

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

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A study on attendance management in the fire and rescue service was commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive and Communities and Local Government in 2007. The research was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research and involved an in-depth review of attendance management in five local authority fire and rescue services. Tyne and Wear was one of the five selected.
- 1.2 The main report of the research into managing sickness absence in the fire and rescue service (which does not make reference to individual fire and rescue services) has now been published and is available on:
- www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr632.htm
- 1.3 The National Centre for Social Research has also prepared a confidential review for this Authority, as one of the five participants. The review 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.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A case study design was adopted for this research, the aim being to understand:
- 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.
- 2.2 Five fire and rescue services were selected for inclusion in the research. The aim was to select a diverse group so that overall findings would be relevant to a wide range of fire and rescue services. Key criteria were to include services from each of the five 'family groups', with different patterns of sickness absence, different governance arrangements, and from different geographical regions. This authority was selected due to its average level of sickness absence, its improved sickness absence performance from 2000 to 2005 and its governance arrangements.

3 REVIEW SUMMARY

- 3.1 The full review is attached as Appendix A for the information of Members, however the review 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'*.
- 3.2 Nonetheless the review did highlight some areas to maintain improvement 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.
- 3.3 The Chief Fire Officer considers this a positive reflection of the attendance management policies of the Authority providing the additional assurance of an external accredited audit. The outcomes 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) Endorse the actions taken by the Chief Fire Officer;
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

Attendance Management Review