

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Human Resources Committee

Item: 8

1 July 2015

Sickness Absence

Report by the Chief Officer

Contact: Helen Mears : 07810 636682 email: helen.mears@hants.gov.uk

1 Summary

- 1.1 Sickness absence figures have been showing an increasing trend and a report on this subject was recently presented to the Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee. The HR Committee have ownership of this key area of people performance and will want to monitor progress and actions. This report is presented for information and includes a brief summary of the key trends with a focus on the improvement plan that has been developed to reduce absence.
- 1.2 An Attendance Management Working Group (AMWG) is now established and has agreed terms of reference and an on-going monthly meeting cycle. The AMWG has developed the improvement plan to address the trend of increasing sickness absence. Key actions relate to improving data and management information, increasing supervisory capability and an effective communications strategy on absence.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 The HR Committee oversee the governance of sickness absence as a key area of people performance.
- 2.2 The Committee accept and support the improvement plan and monitor progress and delivery of actions against it.

3 Introduction and background

Sickness Data Analysis

- 3.1 Due to the increasing absence trend a more detailed analysis was undertaken in late March by Knowledge Management and compared absence in Q1 to Q3 in 2014/15 with the same period in 2013/14.

3.2 From this analysis the key findings are:

- overall absence has increased by 5.1%.
- musculoskeletal accounts for the biggest reason for absence at 44% of all absences.
- there is an increase across uniformed (grey book) and retained staff absence.
- whilst non uniformed staff (green book) shows a decrease across this period it remains the highest of the 3 main employment groups.
- long term absence has increased by 20%.
- 8 of the highest 20 absence cases measured against the service Bradford Factor absence trigger are Non uniformed staff and this accounts for a disproportionate amount compared to their representation in the workforce.
- less than 4% of staff account for 38% of the total sickness absence.

3.3 From the analysis there is a greater understanding of the absence profile and further work will be undertaken to see if there is any correlation between an increase in absence and the period of transformational change the service is going through. Some factors such as the slight reduction in green book absence would indicate there is not a direct link however this is a complex picture. With the implementation of the outcomes of the Risk Review commencing next year it will be important to understand and plan appropriate interventions.

3.4 In terms of comparison with other Fire and Rescue Services, for 2014/15 the HFRS position in relation to absence is as follows:

- Whole time fire fighters – 13th out of 34
- Fire Control operators – 12th out of 29
- Retained fire fighters – 11th out of 17
- Non uniformed staff – 29th out of 33

3.5 Through Cleveland Fire Brigade, the CFOA Occupational Health Network published on 1 June 2015 an occupational health performance report. This compares absence data and trends from 34 Brigades. The overarching analysis shows an increasing absence trend nationally across the service. A more detailed review of the report is taking place to further inform our own analysis.

Action Plan

3.6 An Attendance Management Working Group (AMWG) has been established to improve attendance. The group is chaired by Helen Mears, HR Business Partner, and has a cross section of staff as members. The AMWG has agreed its terms of reference (Appendix 1) and is scheduled to continue meeting monthly throughout this financial year.

3.7 The improvement plan developed by the group is at Appendix 2 and is split into six

key areas that cover:

- Data and management information
- Process and policy
- Training and development
- Communication
- Case Management
- Wellbeing

- 3.8 High quality management information in a timely manner is a key factor in successful attendance management. This has presented a challenge as the absence data is stored across two systems. This has made it a higher investment in time to abstract data and involved manual intervention. Improving the quality of management information is a key part of the action plan. There will also be more detailed monitoring through Occupational Health data as part of a current improvement plan.
- 3.9 The content of attendance workshops are being reviewed with a view to how we can best deliver further development to supervisors. A 'toolkit' is being developed as an easy access point for supervisors for all information they need related to attendance management. A key aspect of good attendance management is high quality 'return to work' interviews conducted by managers after every absence. The workshop and toolkit will give these particular emphasis.
- 3.10 The Attendance Management Policy is being reviewed in conjunction with the wider improvement plan. The policy review will be broad based in relation to all issues identified that have an impact on attendance e.g. health and wellbeing procedures.
- 3.11 An overall communications strategy is being developed to support absence improvement including occupational health facilities. Individual referrals from HFRS into the Occupational Health service have increased from 3% of all referrals in February to 9% in May which is a positive reflection that the communication plan is having an impact.
- 3.12 HR Operations and Occupational Health will jointly review on a monthly basis the long term and highest absence cases to ensure all appropriate interventions are being made.

Progress Against the Plan

- 3.13 Although early stages there are already a number of interventions that are working positively. The increase in occupational health referrals is a positive sign of improved management interventions with earlier access being sought to medical advice.
- 3.14 The stress and resilience workshops being delivered are well attended and receiving positive feedback.

- 3.15 The launch of the new Employee Assistance Programme in April 2015 has improved the medical facilities available to all staff giving 24 hour availability to a medically qualified team.

4 Supporting our Corporate aims and Objectives

- 4.1 This work is key in meeting performance priorities by ensuring staff are present at work delivering against our objectives. It supports the theme of 'making our service stronger'.

5 People Impact Assessment

- 5.1 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

6 Background Papers

- 6.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

“None”

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.

HFRS Attendance Management Working Group Terms of Reference

Sickness absence levels in Hampshire Fire and Rescue have been showing an increasing trend. The Attendance Management Working Group has been set up to develop and deliver an improvement plan that will deliver effective management of absence, reduced sickness, and ultimately reduce the cost of absence. Key responsibilities of the group are as follows:

- Examine and analyse sickness absence data and identify and evaluate emerging trends and themes
- Devise strategies to deliver a reduction in sickness absence, to include consideration of comparative data and good practice in other Services and organisations
- Promote physical and psychological wellbeing to improve engagement, health and efficiency in the Service
- Make recommendations to senior management regarding identified issues and areas of concern
- Measure progress against the improvement plan.

In delivering these responsibilities the group will have due regard for the change programme and environment within which the Service is currently operating.