

## County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

Minutes of a meeting of the **Human Resources Committee** held at Fire HQ on **Tuesday 6 September 2023** at **1430 hours**.

**Present:** Cllr C Martin in the Chair

**Durham County Council:** A Batey, C Marshall, J Quinn

**Darlington Borough Council:** D Ray

**Officers:** K Metcalfe  
C Williams

### Part A

#### 1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr J Cairns.

#### 2 Minutes of previous meeting – 16 May 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

#### 3 Sickness Absence Performance Quarter One 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided an update on sickness performance for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023.

K Metcalfe noted the addition of age related data as agreed at the last meeting.

Cllr J Quinn queried the reasons for MSK absence in the 26-30 bracket. K Metcalfe confirmed that the majority were not work related.

Cllr D Ray requested clarification around the management system for sickness absence. K Metcalfe explained that there were three stages in the formal process; after three occasions of sickness or six cumulative days or more staff would be entered into stage one of the formal process, from there if staff have any further sickness absence within twelve month they would progress to the next stage.

Cllr J Quinn queried whether there was a link between sickness absence figures and a positive culture within the service. K Metcalfe stated that it would be difficult to evidence, however noted that the service did not have high levels of mental health absence for work related stress and there were not high levels of grievances.

The Committee **noted** the report.

#### 4 **Health and Safety Report Quarter One 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023**

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

Cllr J Quinn questioned whether there was a duty to test all systems with near miss reports around BA set failure. C Williams stated that it would depend on the failure type. If it was a provider issue then Draeger would carry out further inspection.

Cllr A Batey commented on the vehicle accident figures and ongoing issues with parked cars. C Williams confirmed that incidents were not happening at the same location each time.

Cllr D Ray queried whether the Service incurred the costs of vehicle accidents or whether they were covered by insurance. C Williams confirmed that there was a high excess in place so small accidents were paid for by the Service, the majority of work was done in house via workshops.

**ACTION:** C Williams to provide excess details for vehicle and personal insurance to the next meeting.

Cllr C Martin questioned whether appliances have cameras to assist with accident investigations and claims. C Williams confirmed they do.

The Committee **noted** the report.

#### 5 **Removal of A Roles from the Establishment**

K Metcalfe introduced the report which advised the committee of a change in the Service establishment whereby Watch Manager and Station Manager A roles across the Service have been removed and replaced with that of B level.

Cllr A Batey questioned whether this would impact staff progression routes. K Metcalfe stated that it would create more progression opportunity and a better system for moves and transfers.

The Committee **noted** the report.

#### 6 **Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services Spotlight Report Action Plan Update**

K Metcalfe introduced the report which updated the committee on the progress made towards completion of the action plan relating to HMICFRS Values and Culture Report and the recommendations made.

Cllr J Quinn questioned whether any issues had been highlighted from the DBS work. K Metcalfe confirmed that there would be national guidance around the procedure for standard checks and a further paper would be prepared for a future CFA meeting.

The Committee **noted** the report.

## 7. **Additional Workforce Healthcare Benefit**

K Metcalfe introduced the report which proposed an enhanced wellbeing offering in the form of a trial of an additional workforce healthcare benefit that is complimentary to NHS provision and our existing Occupational Health Service.

Cllr C Martin commented that he felt it was a proactive step to reduce sickness absence and would be interested to receive updates from the trial.

Cllr J Quinn queried whether staff feedback had been received from other services with the benefit in place. K Metcalfe confirmed that positive feedback had been received and many other services were discussing options around workforce healthcare benefit.

Cllr D Ray questioned the process to refer someone to Benenden. K Metcalfe confirmed that the individual would need to make their own referral.

Cllr A Batey noted that although she agreed with the principle of the proposal she felt conflicted as a NHS advocate and questioned whether diagnosis would be accepted by the NHS if the individual needed to be referred on for further treatment. K Metcalfe stated that Benenden had confirmed they work with the NHS and they would carry out treatment in a lot of cases.

Cllr C Marshall commented on NHS resourcing and wait times, noting that the position was unlikely to change in the near future.

**ACTION:** K Metcalfe to present information around all available staff support options.

**ACTION:** K Metcalfe to arrange a presentation from Benenden for a future HR Committee.

### **Resolved:**

- a) The Committee **approved** the proposed trial for an 18 month period
- b) The Committee **agreed** to review the trial at 18 months with a view to adopting as a permanent employee benefit.

## **Part B**

### 8. **Flexible Retirement Application**

K Metcalfe introduced the report which sought approval of a flexible retirement application from a control Watch Manager.

Following discussion and debate the Committee agreed to approve the flexible retirement application.