

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

Minutes of a meeting of the **Human Resources Committee** held at Fire HQ on **Tuesday 20 February 2024** at **1000 hours**.

Present: Cllr C Martin in the Chair

Durham County Council: Cllrs A Batey and J Quinn

Darlington Borough Council: D Ray

Officers: K Metcalfe
J Parry (for items 4 and 7 only)
D Hodgson (for item 4 only)

Part A

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs C Marshall and J Cairns.

2 Minutes of previous meeting – 21 November 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3 Sickness Absence Performance Quarter Three 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided an update on sickness absence performance for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Cllr J Quinn questioned whether sickness through injury were from incidents at work. K Metcalfe confirmed they were from activities outside of work.

Cllr J Quinn queried service procedures for staff returning to work from injuries. K Metcalfe confirmed that the modified duties procedure had been formalised recently and staff were no longer given this option unless they have a return to work window. The change to process has meant sickness absence can be managed more effectively.

Cllr A Batey commented on sickness relating to mental health and possible links to Covid. Discussion took place around what the service are doing to help and support staff who's physical resilience may be compromised through the effects of Covid. K Metcalfe noted that there was no evidence that cases were directly linked to Covid but confirmed that welfare provisions were in place and were advertised to all staff regularly. Following discussion it was agreed that K Metcalfe would provide a breakdown of mental health absence data at year end.

ACTION: K Metcalfe to provide a breakdown of mental health absence data at year end.

Cllr D Ray commented on people being more open about their mental health and questioned whether the data shows staff taking up support returning to work faster. K Metcalfe confirmed that EAP and Benenden were confidential reporting lines so the data isn't available to make that link.

Cllr A Batey queried Service insurance liabilities for staff returning to work from injuries such as broken limbs. K Metcalfe confirmed that full risk assessments were carried out.

The Committee **noted** the report.

4 Health and Safety Performance Quarter Three 1 October 2023 to 31 December 2023

D Hodgson introduced the report which provided Members with a summary of the Service's health and safety performance for the end of the third quarter of the 2023/24 reporting period.

Cllr J Quinn commented on the vehicle accidents and queried whether the LGV driver had made an insurance claim. D Hodgson confirmed no insurance claim had been made.

Discussion took place regarding the near miss incidents relating to BA set failures and Cllr A Batey suggested that wording be considered to adjust timescales for investigations when external parties are involved to accommodate their lead in times. It was agreed that JP would review the narrative for the PI.

ACTION: J Parry to review the narrative for PI73 regarding investigations incomplete after 28 days.

Cllr D Ray questioned whether the BA set failures were the same issue reported previously and asked if there were any concerns around the manufacturer. D Hodgson confirmed that they were new issues and that the service did not have concerns around the manufacturer. The manufacturer had carried out appropriate investigations including a site visit where drying room procedures had been highlighted. Configuration of the drying room and store were now being reviewed by the Service to restrict access, introduce dehumidifiers and consider the airflow.

Cllr C Martin questioned when the failures had taken place. D Hodgson confirmed that the incidents were from training sets only and was likely due to the high turnover of sets. J Parry assured the committee that health and safety was tightly governed with strict measures in place for all kit.

Cllr A Batey queried the issue regarding drill yard lighting at Sedgefield and questioned whether light visors had been considered. J Parry confirmed that flood lighting was required.

The Committee **noted** the report.

5 Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services Spotlight Action Plan Update

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made towards completion of the Action Plan relating to HMICFRS Values and Culture Report and the recommendations made.

Discussion took place around the procedure change for DBS checks. Members noted that although it was a challenging task it would be greatly beneficial to the Service and Fire sector.

K Metcalfe noted that the two outstanding actions relating to HMICFRS assurances had been discussed with the SLL who advised that they were satisfied as long as the required updates were uploaded to Huddle.

The Committee **noted** the report.

6 Equality Reporting 2023

K Metcalfe introduced the report which updated the committee on the annual reports published by the Service for Public Sector Equality Duty and Gender Pay Gap.

CIr D Ray queried whether flexible working arrangements were still something the Service were open to. K Metcalfe confirmed that all requests were considered however flexibility was limited for operational staff.

The Committee **noted** the report.

7 NFCC Equality Diversity and Inclusivity Maturity Model

J Parry introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made in the implementation of the NFCC Equality Diversity and Inclusivity Maturity Model.

Members commented on the commendable work carried out by the EDI group.

The Committee **noted** the report.

8 Additional Health Care Benefit

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided an update on the implementation of the trial of additional workforce healthcare benefit, through Benenden Health.

Members commented on the positive use to date and noted that it would be interesting to see the effects on sickness absence moving forward.

The Committee **noted** the report.

9 Staff Survey Outcomes

K Metcalfe introduced the report which informed the committee of the findings of the staff survey conducted by People Insight over September and October 2023.

Cllr D Ray queried the number of people taking up welfare provisions and whether it was because they did not know about the services available. K Metcalfe confirmed there was regular communications about service welfare provisions.

The Committee **noted** the report.

Part B

10 Employee Relations Update

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided details of informal and formal complaints received by the Service from its workforce as well as the instigation of any disciplinary action for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Members commented on the information.

Cllr D Ray queried whether the service also document external processes. K Metcalfe confirmed that any employment tribunals would be outlined in the report.

The Committee **noted** the report.