent years and along with that the role of Occupational Health and the associated staff have had to move forward in terms of direction, practice and attitude.
- 1.2 The profile and practice of Occupational Health (OH) has steadily risen over recent years through documents such as The Fit for Duty Report 2000, Securing Health Together & Revitalising Health and Safety both HSE 2000, Occupational Health – Contributing to a Healthier Workplace ENB 2000 and the Governments Healthier Nation Strategy. These welcomed changes also included the operational element of the service losing the exemption under the Disability Discrimination Act in October 2004 which has led not just to OH applying reasonable adjustment for fire fighters on the fire ground but also in recruitment.
- 1.3 The aim of the Unit is to support the broad aims of the Government health initiatives whilst primarily addressing specific areas of concern within the working environment of all employees of the Authority. The ever-increasing scope of the Unit would indicate a greater acceptance and utilisation of the services provided.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the services provided by the Occupational Health Unit and its staff over the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, the thirteenth year of operation of the Unit.

2 SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES PROVIDED BY THE UNIT**2.1 Health Surveillance**

Health surveillance remains the core activity of the unit. It seeks to detect early changes in health due mainly to workplace processes and therefore protect health. It can also serve to act as health promotion in respect of providing health and safety knowledge of the process in which they are engaged. A fit healthy workforce continues

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to be the objective of the unit.

The average age of our workforce is increasing, and in response Cholesterol monitoring and Blood Glucose Monitoring was introduced this year. Raised Cholesterol is considered a predisposing factor to heart disease.

The Blood glucose monitoring was introduced in response to the small but recurring number of Maturity Onset Diabetes that were observed over the course of the previous two years.

Although not a new inclusion the Sit and Reach flexibility box which has been used for many years as an aspect of health screening was included in the services fitness room provision. The Unit still advocate its use as it serves as a reminder as to the requirement for flexibility not just as a fire fighter but equally in every day life.

The following Health Surveillance is undertaken:

Health Screening - Recent national statistics from the Health and Safety Executive informs that although death rates due to accidents in the workplace are falling, ill health due to occupation continues to give cause for concern. Health screening therefore continues to be a fundamental aspect of Occupational Health practice. It establishes a base line of health on which to monitor the effects of the working environment and process on individual employees. It also allows for the early detection of detrimental changes allowing for positive intervention and provides an opportunity for health promotion. A fit healthy workforce continues to be the objective of the unit.

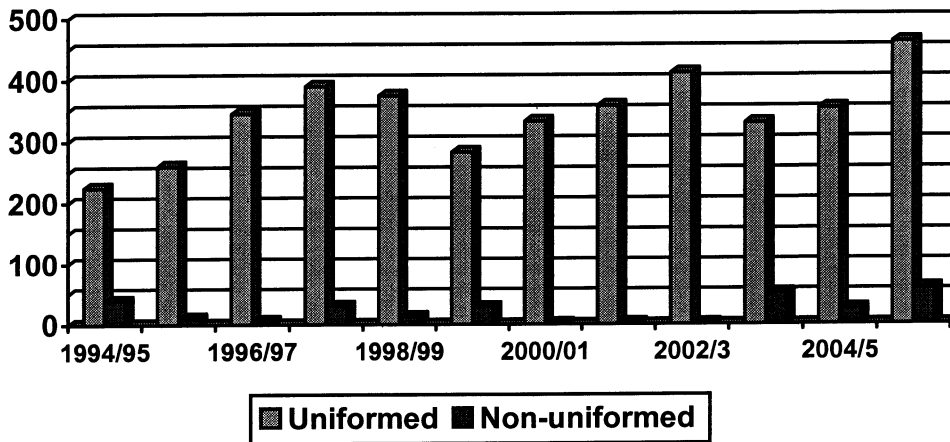
The unit has developed health-screening programmes for specific at risk categories: -

- ❑ Operational personnel. Three yearly with the emphasis on fitness for fire fighting. Includes aerobic fitness assessment, blood pressure, lung function, and visual acuity.
- ❑ Health screening is offered to corporate personnel with an emphasis on health promotion. The level of fitness required by corporate staff is not as high as that for operational firefighters. However the benefits of improved health and fitness are obvious to all and therefore Unit staff continues to encourage all employees to undertake voluntary health screening.
- ❑ Hand / arm vibration screening. Work with vibrating tools / compressed air. Annual nurse based screening with referral for objective testing for positive findings.
- ❑ Compartment fire training. Six monthly health screening including the use of a monthly symptoms questionnaire.
- ❑ Merchant Navy Fire Training School. Annual screening.
- ❑ Pre employment health assessment ensures that the applicants are fit to meet the performance requirements of the job in the environment of the workplace.

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- Aids to Vision. The screening takes place either at medical or on request, with a three yearly recall / retest. The scheme extends to operational personnel, vehicle and other technicians.
- After the opening of the new HQ at Barmston it was pleasing to report that for the first time corporate staff came forward for a health assessment and induction to use the services gyms. A total of 44 corporate staff undertook the assessment.

Health Screening 1994 - 2006



The outcomes of the health screening process are utilised to better inform individuals about their lifestyle; to advise individuals with regard to their general fitness level; and to take any necessary preventative action with the ultimate aim of ensuring individual's remain fit for duty.

3.2 Clinics

The Service Medical Advisor (SMA) conducts clinics on four half-day sessions per week. The medical consists of nurse based health screening prior to personnel seeing the SMA. Appointments fall in to the following categories:

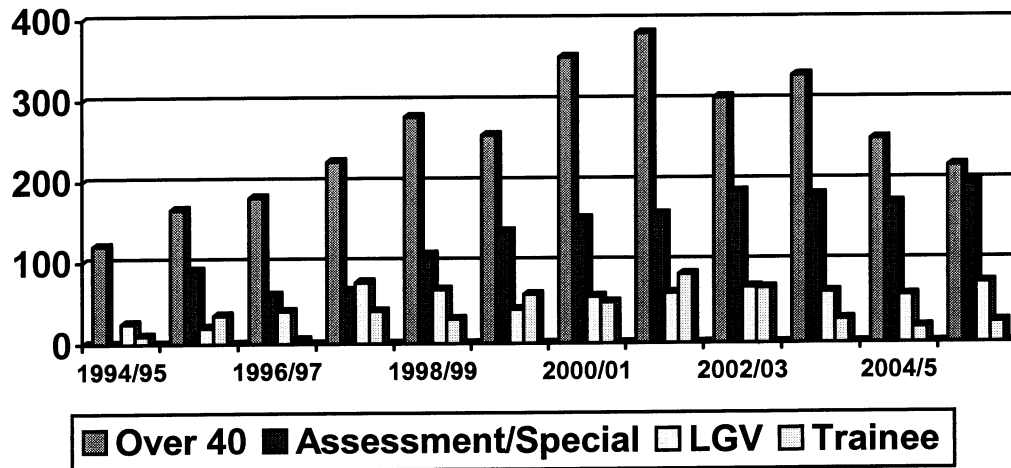
- Plus 40 years – three yearly / 50 to 55 years annually.
- LGV – on request and scheduled
- Sickness absence assessment
- Ill health assessment
- Referrals
- Staff pre-employment
- Assisted Medical Support Scheme

The previous five years has seen a year on year increase in the total number of clinic appointments, mainly due to the increase in the age profile (age 40 and

age 50-year medical), the impact of sickness absence procedures and latterly the Accelerated Medical Support Scheme.

The graph below represents the number of specific medicals undertaken in the unit since its opening in 1994.

SMA Clinics



3.3 Pre Employment Health Screening

The Unit continues to screen all new employees, prior to appointment. As well as confirming suitability for employment and establishing a base line for health, this provides an opportunity for employees to meet the Unit staff and promote the facilities available to individuals.

3.4 Health and Fitness Promotion

Health and Safety presentations are a joint Health & Safety / Occupational Health project. The current programme, now in its third year, targets slips, trips and falls and includes information on hydration and vaccinations.

The Health and Safety presentations also provided an opportunity to make operational and technical personnel aware of proposed changes in The Physical Agents Directive (Noise and Vibration). The changes, in particular to noise, resulted in new hearing protection being trailed in view of the directive now impacting on fire fighters to wear hearing protection.

Health Promotion also includes:

- Occupational Health Welcome packs.

All new employees are issued with a package, which gives details of unit staff and facilities available, as well as a broad range of relevant health promotion

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information leaflets.

- **Service Gazette Health Advice**

The Unit aim to include a health information article in the Service Gazette twice per month. Topics such as sun care, skin cancer, manual handling, cholesterol, skin care when working with substances and smoking prevention in association with the introduction of the Authority 'No Smoking' policy have been explored.

- **Research Topics**

Back pain accounts for the largest single musculo skeletal cause of sickness absence in the Authority. A pilot study undertaken some two years ago developed a measuring tool to assess the spinal health (stability) of operational personnel, and a comprehensive preventative exercise programme was tested during the pilot. This provides a further method which unit staff can employ to identify and mitigate the effects of deteriorating spinal health.

- **Health Promotion Leaflets**

The Unit has also produced specific health promotion leaflets covering areas such as noise, Leptospirosis and Hepatitis A.

- **Smoking Cessation Advisors**

Following a partnership with the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation events were arranged to revisit the topic of Stopping Smoking. Various attempts had been made over the years to provide health promotion information regarding the ill effects of smoking and advising people to stop. Despite this there remain a significant number of personnel who smoke. All the OH Advisors therefore trained as Smoking Cessation Advisors with the various Primary Health Care trusts to offer the service "in-house". A comprehensive advertising campaign accompanied by help and advice to further encourage existing smokers to quit was undertaken with the pleasing result that 17 members of staff quit smoking. This initiative will continue.

- **Health Promotion: workshops**

Health Promotion Workshops, although not a new concept, present a means of raising the profile of good health and the importance of lifestyle information to the workforce. It further demonstrates the commitment to a fit and healthy workforce by the Authority. The prototype of this scheme was launched at South Division HQ in February and was attended by 48 staff who had an opportunity to access various health and welfare topics e.g. blood pressure, cholesterol measurement, counselling advice, complimentary therapies etc. The opportunity was also taken to feature the workplace Chaplains and give those who attended a chance to see the contribution that they can bring to the wellbeing of the workforce.

3.5 Vaccination

Health Screening continues to provide the opportunity to discuss the importance of vaccination and prompt up dating of status as necessary. Potential trainees are advised at pre course assessment days to bring their vaccinations up to date for polio and tetanus and also to consider the Hepatitis B vaccination if they were not already immunised.

3.6 Physiotherapy

The unit continues to refer personnel with musculo skeletal problems for either assessment or assessment and treatment. Such assessments and treatment generally ensure individuals can continue to work with physiotherapy support, and prevent conditions worsening. A total Number of 97 assessments were made this year, the majority of which were musculo skeletal in nature. These interventions have resulted in an earlier return to work than would have normally been anticipated.

3.7 Accelerated Medical Scheme

The Authority has in place a scheme to provide early access for staff to medical specialists in order to gain an immediate assessment of a medical problem. The scheme also enables an early diagnosis and plan for appropriate treatment(s) with a view to reducing sickness absence and providing robust evidence regarding the application of ill health retirement.

During the course of 2005/06, 42 individuals progressed through the AMS scheme including operational and corporate staff. The results to date indicate that employees assessed leads directly to recommending a level of treatment and thereby a speedier return to work. For example: an individual was referred to the OHA and was examined by the SMA in August. Through the scheme, the individual underwent an MRI scan and surgery and returned to work in January of the following year. It is estimated that the normal course for this individual would have been a nine-twelve month absence, however utilising the scheme, the absence was substantially reduced with subsequent cost savings.

3.8 Counselling and Welfare Support

Counselling services are provided to Authority staff through an internal specialist Welfare Officer, who is specifically trained in the psychological problems associated with the workplace. Welfare support and pastoral care is also an area of continuing growth and is provided jointly by the Unit and the Welfare Officer.

Over 120 persons used the service this reporting year. There were 100 home visits made and advice given a further 276 times via the telephone. Of the cases dealt with the majority (72.4%) were **non-work related** difficulties, 89 of the 123 referrals, with the most common non-work related difficulties being stress/anxiety/depression symptoms 32.5%, relationship difficulties 19.5% and bereavements 8.1%

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By far the smallest amount (27.6%) were **work-related** difficulties, 34 of the 123 referrals, with the most common work related difficulties being stress/anxiety/depression symptoms (18.7%) and relationship difficulties (4%).

In addition, use of this service has meant that of the 123 referrals, 86 were able to remain at work with 37 on sickness absence.

The Trauma Support Team continues to be an important cornerstone in the aftermath of incidents. There were 21 critical incidents involving one or more fatalities in 2004, where supervisory personnel were contacted and the services of the TST were offered. 16 Trauma Support Sessions were requested and delivered.

The internal stress management policy was adopted and launched in 2004. Stress management sessions have become an established addition to the quarterly training programme and educate employees about possible symptoms of stress, what services are available both internally and externally and general advice about developing a healthy lifestyle that will help to strengthen against stress. The sessions come from a health promotion ethos that puts the individual as the expert and gives them responsibility for their own problems and solutions

3.9 Recruitment

The unit continues to play an extensive role in recruitment by providing fitness testing of all potential trainees, input at induction and provision of health supervision through out the trainee course. This initial targeting implants the culture of the organisation into such persons from the beginning of their service.

3.10 Audiometry

Audiometry Programme: In keeping with the aim of retaining people in the workplace individuals are investigated to explore the possibility of providing artificial aids to make this particular disability compatible with fire fighting. Digital technology is now applied to artificial aids providing a significant improvement in hearing when compared to the analogue type.

3.11 Aids to Vision

Aids to vision on the fireground was introduced in 1997 following research by the City University, London, and made provision for serving firefighters, whose vision had declined below the required standard, to wear optical correction in both safety spectacles and breathing apparatus lens inserts. The scheme is now well established with a constant 12% of operational personnel using the safety spectacles with optical correction. The scheme also available to other identified service staff on a risk approach basis.

3.12 Aerobic Capacity Testing

Monitoring of Aerobic fitness on station six monthly has now been in place for

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two years. Aerobic fitness underpins a fire fighters efficiency and safety on the fire ground. It is a quality that requires development and maintenance. Previously testing was undertaken three yearly at health screening. The move to six monthly provides an earlier warning of declining fitness whilst also serving as a prompt to maintain exercise as part of your lifestyle.

The average Aerobic capacity at the time of report was 50.8 mls.02/kg/min. This compares favourably with a recommended figure of 45mls.02/kg/min.

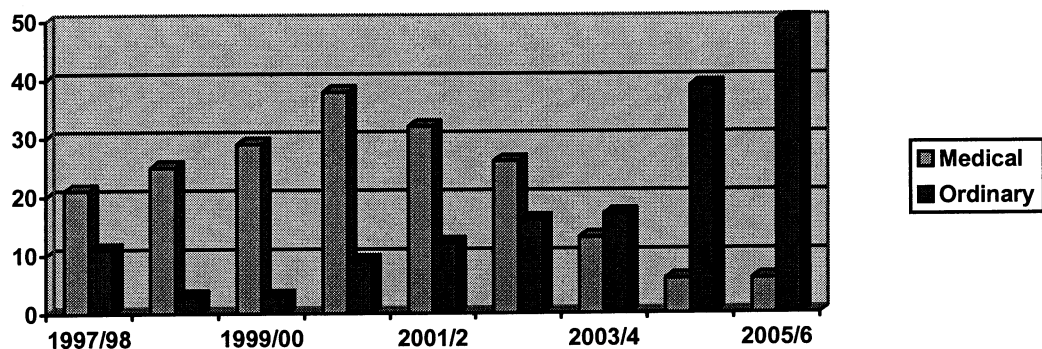
3.13 Training

Occupational Health staff undertook a variety of training and updating during the year, this included;

- Equality and Diversity
- SAP Financial Management System
- Fire Fit Conference
- Compartment Fire Training and RTA familiarisation
- Sickness Absence Management
- Misuse of Alcohol Strategy
- Slips Trips and Falls
- Clinical update – The Musculo Skeletal system

3.14 Retirements

The chart below shows the retirement profile of this Service from 1997. This quite clearly shows a substantial increase in medical retirements up to 2000/01, with medical retirements accounting for over 70% of all retirements from the wholtime service. Due to the pro-active approach taken by senior management assisted by the dedicated efforts of the Occupational Health Team, since 2000/1 the number of medical retirements have been decreasing year on year.



3.15 Regional Management Board –Working Groups

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Working groups were established to review aspects of Health and Safety. The Unit's welfare Officer is active on the Welfare and Stress groups while the Senior Occupational Health Advisor takes an active role on Substance Misuse and Fitness. The Substance Misuse and Fitness have reported to the Regional Management Board.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Although now in its thirteenth year the unit is still evolving. The potential for future growth and development is vast and the commitment to a proactive dynamic approach remains a core objective. The mission statement "Your Health Matters" reaffirms the Authority's commitment to investing in the organisation's most valuable asset, the health and well being of the individual.
- 4.2 All the indications are that the combined initiatives in place under the Occupational Health Unit are reducing sickness absence rates. Our current wholetime number of shifts lost per employee at 9.53 is the lowest for eight years. However, targets have been set to enable the Authority to better the upper quartile (for the Fire Service) of shifts lost for all staff of 8.7 within three years and the Chief Fire Officer is actively working towards meeting that target.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members are requested to consider this report and provide appropriate feedback.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Fire and Civil Defence Authority Health and Safety Manual
- Occupational Health Unit Service Level Agreement

**SUBJECT: CULTURE CLUB – THE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY NEWSLETTER
FOR THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES OF THE NORTH EAST****REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Fire and Rescue Services of the North East are committed to the principles of equality and diversity and constantly strive to meet a high standard and consistent approach to equality and diversity. They intend to be organisations that will prove their interest in improving diversity, tackling discrimination or harassment and addressing inequalities. Central to this commitment is the shared belief that all staff or members of the local communities with whom they interact should be treated with due civility and respect regardless of their situation, circumstances or life style.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Audit Commission advice on diversity to Cleveland, Tyne & Wear and Durham in 2003 concluded that there was a need to develop regional collaboration further. Since then the North East region have developed partnership working and a collective approach which has resulted in the establishment of a Regional Diversity Steering Group, chaired by this Authority.
- 2.2 Equality and Diversity is high on the agenda at both a national level, regional level and within this Authority. A diversity champion was appointed and all parts of the Service are aware that there are specific commitments to be met in terms of legislation, performance management, HR management and more importantly, inclusivity.

3 VALUING DIVERSITY

- 3.1 An organisation which values all staff regardless of their diversity but recognises the contribution that they make and provides a working environment free from bullying and harassment will be an organisation that is able to recruit, retain and motivate the staff needed to deliver the demands of the modern fire and rescue service.
- 3.2 Equally all fire and rescue services also need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs of their local communities and by attracting the best people within our local communities we may be better placed to deliver the best services we can offer.
- 3.3 The value of fully embracing diversity are:

- Having a wider pool of talent to select from;
- Realising efficiency savings by reducing recruitment spend;

Creating the Safest Community

- Realising cashable saving in improved retention rates;
- Realising performance improvements from reduced sickness absences & the financial benefits relating to this;
- Enabling a wide range of views to be present in an organisation, including views that may challenge the status quo from all sides (W Sonnenschein 1997);
- Being able to focus and strengthen an organisation's core values (W Sonnenschein 1997);
- Being instrumental in supporting organisational change.

3.4 The literature clearly indicated that the moral and soft benefits of embracing diversity are more likely to be realised when diversity is integrated into organisational practice and to ask the question 'If it can't be measured then why are we doing it?', to focus effort where it will have the most impact.

4 RAISING AWARENESS AND DIVERSITY TRAINING

4.1 The purpose of raising awareness and diversity training for employees is to assist in achieving the goal of representing the community we serve within the organisation which will have the added benefit of improving performance.

4.2 One way of raising that awareness is by the production of a regional newsletter, 'Culture Club'. This has been produced with the intention of fully informing all of our employees of developments in the ever changing world of diversity, whilst also providing a forum highlighting good practice which is going on in the four North East Fire and Rescue Services. This newsletter is also available for sharing with our partners in the community so they know what we are doing in order to promote diversity.

4.3 It is proposed that the newsletter be produced on a quarterly basis, with the editorial responsibilities firmly with the Regional Diversity Manager. However, any input or articles are welcomed from all parties.

4.4 The introduction of such a valuable tool in raising the awareness of all staff whilst also highlighting many areas of good practice in the equality and diversity field can only assist in promoting the Authority's intent as an equal opportunities employer.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

5.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members are recommended to:

- a) note the contents of this report:

- b) approve the introduction of the equality newsletter in this Service.
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Strategic Plan 2006-2011