

## report

meeting	<b>NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY PERSONNEL COMMITTEE</b>	
date	<b>14 January 2005</b>	agenda item number

### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

#### **SERVICE SICKNESS LEVELS**

##### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to present to Members of the Personnel Committee a paper submitted to the Improvement and Development Board meeting held on 22 December 2004 regarding the levels of sickness occurring within the Service at this time.

##### **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 As part of its obligations under Best Value Performance Indicator 12a, Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority reports the days/shifts lost to sickness absence of its uniformed workforce.

2.2 At the full Fire Authority meeting of 22 October 2004, Members requested information on the levels of uniformed sickness occurring and how the organisation benchmarked against other Services within the country. The paper was presented in response to that request by Members.

##### **3. REPORT**

The paper attached at Appendix A is therefore put forward by the Improvement and Development Board for consideration by Members of the Personnel Committee.

##### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the attached report.

##### **5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the attached report.

##### **6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the attached report.

##### **7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the attached report.

##### **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

As outlined in the attached report.

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION**

None.

Paul Woods  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

## report

meeting	<b>IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD</b>		
date	<b>22 DECEMBER 2004</b>	agenda item number	<b>6</b>

### REPORT OF HEAD OF INFORMATION SERVICES

#### SERVICE SICKNESS LEVELS

##### 1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Improvement & Development Board of the levels of sickness occurring within the Service at this time.

##### 2. Background

2.1 As part of its obligations under Best Value Performance Indicator 12a, Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority reports the days/shifts lost to sickness absence of its uniformed workforce.

2.2 At the full Fire Authority meeting of 22nd October Members requested information on the levels of uniformed sickness occurring and how the organisation benchmarked against other Services within the country. This report is presented in response to that request by Members.

##### 3. Report

3.1 In response to the Members' request of 22nd October 2004 an exercise has been undertaken to examine the levels of absence of uniformed personnel in the organisation over the period 1st August 2002 to 31st July 2004. Detailed analysis of the information is given below.

#### **Uniformed Personnel (Establishment 569) excluding Retained Period 1.8.02 – 31.7.04**

	<b>No. of Shifts Lost</b>
Firefighter	6794.0
Crew Manager	2079.5
Watch Manager	1628.5
Station Manager	285.0
Group Manager	15.0
Area Manager	3.0
Brigade Manager	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,805</b>

3.2 In order to establish cost associated with the number of shifts lost to the Service, an average shift length of twelve hours was used, multiplied by the hourly rate for the post. Utilising this as a basis for calculation the cost of sickness for the stated period is £1,575,708. (This excludes acting up and overtime payments to maintain cover at stations.)

- 3.3 In an attempt to breakdown sickness patterns further, the levels of individual sickness episodes have been analysed. These are shown below:-

<b>Number of Sickness Episodes in Period (1.8.02 – 31.7.04)</b>	<b>Number of Employees that this is related to</b>
4	76
5	55
6	56
7	25
8	28
9	10
10	13
11	4
12	2
13	2
14	2
18	1

- 3.4 The figures presented do not reflect a peak in sickness as information relating to the period July-September 2004 show that the levels of absenteeism continue to increase.
- 3.5 The figures presented are also of concern in relation to the operational availability of front-line resources. There is an allowance of 6%, or 28 people, for sickness absence and light duties built into the ridership levels of stations. The levels of sickness absence (about 40 personnel averaged over the year) and light duties (currently 22 personnel) is far in excess of this allowance. This clearly affects the levels of people available for appliances and affects the ability of individuals to train or take annual leave.
- 3.6 In comparison with other Fire & Rescue Services, the Nottinghamshire average sickness figure of 12.7 days per uniformed member of staff exceeds the National average of 10.5. Nottinghamshire remain in the upper quartile of Fire & Rescue Services (based on 2002/03 figures). The average sickness rates for the whole public sector is 10.6 days/year (Financial Times 23/8/04).
- 3.7 The management of long-term sickness has been considerably improved by the established of the in-house Occupational Health facility and the approved corporate membership of the Westfield Health Scheme. This continues to improve with work in individual programmes of rehabilitation and work relating to the identification and resolution of stress. The problems reflected in this report are attributable to the management of frequent, short-term sickness.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

As stated in paragraph 3.2 the cost of the sickness associated with the period exceeds £1.5 million.

#### **5. Equal Opportunity Implications**

There are no direct equal opportunity implications arising from this report.

#### **6. Personnel Implications**

- 6.1 Currently personnel report sickness directly to their allocated workplace which is then recorded on an attendance register. There is clearly a failing within

the system and a more robust centralised system of management is required. There are likely to be resource implications associated with this, however, the continuing situation is clearly unacceptable.

- 6.2 Currently personnel in a large number of cases are refusing to disclose the reasons for sickness or the information is not being recorded on station. At this point in time 93% of sickness absence is undisclosed. This cannot be allowed to continue, and personnel will be required to disclose their reason for absence.
- 6.3 At present personnel within some areas of the uniformed establishment are allowed to engage in secondary employment. Whilst no direct links have been established, this may be a significant factor in the levels of short-term sickness absenteeism. A full review of all current secondary employment is being undertaken in order to comply with the Working Time Regulations 1998 and to ensure compatibility with revised "Grey Book" conditions. The opportunity to impose restrictions is available to the Fire Authority "if it thinks fit".

## **7. Risk Management Implications**

- 7.1 The current levels of sickness have the potential to limit the Authority's ability to implement IRMP. This is a clear requirement of the Fire & Rescue Services National Framework and an expectation of the ODPM.
- 7.2 From March 2005 the Service will be measured against revised sickness and ill-health retirements by the ODPM. Without urgent and robust actions the Service will be seen as failing in this area.
- 7.3 From February 2005 the Service will undergo its first Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). CPA is about the overall performance of the organisation, including how it addresses its sickness and absenteeism. A poor CPA result could affect the ability of the organisation to manage its own future.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 IDB support the revision of the Absence Monitoring Policy to be completed and implemented at the earliest opportunity.
- 8.2 IDB Members may wish to consider and discuss the viability of funding membership of the Westfield Health Scheme and providing on-site physiotherapy/rehabilitation services, etc.
- 8.3 IDB Members support the concept of a centralised notification, recording and monitoring system for absence, supported by a robust IT system and resources dedicated to managing sickness.
- 8.4 IDB support a recommendation that removes the ability of any individual to self-certify if they fail to disclose the reason for their sickness absence. This will require the individual to produce a certificate from their GP regardless of the number of days absent.
- 8.5 That IDB support the concept of the imposition of conditions and restrictions on secondary employment in certain cases and discuss what the conditions and restrictions may be.

8.6 That IDB support a proposal to extend this review to cover absenteeism amongst non-uniformed personnel

Frank Swann  
**ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**