



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Human Resources Committee

# HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 29 April 2022

**Purpose of Report:**

To update Members on key human resources metrics for the period 1 January to 31 March 2022.

**Recommendations:**

That Members note the contents of the report.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As part of its remit, the Human Resources Committee of Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority receives regular updates on human resources (HR) issues within the Service. This includes issues such as sickness absence, formal discipline, grievance, employment tribunal cases and staffing numbers. These issues are collectively referred to as HR metrics.
- 1.2 Reports are on a quarterly basis and allow the Human Resources Committee to keep informed of ongoing issues and offer their guidance and scrutiny.

## 2. REPORT

### STAFFING NUMBERS

- 2.1 During the period 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022, nine employees commenced employment. Establishment levels at 31 March 2022 are highlighted below:

	Approved	Actual	Variance
<b>Wholetime</b>	431 (431 FTE)	427 (424.3 FTE)	-4 (-6.7 FTE)
<b>On-Call</b>	192 Units	241 persons (includes 71 Dual Contracts)	-54.5 units (Please refer to Para 2.6)
<b>Support</b>	152 (149.05) FTE)	174 (163.6 FTE)	+22 (+14.55fte)

- 2.2 There have been 23 leavers and 9 starters since the last report. This has resulted in an actual workforce figure of 842 (this includes 71 dual contractors). Leavers are broken down as follows: 10 x Wholetime, 6 x On-call and 7 x Support roles.
- 2.3 As at 31 March 20221 Wholetime strength stood at 427 operational personnel (424.3 FTE) employees against an establishment of 431 posts.
- 2.4 During the period, the Service has appointed to 5 On-call and 4 support roles.
- 2.5 Overall, the number of leavers for Wholetime employees is within planning forecasts. However, turnover rates for On-call (+5) and support roles (+16 – this does not include completion of fixed term contracts) are higher than predicted. As reported in the previous review, this reflects the national picture of turnover where employment vacancy rates have increased significantly during 2021-22. This has been identified as a potential area of concern for the

Service and is referenced in the Service's risk register. During 2021-22, there have been 18 new starters to permanent support roles and 13 to On-call roles.

2.6 The recent introduction of the On-call trial at Bingham and Stapleford fire stations, whereby available hours are calculated as opposed to units of cover, has affected the variance figure set out in the table at 2.1. This now reflects the position of the fourteen stations not involved in the trial period.

## SICKNESS ABSENCE

2.7 The review period covers Q4 (Jan-Mar 2022).

2.8 Target absence figures for 2021/22 are:

Wholetime:	6 days per person
Non-Uniformed:	7 days per person
Whole Workforce:	6.25 days per person

(The average is affected by the numbers of employees in each work group and the average work shift)

2.9 Summary Table: Due to the impact of Covid related absence on sickness figures, absence **excluding Covid** is shown in brackets:

Absence	Period 4 Jan – March	Compared with previous quarter	Total days lost for 21/22	Average over last 12 months
<b>Total workforce (236 employees have been absent on 270 occasions during Q4, excluding On-call *)</b>	1916 days lost  (1381 excluding covid)  3.23 days per employee  (2.32 excluding covid)	2009.64 days lost  (1318.5 days excluding covid)  3.32 days per employee  (2.18 days excluding covid)  4.66% decrease  (-93.64 days)	7075.42 days lost  (5391 days excluding covid)	11.99 days per employee  (9.18 days per employee excluding covid)  (target 6.25 days)

(\*Due to the on-call nature of the On-call Duty System, On-call absence is not reflected in the figures. These are shown separately at Appendix C).

- 2.10 Absence across the workforce, excluding On-call employees, decreased by 93.64 days (4.66%) in Quarter Four compared to the previous quarter.
- 2.11 Excluding Covid related absence, this represents a 65% increase (+545 days) compared to the same quarter of the previous year (2020-21). It should be noted that absence during 20-21 saw an overall reduction of 25.7% compared to the previous year (2019-20), which may account for the comparatively high increase. If compared to pre-Covid absence levels (2019-20), this shows a 2.4% increase (+133 days).
- 2.12 For On-call staff, absence figures (excluding covid absence) decreased by 3.1% (23 days) compared to the same quarter of 20-21.
- 2.13 Absence related to Covid represents 547 working days lost in Q4, which accounts for 28.37% of total absence in this period. In addition, 387 days (34.74%) were lost due to covid absence for On-call personnel.
- 2.14 The trends across quarters is shown in the table set out at Appendix A.
- 2.15 A full period commentary by employment group is set out in Appendix C.
- 2.16 Long term absence equated to 49.08% of the total absence during the review period.

## **WHOLE YEAR ABSENCE REVIEW**

- 2.17 Non Covid related sickness absence for wholetime and support employees during the financial year 2021-22, accounted for 5391 days, at an average of 9.18 days per employee. This means that the Service did not achieve its target of 6.25 days per employee. Of this, 69.5% was long term in nature i.e. absence of more than 28 days supported by a medical fit note.
- 2.18 Non Covid related sickness absence for On-call employees accounted for 3460 days, at an average of 14.12 days. This means that the Service did not achieve its target of 11 days per On-call employee. Of this, 79.6% was long term in nature.
- 2.19 Absence due to Covid related reasons accounted for an additional 1647 days for wholetime (1163 days) and support (484 days) employees and, 1079 days for On-call employees during the year. In total, Covid absence accounting for 23% of sickness absence.
- 2.20 It is very hard to draw direct comparison with absence figures for 2020-21 due to the impact of Covid. Comparison has therefore been made with the pre-Covid period of 2019-20 which has seen an overall increase of 2.54% for wholetime and support absence and 0.93% for On-call absence.
- 2.21 The Service provides significant support to employees through its Occupational and Health and Fitness team, Employee Assistance Programme and membership of the BUPA Cash-Back scheme, both to promote well-being and therefore to prevent sickness or injury arising, and to support employees during any period of sickness or injury. This includes a focus on mental health and musculo-skeletal injury, which are the two primary

reasons for sickness absence. This support includes access to counselling, physiotherapy, fitness advisor, an Occupational Health Physician and on-site gyms.

- 2.22 Work will be undertaken during 2022-23 to reduce the levels of sickness absence across all work groups.

### **NATIONAL ABSENCE TRENDS**

- 2.23 The Service contributes to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) sickness absence survey, which is undertaken quarterly and allows for comparison between contributing Fire and Rescue Services.
- 2.24 Reasons for sickness absence at NFRS broadly mirror the national trends with musculo-skeletal and mental health related absences featuring significantly in all workgroups.
- 2.25 Appendix B reflects the national absence trends for Quarter 3. Quarter 4 figures have not yet been published. The three charts reflect Wholetime, Support staff (Green book) and On-call the average of duty days / shifts lost per person for those Fire and Rescue Services who contribute to the survey.
- 2.26 For Wholetime personnel NFRS has an average of 8.48 days lost per employee which ranks the Service as 30<sup>th</sup> out of the 38 Services included in the survey. This figure is above the sector sickness average of 8.10 days per employee. The lowest average was 4.06 and the highest 13.5.
- 2.27 For On-call staff, NFRS has an average of 13.92 days lost per employee which ranks the Service 20 out of the 24 Services included in the survey. This figure is above the sector sickness average of 10.18 days per employee. The lowest average was 3.68 and the highest 22.97.
- 2.28 For Support Staff (Green Book) the Service has an average of 9.17 days lost per employee which ranks the Service 35 out of the 39 Services included in the survey. This figure is above the sector sickness average of 6.72 days per employee. The lowest average was 0.93 days and the highest 12.22 days.

### **OTHER WORKFORCE METRICS**

- 2.29 This section reviews the following activities: disciplinary cases, grievances raised, harassment cases raised, dismissals, appeals and active employment tribunal cases.
- 2.30 Over the period, one grievance has been heard. This related to a management decision.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The Authority's pay budgets cover the cost of the workforce, and these include budgets for overtime to cover sickness absence where operational cover is affected. The actual numbers of employees in post compared to the

establishment can cause budgetary variances and these are reported to the Finance and Resources Committee.

- 3.2 Any increase in absence has a direct impact upon the Service's operational pay budget as gaps in the ridership can lead to an increase in overtime pay to cover for long-term absence.

#### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 A review of sickness absence will be undertaken as a priority with the aim of reducing both short- and long-term sickness levels. This review will be overseen by the Head of People and Organisational Development.
- 4.2 An updated Workforce Plan will be developed to support the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (Our People) for the period 2022-23 and will be reported to a future meeting.

#### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

As this review does not impact upon policy or service delivery, no equality impact assessment has been undertaken.

#### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

#### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

A regular reporting system on the management of human resources ensures that the Service and the Authority are aware of any developing workforce issues.

#### **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

#### **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members note the contents of the report.

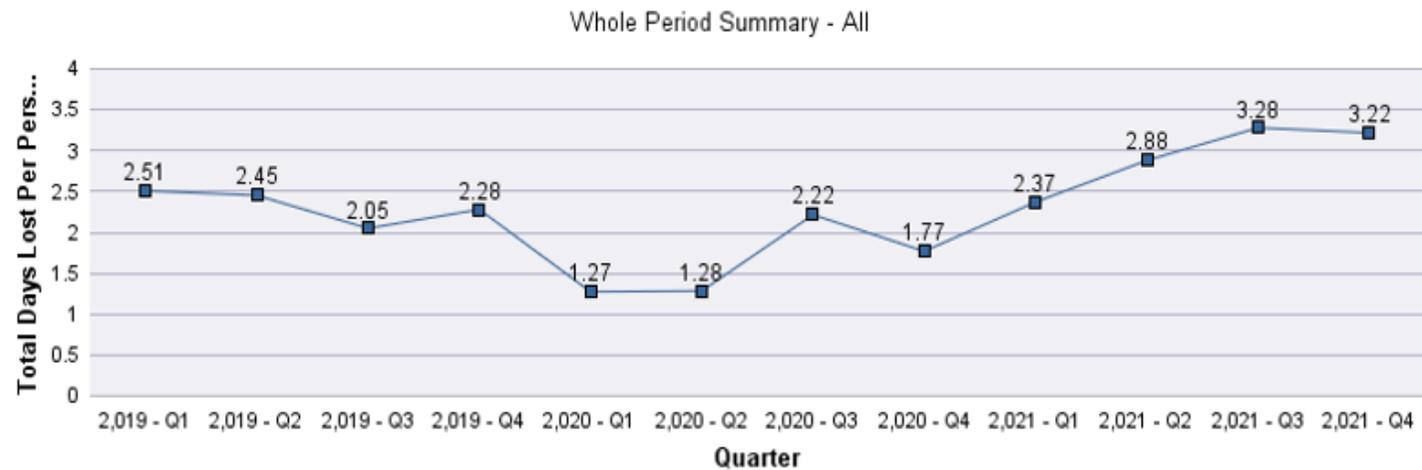
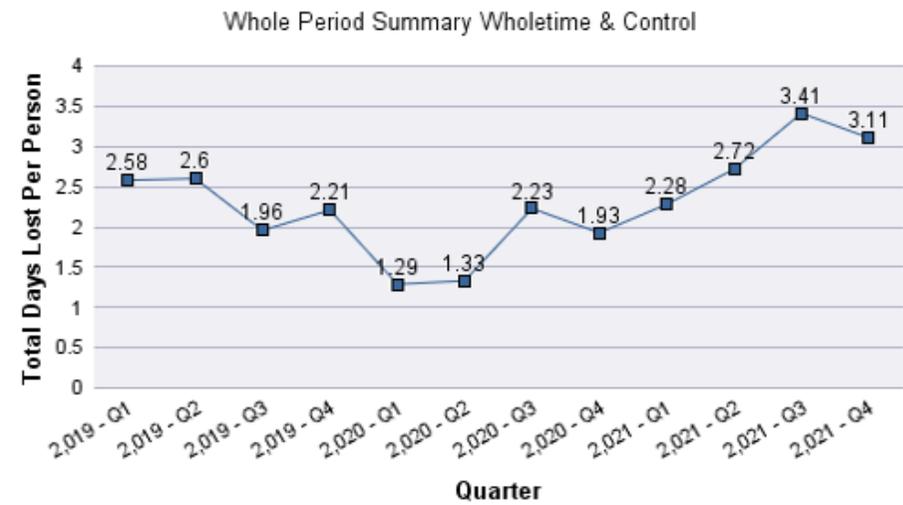
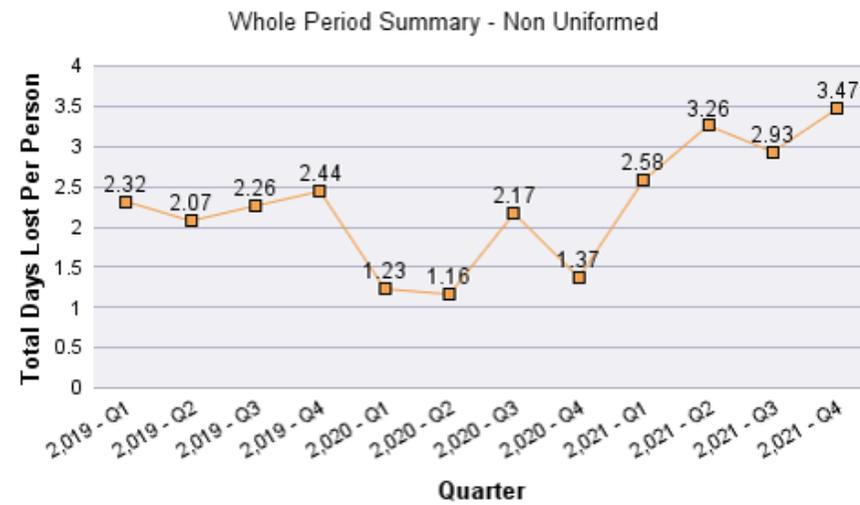
**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

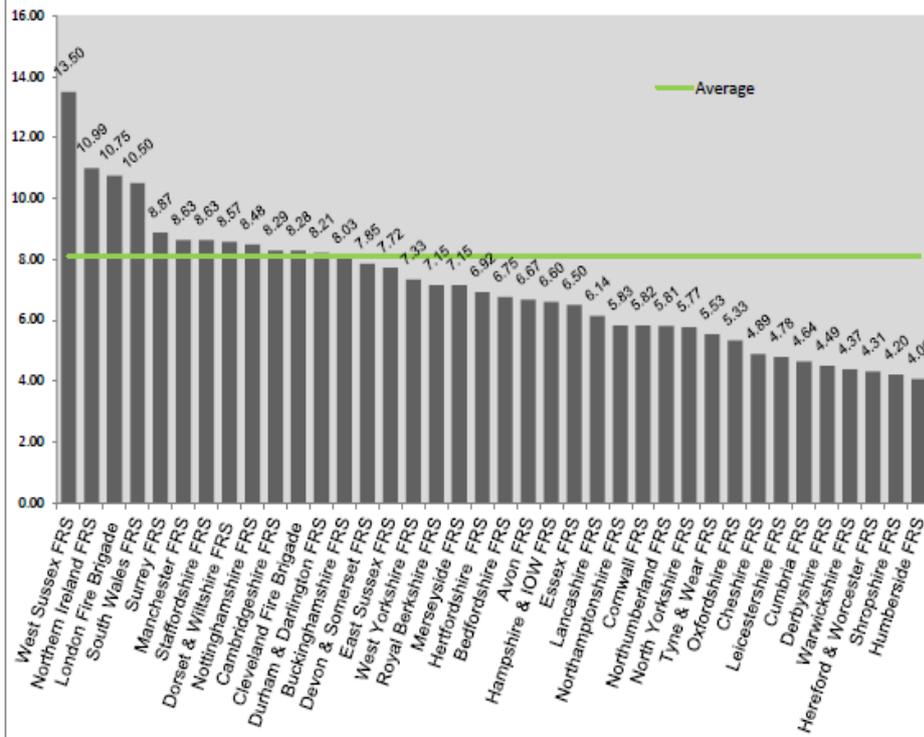
Craig Parkin  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

## APPENDIX A

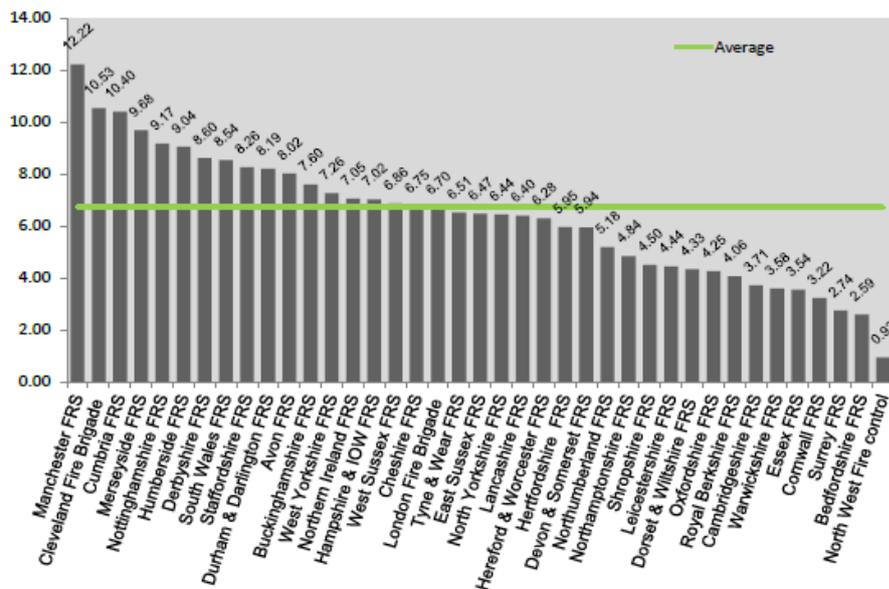
### Appendix - Reporting Period: 01/04/2019 to 31/03/2022

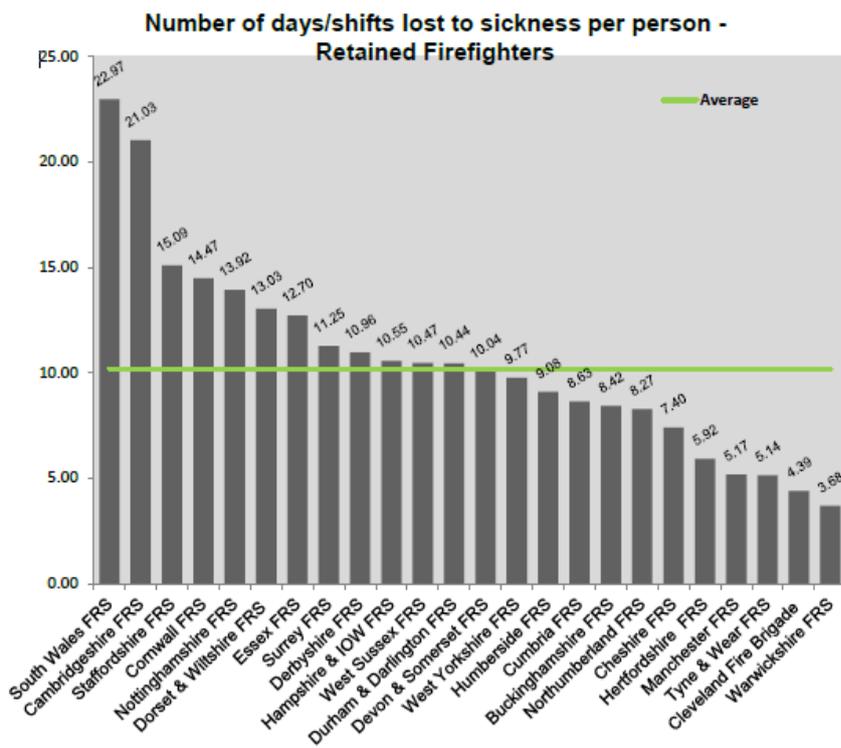


Number of days/shifts lost to sickness per person -  
Wholetime Firefighters



Number of days/shifts lost to sickness per person  
Green Book staff





Please note that not all FRS in the survey have reported covid related absence.

**Q4 2021/22 – WHOLETIME**

In total 1323.7 working days were lost due to sickness during this quarter. Of this, 644 days were lost to long-term absence (28+ calendar days absent) and 679.7 days were lost due to short term absence. This represents an overall decrease of 164.3 days (11.04%) on the previous quarter. The average absence per employee was 3.08 days lost, which is above the target figure of 1.6 days lost per quarter per employee.

48.65% of sickness absence in this quarter was due to long term absence. There were 62 periods of absence covered by a Medical Certificate (i.e. absence longer than 8 days in duration), 20 of which were classified as long-term sickness. At the end of the period 46 employees had returned to work with 16 still absent.

**Reasons for Absence**

Main reasons for sickness absence for the Wholetime are Covid-19 Tested Positive (88 instances, 377 days) and Musculo Skeletal (33 instances, 377 days). The main long-term absence reasons were Musculo Skeletal (8 instances, 276 days) For short term absences was Covid-19 Tested Positive (88 instances, 370 days).

**Wholetime**

			<u>Short Term Absences</u>			<u>Long Term Absences</u>		
Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absen	Days Lost
Musculo Skeletal	33	377	COVID-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	88	370	Musculo Skeletal	8	276
COVID-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	88	370	Musculo Skeletal	25	101	Mental Health	6	191
Mental Health	7	199	Hospital/Post Operative	6	39	Mental Health - Other	2	71
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	15	83	Gastro-Intestinal	12	31	Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	1	53
Mental Health - Other	5	79	Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	14	30	Hospital/Post Operative	1	30
Hospital/Post Operative	7	69	Respiratory - Chest Infection	7	25	Cancer and Tumours	1	15
Gastro-Intestinal	12	31	Ear, Nose, Throat	3	19	Heart, Cardiac and Circulatory Problems	1	8
Respiratory - Chest Infection	7	25	Other known causes (not specified in list)	3	17			
Ear, Nose, Throat	3	19	Unknown causes, not specified	3	11			
Other known causes (not specified in list)	3	17	Mental Health	1	8			
			Mental Health - Other	4	8			

**NON-UNIFORMED**

In total 592.3 working days were lost due to sickness during this quarter. Of this, 296.38 days were lost to long-term absence (28+ calendar days absent) and 295.93 days were lost due to short term absence. This represents an overall increase of 70.67 days (13.55%) on the previous quarter. The average absence per employee was 3.6 days lost, which is above the target figure of 1.6 days lost per quarter per employee.

50.04% of sickness absence in this quarter was due to long term absence. There were 20 periods of absence covered by a Medical Certificate (i.e. absence longer than 8 days in duration), 6 of which were classified as long-term sickness. At the end of the period 15 employees had returned to work with 5 still absent.

## Reasons for Absence

Main reasons for sickness absence for the Non-Uniformed are Covid-19 Tested Positive (31 instances, 162 days) and Mental Health (4 instances, 114 days). The main long-term absence reason was Mental Health (2 instances, 80 days) For short term absences was Covid-19 Tested Positive (31 instances, 162 days).

Non Uniformed			Short Term Absences			Long Term Absences		
Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost
Covid-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	31	162	Covid-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	31	162	Mental Health	2	80
Mental Health	4	114	Mental Health	2	34	Cancer and Tumours	1	64
Musculo Skeletal	6	85	Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	12	30	Musculo Skeletal	1	64
Cancer and Tumours	1	64	Musculo Skeletal	5	21	Hospital/Post Operative	1	49
Hospital/Post Operative	2	54	Mental Health - Other	1	19	Other known causes (not specified in list)	1	38
Other known causes (not specified in list)	2	41	Gastro-Intestinal	5	12			
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	12	30	COVID-19 Isolating Symptoms Self	3	11			
Mental Health - Other	1	19	Respiratory - Chest Infection	2	7			
Gastro-Intestinal	5	12	Hospital/Post Operative	1	5			
COVID-19 Isolating Symptoms Self	3	11	Ear, Nose, Throat	2	3			
			Other known causes (not specified in list)	1	3			

## ON CALL ABSENCE

Attendance for on-call fire-fighters does not reflect shifts lost as they do not have standard working hours, instead it reflects calendar days lost e.g. availability to attend incidents or training periods and absence is predicated over a 7-day availability pattern (compared to 4 day shift traditionally for whole-time employees). In Q4, 1114 days were unavailable due to sickness, broken down into 528 days of long-term absence (28+ days) and 586 days of short-term absence. This equates to an average of 4.62 “days” of unavailability per employee. Compared to Q3, when 1333 days were lost to sickness absence, this reflects a decrease of 219 available days lost to sickness (-16.43%).

There were 37 periods of absence covered by a Medical Certificate (i.e. absence longer than 8 days in duration), 7 of which were classified as long-term sickness. At the end of the period 30 employees had returned to work with 7 still absent.

## Reasons for Absence

Main reasons for sickness absence for On-Call are Covid-19 Tested Positive (47 instances, 382 days) and Musculo Skeletal (12 instances, 179 days). The main long-term absence reason was Mental Health (2 instances, 155 days) For short term absences was Covid-19 Tested Positive (47 instances, 382 days).

Retained			Short Term Absences			Long Term Absences		
Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost	Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost
Covid-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	47	382	Covid-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	47	382	Mental Health - Other	2	155
Musculo Skeletal	12	179	Musculo Skeletal	11	89	Mental Health	2	123
Mental Health - Other	3	162	Hospital/Post Operative	2	49	Musculo Skeletal	1	90
Mental Health	2	123	Gastro-Intestinal	8	27	Respiratory - Other	1	90
Hospital/Post Operative	3	91	Other known causes (not specified in list)	2	15	Hospital/Post Operative	1	42
Respiratory - Other	1	90	Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	4	15			
Gastro-Intestinal	8	27	Eye Problems	3	12			
Other known causes (not specified in list)	2	15	Ear, Nose, Throat	2	7			
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza	4	15	Mental Health - Other	1	7			
Eye Problems	3	12	COVID-19 Isolating Symptoms Self	2	5			