

**TASK & FINISH GROUP**  
**OF THE**  
**MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2013**  
**“REVIEW OF SICKNESS ABSENCE”**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Steve Niblock (Chair of Group), Tony Newman and Roy Gladden

**ALSO PRESENT:** Janet Henshaw – Clerk To The Authority and Director of Legal, Procurement & Democratic Services  
Nick Mernock – Director Of People & Organisational Development  
Paul Blanchard-Flett – Manager of Occupational Health  
Philomena Dwyer – Professional Standards Manager  
Kelly Johnson – Minute Taker

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**1. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Group considered the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and approved them as an accurate record.

**2. Consideration of Presentation**

The Group considered the presentation and additional information provided by Nick Mernock, Director of People & Organisational Development.

The presentation and additional information provided the Group with the following:

- *A breakdown of information regarding individuals on long-term sickness absence, and Approximate costs to the Authority relating to these absences in terms of sick pay and providing cover.*

The Group considered the number of people on long term sickness absence, from January 2012 to January 2013; the reasons behind the absences; and the cost to the Authority.

Members noted the systems of support in place to reduce the length of time Employees are away from work and assist in their recovery.

The Group considered and discussed the impact that the introduction of a Capability Procedure might have on long term sickness absence and return-to-work arrangements.

- *Sickness absence figures for individuals self-rostering, and sickness absence figures for individuals actually operating on fire appliances (to include Search & Rescue Team)*

The Group considered the figures presented concerning the number of duty days lost to sickness for the period January 2012 to January 2013. Members noted that the average duty days lost for all staff appear quite high acknowledging that they are better than the average for Public Sector but not as good as the figures for the Private Sector.

The Group discussed whether the recent rise in sickness absence could be attributable to the termination of the Attendance Incentive Scheme. Members noted that although the scheme had had a positive effect initially on reducing the level of sickness absence, the success of the Incentive Scheme had plateaued after a few years, with sickness absence figures increasing once again.

- *The number of individuals who would be eligible for an award/incentive (for not being off sick within the past 12 months) and approximate costs associated with providing a suitable award.*

The Group considered the financial impact of an Incentive Scheme based upon two award sum options and the number of people who meet the criteria of no sickness absence for the period January 2012 to January 2013. Members considered and discussed a number of possible awards and how the award could be made attractive enough to act as a good Incentive, whilst being cost effective.

The Group resolved that:

- a) The high cost of long-term sickness absence to the Authority, be noted.
- b) The complexity of long-term sickness absence arising from the individuality of each case and the services in place to assist in the return to work of employees currently off work from long term sickness, be noted.
- c) The levels of sickness absence for individuals self-rostering and those operating on fire appliances, be noted; and

- d) The need for any new Attendance Incentive Scheme to be cost effect for the Authority and the attractive to the Employee, be noted.

### **3. Consideration of Draft Committee Report**

The Group considered the Draft Committee Report for submission to the Performance & Scrutiny Committee.

Members requested the following amendments to Paragraph 9 of the report under the sub-heading Conclusions Reached:

- **At Paragraph 9 the first bullet point begins:** *The introduction of a Capability Procedure would be a sensible approach in relation to addressing long-term or persistent sickness absence.*

The Group agreed that it cannot be assumed that the Capability Procedure is a sensible approach before the Draft Capability Procedure has been considered. Therefore the sentence should read:

***The introduction of a Capability Procedure may be a sensible approach in addressing long-term or persistent sickness absence.***

- **At Paragraph 9 the second bullet point** makes no reference to the type of reward.

The Group considered the relative impact of a number of potential awards that could form part of any future Incentive Scheme. The exact nature of the award should be considered by the Performance and Scrutiny Committee, however the group should discuss and formulate a number of options that can be presented to this Committee.

***The report is to include options that cover the pros and cons of Cash Payment, Non-Cash Payment, Team-based Incentives, Leave Allowance, Vouchers, and any other that may arise, which are to be agreed at the next meeting of the Task and Finish Group.***

- **A third bullet point to be included:**

The Group agreed that in light of the lessons learned from previous Attendance Incentive Schemes and the current financial situation that any new Scheme should be piloted for a period of 12 months. This scheme should be reviewed after the 12 months to ensure that it is providing value for money for the Authority, and is backed and valued by the majority of Employees.

***The report is also to include the recommendation to pilot the recommended Scheme for 12 months.***

#### **4. Determination of Work Plan/ Actions**

The Group reviewed the Work Plan and agreed that the next meeting of the Group be used to discuss the Draft Capability Procedure and to look at options for an Incentive Scheme.

It was resolved that:

The Draft Capability Procedure be distributed to Members of this group, following a meeting between the Director of People & Organisational Development and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to finalise the Draft.

#### **5. Date of Next Meeting**

T.B.C