



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: 19 April 2024

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on key human resources metrics for the period 1 October to 31 December 2023.

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this 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 October 2023 to 31 December 2023, 12 employees commenced employment. Establishment levels as of 31 December 2023 are highlighted below:

	Approved	Actual	Variance
Wholetime	431	414 (413.6fte)	-17 (-17.4fte)
On-Call	192 units	237 persons (127 units) (includes 70 dual contracts)	-65 units
Support	163 (157.32 fte)	165 (152.1fte)	+2 (-5.22 fte)

- 2.2 There have been 20 leavers and 12 starters since the last report. This has resulted in an actual workforce figure of 816 (this includes 70 dual contractors). Leavers are broken down as follows: 8 wholetime, 8 on-call and 4 support roles.
- 2.3 In order to address the gaps in the wholetime establishment, the Service has undertaken a national transfer process, which has resulted in 15 competent firefighters appointed to operational positions (11 firefighters, 2 crew managers, 2 watch managers). Of these, 4 commenced employment during the review period, and 11 will commence in early 2024.
- 2.4 In addition, the Service commenced a wholetime apprentice firefighter recruitment campaign in August 2023, with final interviews held throughout January 2024. This has resulted in 34 appointments, which will be factored in during 2024-25 to address projected turnover figures. Further details of this selection process are contained within the "Wholetime Recruitment Outcomes" report on the agenda.

- 2.5 As at 31 December 2023, wholetime strength stood at 414 operational (413.6 fte) employees against an establishment of 431 posts.
- 2.6 During the period, the Service has appointed to 5 wholetime, and 7 support roles.

SICKNESS ABSENCE – Quarter 3

2.7 The review period covers the three-month period between 1 October and 31 December 2023.

2.8 Target absence figures for 2023/24 are:

Wholetime:	9.05 days per person
Support:	9.35 days per person
On-Call Workforce:	13.2 days per person

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

2.9 For the purposes of reporting, on-call absence analysis is shown separately to other workgroups due to the nature of their working arrangements. Absence related to Covid has been included in the total absence figures.

Workforce (excluding on-call)

2.10 Total absence across the workforce (excluding on-call) increased by 299.5 days (+19.5%) compared to the previous quarter, at an average of 3.2 days lost per employee. This increase may relate to seasonal factors as sickness absence figures historically are higher during Q3 (October to December) than Q2 (July to September).

2.11 This represents an increase compared to the same quarter of 2022-23 of 192 days (+11.7%).

2.12 Absence related to Covid accounted for 65 working days lost, or 3.5% of total absence.

2.13 Long-term absence equated to 57.4% of sickness absence. This breaks down to 47.9% for the operational workforce and 70.7% for support employees.

2.14 Absence due to work related injury accounted for 219 days, or 12% of all sickness absence. The main reason for absence related to work was mental health issues.

2.15 Absence trends across the last three years are shown in the table set out in Appendix A.

On-Call Workforce

2.16 Absence figures increased by 122 days (+11.9%) during the review period compared to the previous quarter, at an average of 4.8 days per employee.

- 2.17 This represents a decrease compared to the same quarter of 2022-23 of 39 days (-3.3%).
- 2.18 Absence related to Covid accounted for 77 working days lost, or 6.7% of total absence.
- 2.19 Long-term absence equated to 58.6% of total sickness absence.
- 2.20 A summary of the reasons for absence by workgroup are attached at Appendix C.

NATIONAL ABSENCE TRENDS

- 2.21 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.
- 2.22 Reasons for sickness absence at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) broadly mirror the national trends with musculo-skeletal and mental health related absences featuring significantly in all workgroups.
- 2.23 Appendix B reflects the national absence trends for Quarter 3. 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.
- 2.24 For wholetime staff, NFRS has an average of 6.91 days lost per employee which ranks the Service as 16 out of the 35 Services included in the survey. This figure is below the sector sickness average of 8.58 days per employee. The lowest average was 2.97 days and the highest 14.78 days.
- 2.25 For on-call staff, NFRS has an average of 12.25 days lost per employee which ranks the Service as 16 out of 22 Services included in the survey. This figure is above the sector sickness average of 11.82 days per employee. The lowest average was 0.14 days and the highest 24.99 days.
- 2.26 For support staff (green book) the Service has an average of 11.87 days lost per employee which ranks as 34 out of the 35 Services included in the survey. This figure is above the sector sickness average of 7.72 days per employee. The lowest average was 2.86 days and the highest 13.10 days.

OTHER WORKFORCE METRICS

- 2.27 This section reviews the following activities: disciplinary cases, grievances raised, harassment cases raised, dismissals, appeals and active employment tribunal cases.
- 2.28 During the review period, one disciplinary hearing resulted in a dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct, and no further disciplinary investigations have been undertaken. One grievance was raised and not upheld. Four employees did not pass their probationary assessment and were dismissed on capability grounds – these related to 3 on-call trainees and 1 firefighter apprentice. No employment tribunal cases were lodged.

EQUALITIES MONITORING

2.29 A review of key equalities metrics is undertaken twice yearly to establish any patterns or changes. Due to the timing of the meeting, the following equalities monitoring information is provided for the period of 1 October 2023 – 31 March 2024.

Workforce Profile

2.30 The table below sets out a snapshot of key equalities metrics:

Workforce	Female firefighters (Wholetime and On-Call)	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees (whole workforce)	BAME employees in wholetime roles	Lesbian, gay or bisexual (whole workforce)	Disabled (whole workforce)
31 March 2024 Headcount 830	10.4% (42 out of 405 roles)	5.8% (48)	6.2% (26)	3.9% (32)	4.6% (38)
30 September 2023 Headcount 824	10.6% (44 out of 414 roles)	5.6% (46)	6.2% (26)	4.13% (34)	4.4 % (36)

2.31 When considered by workgroup, the monitoring data shows that:

Whole Workforce

- Women currently constitute 16.9% (140) of the total workforce. Of these, 39.5% (55) women are employed in operational roles . Women represent 8.5% of operational roles undertaken and 4.5% (10 of 218) of supervisory managers and 3.4% (1) of middle operational managers are women. There are four women in strategic operational roles (Area Manager and Assistant Chief Fire Officer) and who are members of the Strategic Leadership Team.
- Employees from BAME backgrounds constitute 5.8% (48) of the workforce. Current census figures show the BAME population of Nottinghamshire as 14.64%.
- Employees who identify as being Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) constitute 3.9% (32) of the workforce. Current census figures demonstrate an LGB population of Nottinghamshire of 2.68% (however the prefer not to say level was 6% within the last census, suggesting Nottinghamshire’s LGB population could be higher).

- Disability declaration is at 4.6% (38) of the workforce. However, this increases to 10.1% (17) of employees in support roles. Census data shows 20% of the population of Nottinghamshire identify as having a disability.

Operational Roles

- For wholetime roles, women are employed in 10.3% (43) of operational roles. Of these, 5.6% (8 out of 144) are supervisory roles (Crew or Watch Manager) and 3.4% (1 out of 29) are middle manager roles (Station or Group manager). 22.2% (2 out of 9) women in a strategic operational role (Brigade Manager).
- Employees from BAME backgrounds represent 6.2% (26) of wholetime operational roles. Of these, 5.6% (8 of 144) are supervisory roles (Crew or Watch Manager). There are no BAME employees in middle or senior manager roles.

On-Call Roles

- For On-Call roles, women are employed in 5% (12) of operational roles. Of these, 2.6% (2 out of 78) are employed in supervisory roles.
- Employees from BAME backgrounds represent 2.5% (6) of operational roles. Of these, 1.3% (1 out of 78) are employed in supervisory roles.

Support Roles

- For support roles, women are employed in 50.2% (85) of roles. Of these, 49.4% (43 out of 87) are employed in supervisory roles and 44.4% (8 out of 18) are employed in senior or strategic roles.
- Employees from BAME backgrounds represent 9.5% (16) of roles. Of these, 11.5% (10) are employed in supervisory roles and 5.6% (1) in senior roles.
- The table below, shows the breakdown of the support workforce by protected characteristic and grade.

Support Employees	Men	Women	Disability	BAME	LGB
Grades 1-4 (plus Apprentice)	30	34	7	5	7
Grades 5-7	44	43	10	10	3
Grades 8-SLSM	10	8		1	
Total	84	85	17	16	10

STARTERS AND LEAVERS

2.32 There have been 38 starters and 41 leavers during the review period. The table below shows details of these starters and leavers by protected characteristic:

	Starters			Leavers		
	On-Call	Wholetime	Support	On-Call	Wholetime	Support
Women	1 (3)	0(8)	10 (15)	1 (2)	2 (3)	6 (14)
Men	11 (22)	12 (31)	4 (14)	14 (22)	13 (27)	5 (8)
BAME	0 (1)	0 (1)	1 (1)	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (2)
LGB	1 (4)	0 (7)	1 (2)	3 (5)	1 (1)	0 (0)
Disability	0	2 (3)	(1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)

Figures in brackets denote whole year

2.33 Of the 38 starters, 28.9% (11) were women. The high number of male appointees reflects outcomes from the recent transferee process, which saw ten male appointees to operational roles. One woman took part in the On-Call trainee firefighters course held in January. However, 7 women had taken part in earlier firefighter trainee/apprenticeship courses during 2023. Whilst the number of women applying for firefighter careers has seen an increase in female recruits over recent years, it does represent an ongoing national challenge, and this is particularly the case for On-Call roles. It is worth noting that 10 (71.4%) of successful applicants for support roles were women.

RECRUITMENT

Wholetime

2.34 The Wholetime Apprentice Firefighter recruitment process, which commenced in August, concluded in January with 160 candidates interviewed. This had been preceded by positive action to encourage a diverse range of candidates to apply. The first cohort of 20 recruits will commence their apprenticeship in April. Further details of this selection process are contained within the “Wholetime Recruitment Outcomes” report on the agenda.

On-Call

2.35 There have been no On-Call recruitment campaigns within the period of this report. However, a trainee firefighter course commenced in January 2024, with 12 trainees appointed, including 1 female recruit.

Support Roles

2.36 In the review period the Service received 93 applicants in total for 7 vacancies. It should be noted that three of these vacancies were not filled within the review period. The breakdown of applicants, those shortlisted for interview and appointed are shown in the table below:

	Female	Male	BAME	Disabled	LGBT
Applicants	35 (37.6%)	56 (60.2%)	61 (65.6%)	4 (4.3%)	6 (6.5%)
Shortlisted	15 (51.7%)	14 (48.2%)*	15 (51.7%)	2 (6.9%)	3 (10.3%)
Appointed	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	2 (25%)	0	1 (25%)

Please note that two applicants did not declare their gender

- 2.37 It can be observed that there were more male (60.2%) than female (37.6%) applicants and the number of applications from under-represented groups was high (this was linked to a particular job role). The representation of successful applicants with protected characteristics is also high.

CONCLUSION

- 2.38 The monitoring data shows that the workforce profile is not representative of the local population in terms of employees from BAME backgrounds, Disability and people who identify as LGBT. This is particular marked in operational roles.
- 2.39 The Service continues to use positive action to promote the fire service as a career during firefighter recruitment campaigns both wholetime and On-Call, it does also promote support staff vacancies through targeted advertising. It should be noted most vacancies are for On-Call roles, and these are specific to location, which can reduce the impact on diversity.
- 2.40 Using a range of awareness events, mentoring and fitness/strength development activities prior to wholetime recruitment has helped to lead to positive diversity figures.
- 2.41 From the data presented above, it can be noted workforce is becoming gradually more representative.

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

The human resources and learning and development implications are set out in the report.

5. EQUALITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 As this review does not impact upon policy or service delivery, no equality impact assessment has been undertaken. However, the report contains equalities monitoring information for the period October to December 2023 which provides an overview of progress in terms of increasing the diversity of the workforce.

5.2 There are no ethical implications arising from this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental or sustainability 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

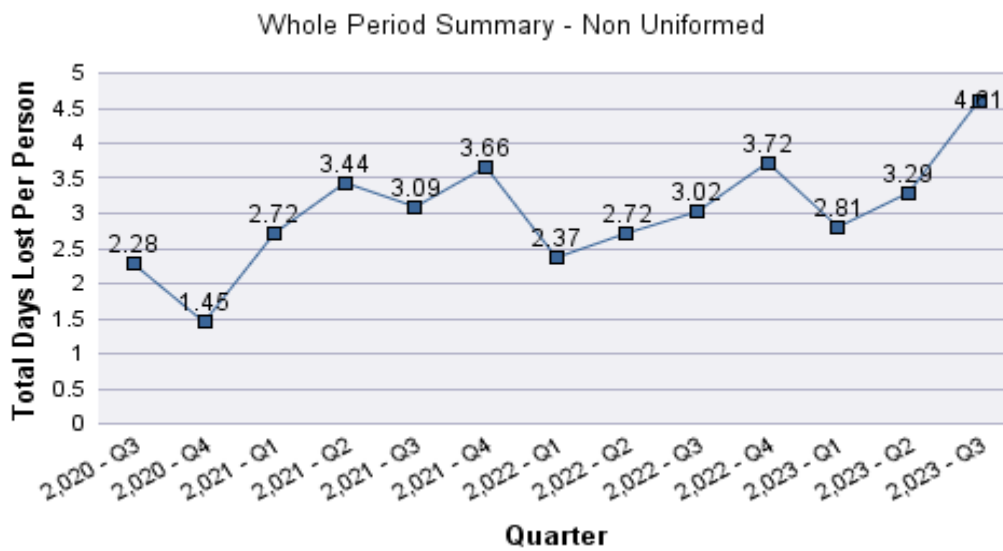
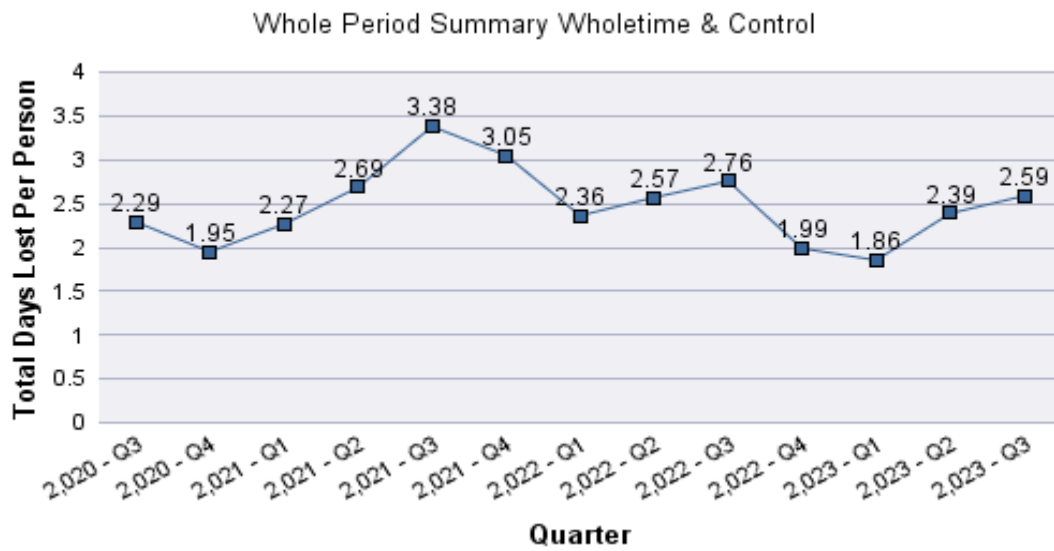
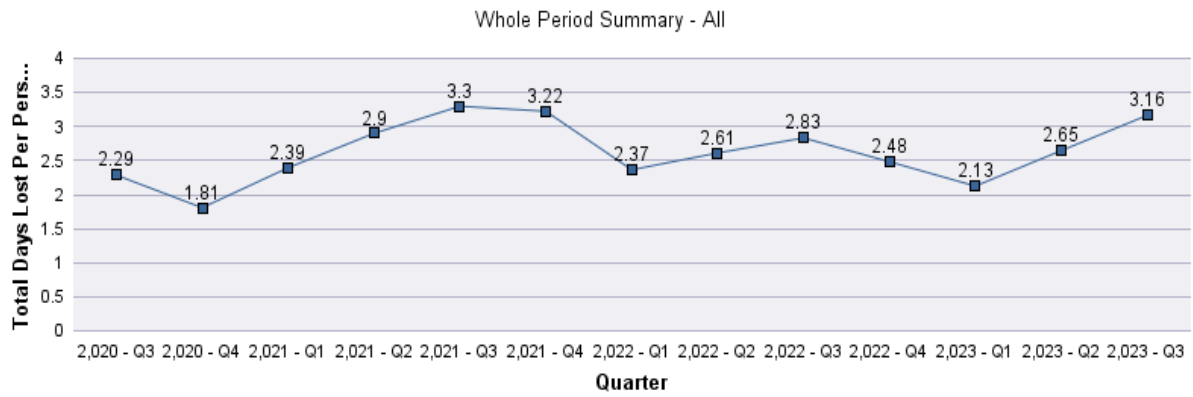
That Members note the contents of this report.

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

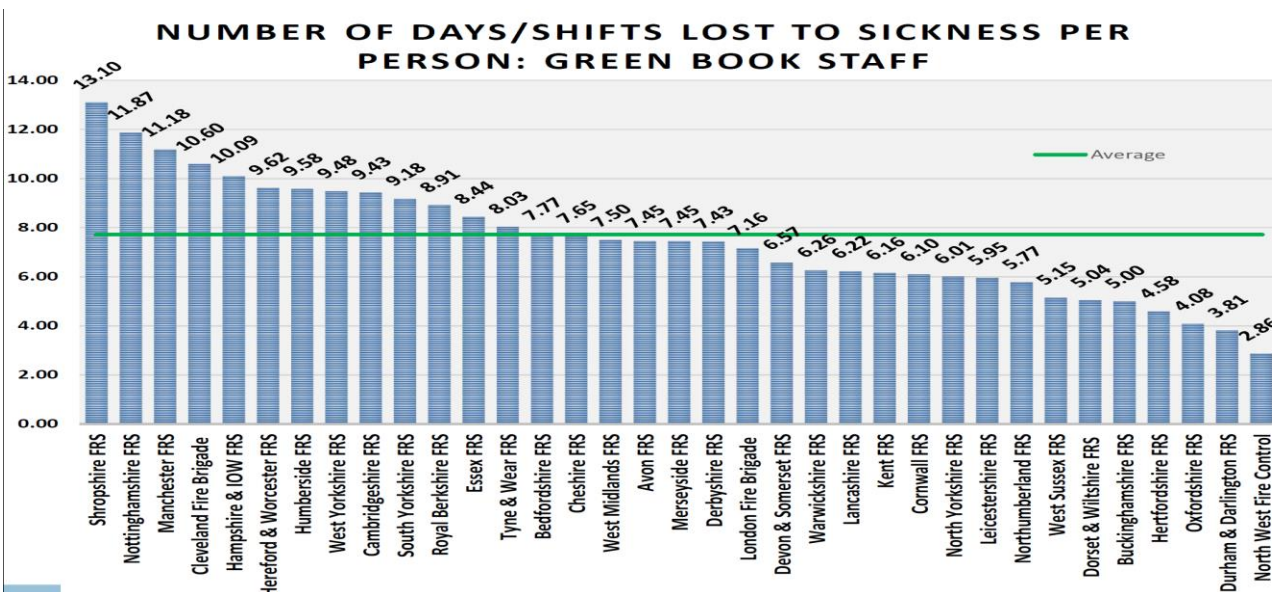
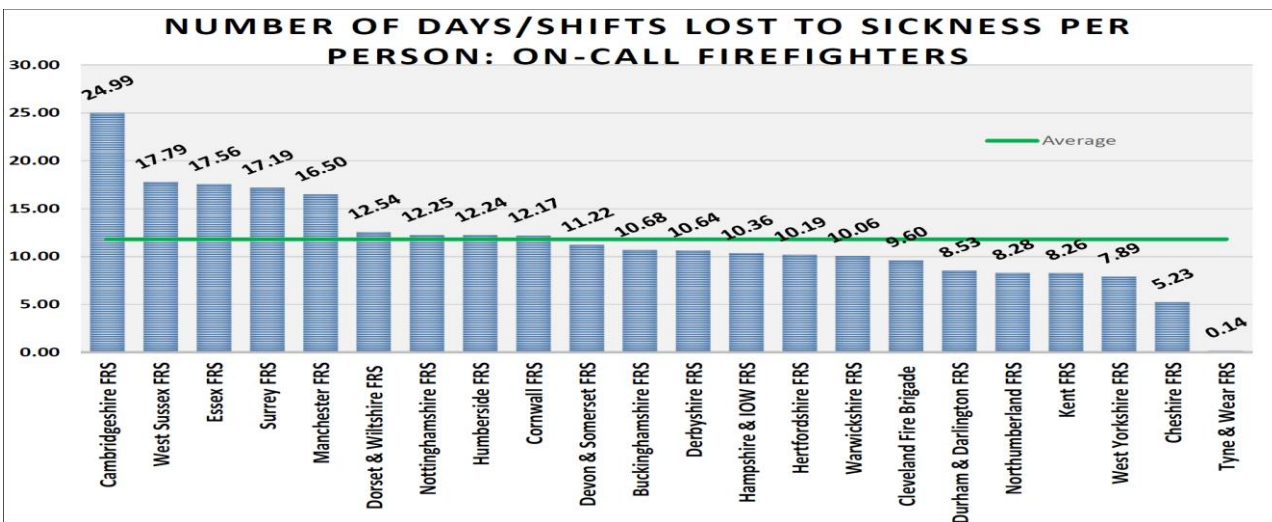
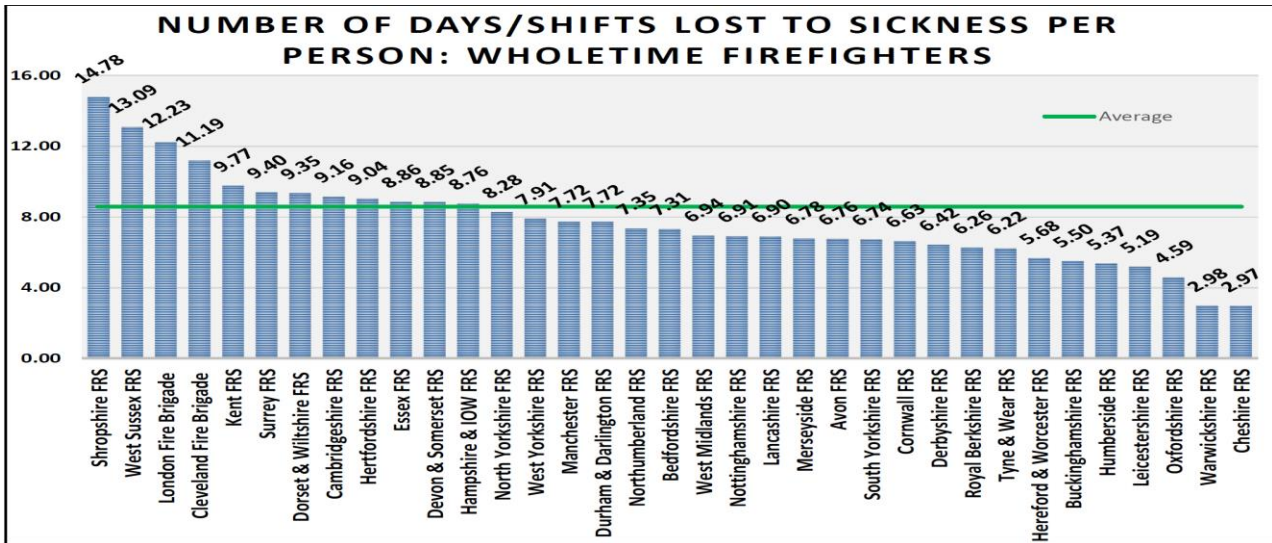
None

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX A



National Absence Survey



Wholetime Absence**Q3**

Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost
Musculo Skeletal	33	315
Mental Health	6	159
Gastro-Intestinal	27	116
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza (COVID related)	27	105
Hospital/Post Operative	9	72
Heart, Cardiac and Circulatory Problems	1	56
COVID-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	17	55
Cancer and Tumours	1	48
Virus/Infectious Diseases	12	48
Ear, Nose, Throat	8	31

On-Call Absence**Q3**

Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost
Musculo Skeletal	12	411
Mental Health	8	397
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza (COVID related)	13	93
COVID-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	12	77
Gastro-Intestinal	5	59
Hospital/Post Operative	4	35
Skin Condition	1	18
Genitourinary/Gynaecological/Reproductive	1	14
Virus/Infectious Diseases	4	12
Headache/Migraine/Neurological	1	9

Support Staff Absence

Q3

Absence Reason - Grouped	Unique Absence Count	Days Lost
Mental Health	5	190
Hospital/Post Operative	5	120
Respiratory - Cold/Cough/Influenza (COVID related)	27	111
Musculo Skeletal	4	79
Headache/Migraine/Neurological	6	74.5
Cancer and Tumours	1	65
Respiratory - Chest Infection	2	38
Mental Health - Other	1	30
Genitourinary/Gynaecological/Reproductive	1	26
COVID-19 Isolating - Tested Positive	3	10
Gastro-Intestinal	6	10