

AGENDA ITEM:

REPORT TO:	MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE:	9TH APRIL 2013
REPORT NO.	CFO/045/13
REPORTING OFFICER:	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
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SUBJECT:	CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

APPENDIX	A	TITLE	Critical Incident Stress Management Implementation Plan
	B		Equality Impact Assessment
	C		Critical Incident Stress Management Service Instruction

ATTACHED – ELECTRONIC

Purpose of Report

To request that Members approve the recommendations of this report relating to the formal implementation of a Critical Incident Stress Management process within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority with the aim of improving the wellbeing support available to staff, particularly following attendance at critical incidents.

Recommendation

1. That Members:
 - a) Approve the introduction of a Critical Incident Stress Management process and the relevant training required to make this possible

- b) Recognise that introducing a Critical Incident Stress Management process within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority will promote and encourage positive health and wellbeing at work, creating an organisational culture where mental ill health issues are recognised, understood, minimised and managed before they impact upon the wellbeing of staff.
- c) Note that Critical Incident Stress Management is highlighted in the Fire Service Health, Safety and Welfare Framework 2012 document as a tool fire services should consider implementing to reduce stress, stating it can manage the effects of *'staff turnover, sickness absence, ill health and erosion of competency, all potentially affected by critical incidents'*.

Executive Summary

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority have a responsibility to ensure as far as reasonably practicable, the Health, Safety and Welfare of all its employees. By the nature of the Fire Service's work, employees (particularly operational) are at risk of exposure to distressing events. From these events, individuals may experience negative reactions ranging from anxiety to depression; this could have the potential to interfere with both work and home life.

In compliance with MF&RA's duty of care, it is intended to develop a Critical Incident Stress Management programme which will provide a proactive response to critical incidents; as well as promoting an understanding and developing a supportive framework for the individual or team in order to manage any negative reactions generated.

Introduction & Background

2. A critical incident is any incident faced by MF&RA personnel that may cause them to experience unusually strong emotions which could possibly affect their ability to function either at the scene or post incident.

The following critical Incident Categorisation would be adopted to support the management of the programme:

Mandatory:

- Serious injury or death of a colleague
- Death of a child
- Incident involving horrific injury/ death
- Mass casualties/ fatalities
- Major disaster or incident
- Civil disturbance - an incident which contains high levels of violence or aggression towards fire crews

Optional:

- Incident involving a fatality
 - Where the involved person is known to the firefighter(s)/ employee(s)
 - Where crews are exposed to a series of traumatic events over a short period of time
 - In the case of control staff, where an operator has handled an unusual, difficult or traumatic call
 - An incident which may entail excessive media interest
 - An incident in which the Senior Officers consider to be deemed 'critical'
3. In August 2012, a critical incident working group was formed to review the mental health needs of employees throughout their career, from entry to exit, with particular reference to the mental health impact following exposure to critical incidents throughout their service. The group were tasked to research and report, with recommendations and an implementation plan for the Service.
 4. The group consisted of representatives from Occupational Health, Health and Safety, Bridging Team, Operational Staff at Station Manager, Crew Manager and Firefighter levels and the Fire Brigades Union. Two practitioners from Beacon counselling were also active members of the working group, available to offer professional advice in the areas of critical incident stress management and mental ill health.
 5. From the group's findings, it has been highlighted that there are improvements that can be made to formalise and embed the mental health support available to staff following their attendance at potentially traumatic incidents.
 6. Following a review by the group in relation to the current support arrangements in place in MFRA, and based on notable practice already in place in other Fire & Rescue Authorities, the group recommend that a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) process be introduced to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority in accordance with the Fire Service Health, Safety and Welfare Framework 2012 document recommendations.
 7. The various mental health support methods available for trauma response have been discussed by the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee with members recommending that the Critical Incident Stress Management process (as opposed to the alternative Trauma Risk Management process) was the most effective and suitable way forward for the Service.
 8. Critical Incident Stress Management will provide a response to critical incidents, as well as promoting an understanding and developing a framework for the individual or team to manage any reactions encountered.
 9. The Critical Incident Stress Management process will be managed and coordinated by the Occupational Health Department, supported by the Health and Safety Team.
 10. The Critical Incident Stress Management process involves a two tier response consisting of initial defusing followed by a more structured debrief process: Trained Defusing Officers will undertake the initial response, Defusing will be conducted immediately when staff have returned to station following attendance at a critical

incident - always before they go off duty. (See Appendix A: Implementation plan, point 4 for further details).

11. Trained Debriefing Officers will conduct the second stage of the process. If a full debrief is required after the defusing stage, Debriefing Officers will hold a structured meeting with those involved, enabling all attending individuals to share their experiences of the incident, reviewing facts, feelings and reactions encountered. This should take place within 48-72 hours following the incident, when not possible as soon as staff return to duty after this time. (See Appendix A: Implementation plan, point 4 for further details).
12. Once a critical incident has been confirmed (by the incident senior officer), a defusing session will always take place and all individuals attending the incident will be required to attend the defusing session.
13. Debriefing will not necessarily always be conducted after a critical incident. This will depend on whether the defusing officer after the initial defusing session feels that a full critical incident debrief is required. If required, then debriefing will be arranged. Attendance at a debrief is not compulsory, but is strongly recommended - Those that choose not to attend the debriefing session will be given an advice leaflet in relation to Critical Incident Stress Management.
14. Debriefing sessions will be facilitated by 2 debriefing officers and will last approximately 1-2 hours. Staffing to provide the debriefing officers whilst on duty when possible will be managed by Time and Resource Management (TRM) (who will liaise with the Occupational Health critical incident project coordinator).
15. It should be noted that full debriefs are not likely to be undertaken frequently - defusing sessions on most occasions will suffice. For example, Critical Incident Stress Management has been in use in Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service since 1997 they have completed just over 100 debriefs since the process began - approximately 6-7 debriefs per year.
16. During debriefing sessions, the team should be made operationally unavailable.
17. Any personnel showing concerning signs during the debriefing, or who request further assistance will be referred to Occupational Health or further relevant support as deemed appropriate.
18. Those who have undertaken debriefing will be contacted by the debrief coordinator at a 3 and 6 month interval (time scales of the follow up reviews may adjust on agreement with trainer and OH coordinator). These reviews are conducted on an individual basis to establish whether further support is required.
19. Non uniformed personnel can also declare a critical incident in the same way and in this circumstance should be declared by the relevant Line Manager.
20. Defusers and debriefers will be contacted individually by the critical incident scheme coordinator to discuss their personal welfare after completing each defusing/debriefing session. This in turn will ensure that defusing officers are also defused and debriefed following the incident when necessary. The critical incident

scheme coordinator will make a decision as to whether a full debrief with the senior officer is required upon contact with them.

21. For Critical Incident Stress Management to work proactively and ensure that all defusing officers and debriefing officers are adequately trained and skills are fully utilised:
 - The defusing officers will be all those Managers conditioned on the flexi duty system.
22. Employees at all levels will be selected as debriefers as the process relies on full and active engagement with the employees. Based on information received from other Services, it is recognised that solely using Senior Officers for the debriefing process is less effective. Employees are less likely to speak openly and honestly to debriefers who may be senior in rank, and more likely to cooperate fully with debriefers of similar rank and status. MF&RA will have between 12-14 debriefers.
23. Debriefers will be volunteers who will be interviewed and will undergo a selection process by the trainer and scheme coordinator to ensure that those selected demonstrate the skills and suitability to undertake the role.
24. It is recommended that consideration be given by a Director Level or Principal Officer to receive training and become involved in the process.
25. The amount of debriefers should be kept to a minimum, as their skills need to be utilised regularly to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. Similarly, on meeting with both Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service (who have 18 debriefers) and Greater Manchester (who have 12 debriefers), both agreed that too many debriefers resulted in skills not being maintained and demonstrated regularly enough and the process could not be managed effectively due to this – Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service originally started with 30 debriefers, this was reduced to 12 debriefers for this reason.
26. Training will be conducted by Livewellworkwell, who provide the critical incident training for the Firefighters Charity, Greater Manchester and Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service, as well as being lead trainer in this area for The Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
27. Defusing Officers will be trained in-house by the MFRA personnel trained to teach defusing (Livewellworkwell will provide the train the trainer training).
28. Debriefing Officers will be volunteers who wish to be part of the critical incident debriefing team, therefore must be flexible in participating in the training in both work/ personal time.
29. Those personnel who will be trained to conduct the Defuser training will be the current Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Mental Health First Aid Instructors (who will be the scheme coordinators based in Occupational Health and Health and Safety). A third trainer may be considered to undertake the train the trainer training if considered appropriate, in order to have more flexibility with training times, schedules and workloads.

30. The Bridging Team will support this process, and will attend stations in an informal manner after the formal debriefing has taken place. The Bridging Team will all be trained at a minimum of mental health first aid - provided by existing in-house trainers. Again the Bridging Team is staffed by volunteers, so volunteers should be open to training in both work/personal time.
31. All aspects of this process will be recorded in the OSHENS debriefing module.
32. The recording of the entire process will be managed by the Occupational Health critical incident scheme coordinator, and the relevant defusing/debriefing officers will receive actions relating to completing their relevant sections via the OSHENS recording system.
33. Relevant further training in mental health first aid will be offered to those participating as defusing and debriefing officers. As this training is in house it can be done in a rolling process once the Critical Incident Stress Management process is introduced.
34. The Critical Incident Stress Management process will be reviewed after 6 months by the working group, to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, making any adjustments and improvements if required.
35. Annual meetings will be scheduled for defusing/debriefing officers to attend for updates, re-training and/or any relevant information and experiences to be shared with the group.
36. Staff on entering the service shall receive a presentation by the critical incident team regarding the potential incidents that they may attend during their service. They will be informed how their welfare will be supported during their Fire Service career (the presentation will be adapted to suit both uniformed and non uniformed starters).
37. Uniformed staff on entering the Service will be trained in mental health first aid during their recruit training course. The Mental Health First Aid course in full is a 2 day course, but brief mental health awareness half day sessions can be tailored to suit the needs of the Service by the in-house instructors if considered more suitable.
38. Occupational Health will be included in the induction day schedule (alongside the Service Chaplain), to advise new employees what support services are available to them with regards to their physical and mental health whilst working for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority.

Equality & Diversity Implications

39. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) completed. Please see Appendix B

Staff Implications

40. The implementation of the Critical Incident Stress Management process will support and promote mental wellbeing in the workplace. The introduction of this process aims to reduce absence from issues that negatively affect the welfare of staff.
41. Commitment will be required from Senior Management to allow staff partial time to attend the relevant training courses for this process to proceed.

Legal Implications

42. Critical Incident Stress Management will ensure that the Authority complies with its duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974; as well as ensuring that the Authority does all it can to reduce stress in the workplace.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

43. Training costs will be:
 - Defusing Officers – £1,583 for the train the trainer course in defusing. The courses can then be run in-house by a trained trainer in defusing. Defusing training is a 1 day course.
 - Debriefing Officers - Debriefers will be fully qualified in Critical Incident Stress Management. This is a 3 day course (16 max per course) at £4,516 (including travel and accommodation). The cost of this course also includes a review and development day approximately 4-6 months following the initial training, and access for a period of 12 months following initial training to a 24/7, 365 days a year 'debriefing helpline'.
44. The overall cost for all the training would be approximately £7,000.
45. This costing has been compared to other company's prices, in line with the Authority's procurement process.
46. There will be a small additional cost to adjust the current OSHENS debriefing module to fit to the requirements of the critical incident debriefing process.
47. Mental Health First Aid instructors are readily available within the Service, cost for training would solely be cost of the manuals and course materials at the current price of £15 per person.
48. All costs will be met within existing Occupational Health Services budgets.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

49. The Health, Safety and Welfare committee have been consulted about the project, and have in agreement recommended Critical Incident Stress Management for adoption by the Authority.

Contribution to Our Mission – To Achieve; Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters”

50. The introduction of the Critical Incident Stress Management process will directly support all Service staff in their mental wellbeing and so will clearly contribute to making firefighters safer and therefore more effective in their duties.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Fire Service Health, Safety and Welfare Framework 2012 Document