

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

Minutes of a meeting of the **Human Resources Committee** held at Fire HQ on **Friday 27 September 2024** at **13.30 hours**.

Present: Cllr S Zair in the Chair

Durham County Council: Cllrs A Batey

Darlington Borough Council: G Lee

Officers: K Metcalfe
C Williams (for item 4 only)
J Parry (for item 5 only)

Part A

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs C Martin and D Ray.

2 Minutes of previous meeting – 23 May 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3 Sickness Absence Performance Quarter One 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024

K Metcalfe introduced the report which provided an update on sickness absence performance for the period 1 April to 30 June 2024.

K Metcalfe noted that sickness has reduced compared to the previous year. There has been a reduction in long term sick and mental health related absence has reduced.

K Metcalfe advised that a deep dive to look at how sickness absence can be improved, has been carried out.

Discussion followed regarding our performance in comparison with other FRSs across the country, and that figures are not compared like for like in accordance with the size of the authority. K Metcalfe agreed to add narrative into the main report to clarify this.

Cllr Lee asked if Firefighters suffering from injury and unable to carry out their role, can undertake modified duties. K Metcalfe explained that a policy has been agreed whereby modified duties can be carried out for a maximum period of 4 weeks.

Cllr Lee asked for further information about Benenden Healthcare. K Metcalfe noted that Benenden Healthcare offers both a cost-effective solution to reduce sickness

absence and to support the wellbeing of the workforce. The initiative has already been used by a number of staff resulting in some good success stories.

ACTION: K Metcalfe to add narrative to the report to support the performance indicator data.

The Committee **noted** the report.

4 Health and Safety Performance Quarter One 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024

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

The Committee **noted** the report.

5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update

J Parry introduced the report which updated the committee on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work ongoing within the service.

Cllr Lee asked if a suitable dress code could be agreed for future Darlington Pride events following feedback received. Cllr Batey explained that this would need to be raised through the Safety Advisory Group and the organisers of the event.

The committee **noted** the report.

6 Additional Healthcare Benefit

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

K Metcalfe noted that the introduction of the initiative has not reduced sickness as hoped and stressed that it may take longer to evidence the longer-term impact.

Cllr Batey commented that the results are positive overall noting the increase in GP referrals across the service.

K Metcalfe noted that a survey of staff who have accessed the service will be carried out to evidence cost benefits and prevention of short term sickness periods.

The Committee **noted** the report.

7 Standards of Behavior: The Handling of Misconduct in the Fire and Rescue Service

K Metcalfe presented the report informing Members of the outcomes of the internal review of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services practices against the recommendations made in HMICFRS Standards of Behaviour: The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services report.

K Metcalfe highlighted the HMICFRS Handling of Misconduct Improvement Plan which sets out 15 recommendations.

The Committee **noted** the content of the report and **approved** the Improved Plan.

Part B

8 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 2024 to 30 June 2024.

ACTION: K Metcalfe to add age to the disproportionality data.

The Committee **noted** the report.