

**AGENDA ITEM:**

<b>REPORT TO:</b> Meeting of the	<b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>27<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2013</b>
<b>REPORT NO.</b>	<b>CFO/082/13</b>
<b>REPORTING OFFICER:</b>	<b>CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY ON BEHALF OF THE TASK &amp; FINISH GROUP</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>JANET HENSHAW – DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, PROCUREMENT &amp; DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, EXTN:4301</b>
<b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>	<b>CLLR STEVE NIBLOCK – CHAIR OF TASK &amp; FINISH GROUP CLLR ROY GLADDEN  CLLR TONY NEWMAN NICK MERNOCK – DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE &amp; ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PAUL BLANCHARD-FLETT – OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH MANAGER PHILOMENA DWYER – PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS MANAGER</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>FEEDBACK OF TASK &amp; FINISH GROUP REGARDING SCRUTINY OF SICKNESS ABSENCE</b>

- APPENDIX A – TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TASK &  
FINISH GROUP**
- APPENDIX B – MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GROUP ON 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2013**
- APPENDIX C - MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GROUP ON 27<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2013**
- APPENDIX D - MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GROUP ON 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2013**
- APPENDIX E - MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
GROUP ON 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2013**
- APPENDIX F - MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
FULL AUTHORITY 7<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2013**
- APPENDIX G - PROPOSED EXTENDED TERMS OF  
REFERENCE FOR TASK & FINISH  
GROUP**

## Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with feedback from the Task & Finish Group established at the request of the Performance & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012, to scrutinise the Authority's sickness absence levels and review its policies and procedures in relation to sickness absence.

## Recommendation

2. That Members;
  - a) Note the feedback from the Task & Finish Group regarding Scrutiny of the Authority's sickness absence levels and review of its policies and procedures in relation to sickness absence.
  - b) Request Officers to complete a review of all policies and procedures relevant to sickness and discipline in the Organisation.
  - c) Request the Committee to establish a further task and finish group to scrutinise such documentation when it is available; and to expand its Terms of Reference to incorporate this.
  - d) Request that such a Task and Finish Group comprise of the same Members as currently (Cllrs Niblock; Newman and Gladden) plus an additional Member (taking Membership of the Group up to four Members), given the extended remit and workload of the Group.
  - e) Request that all papers for any future Task and Finish Groups be sent to Members 5 working days before the date of the meeting so that Members may peruse these properly
  - f) Request that a draft Programme of work is provided including forward planning of meeting dates whenever a Task and Finish Group is established.

## Introduction & Background

3. Sickness absence figures are monitored through the Service Delivery Plan as Local Performance Indicators (LPI's). Updates on the Service Delivery Plan and progress against the LPI's, are presented quarterly to the Authority's Performance & Scrutiny Committee.

4. Increases in sickness absence levels were observed during 2012/13, with the cost of sickness absence to Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority currently being approximately £1.3 million per year.
5. At the meeting of the Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012, the Committee requested that a Task & Finish Group be arranged to scrutinise the Authority's current levels of sickness absence and review its current policies and procedures in relation to sickness absence.

#### Remit of the Task & Finish Group

6. The question Members of the Task & Finish Group were asked to scrutinise was:  
  
***“Why are the current levels of sickness absence across the Authority not reducing and can any action be taken to reduce this?”***

The full Terms of Reference for this Task & Finish Group are attached to this report as Appendix A.

#### Membership of the Group

7. Membership of this Task & Finish Group consisted of Councillor Steve Niblock (Chair of Task & Finish Group), Councillor Roy Gladden and Councillor Tony Newman. Officer support was provided to Members of the Group by Janet Henshaw – Clerk to the Authority, Nick Mernock – Director of People & Organisational Development, Paul Blanchard- Flett – Occupational Health Manager; and Philomena Dwyer – Professional Standards Manager.

#### Meetings of the Group

8. The Group initially met on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013, to consider some background information in relation to sickness absence within the Authority and decide up on a plan of work and information they wished to consider as part of the scrutiny review. The group subsequently met on 3 further occasions, the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 and 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013.

#### Information Considered

9. Throughout this scrutiny review, the Task & Finish Group considered a significant amount and wide range of information. At the initial meeting, the Group considered a historical overview of sickness figures within the Authority; work and initiatives to date which led to initial reductions in sickness absence; and information in relation to the support and services available to staff through the Authority's Occupational Health services.

10. The Group have also considered and scrutinised as part of this review:
- policies and procedures in relation to Sickness Absence, Mental Health, Ill Health Retirement, "Other Duties" and Discipline.
  - A breakdown of sickness absence statistics including, for long-term sickness absence (being any sickness absence of 28 days or more), operational staff located on fire stations, and staff who self-roster.
  - A breakdown of statistics relating to shorter term sickness (being any sickness absence of 28 days or less).
  - A breakdown of costs to the Authority associated with sickness absence, both in terms of sick pay and covering those off sick.

### Conclusions Reached

11. During this scrutiny review, the Group reached the following conclusions:
- The introduction of a Capability Procedure **may** be a sensible approach in relation to addressing long-term or persistent sickness absence. However the Group acknowledged that any such Procedure would need to be fair and equitable and each case would need to be considered individually and dealt with on its own merit.
  - However the Group also concluded that a capability procedure could not be viewed in isolation from other related procedures, such as discipline and absence.
12. On this basis the Group agreed that more work over a longer timescale would be needed to ensure that all relevant procedures in this area could be developed in order to provide consistency and fairness to all concerned.
13. The Group considered that scrutiny of these issues is important but that it could not take this any further at the present time until all the procedures had been reviewed and refreshed by Officers.
14. Furthermore the Group considered that the existing Terms of Reference would need to be expanded to allow effective scrutiny of all current procedures and their interaction in light of proposed amendments.
15. At the Authority Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2013, in relation to Report CFO/055/13 – "Changes To Discipline Procedure – Management Levels" Members resolved that: *"This matter be referred to the Policy & Resources Committee, to consider a report from the Task & Finish Group which is currently considering sickness and absenteeism; and that the remit of that Task & Finish Group be appropriately extended to consider issues concerning the Authority's Disciplinary Procedures, with any final decisions with regards to Disciplinary Procedures to be made by the full Authority"*.

Due to the need to establish the Task and Finish Group as soon as possible and as the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee is not until 30<sup>th</sup> July 2013, at the request of the Chair of the Authority this report is brought to the

Authority for approval. Therefore, this report seeks to provide Members with feedback concerning the Task & Finish Groups initial scrutiny review; and request that the Authority approve the appropriate extension of the Task & Finish Groups Terms of Reference, to enable them to consider Disciplinary and other associated procedures as part of a wider review.

### Equality & Diversity Implications

16. All current policies and procedures have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). Any future amendments to policies and procedures, or any new policies, which may be recommended as a result of this review, will have a full EIA completed, prior to being approved for implementation.

### Staff Implications

17. The Authority provides comprehensive Occupational Health Services and support to all its employees, which aim to support staff in their return to work.
18. The new and amended policies and procedures which have been proposed as part of this review, will or have already been the subject of consultation with the appropriate representative bodies.

### Legal Implications

19. The Authority's Occupational Health practices; and policies and procedures, comply fully with all relevant legislation and are delivered and implemented within the relevant legal parameters.

### Financial Implications & Value for Money

20. The costs associated with sickness absence are a significant financial burden to the Authority, especially given the scale of the current financial challenge. The robust management of absence at all levels will assist in reducing this financial burden, as much as possible.
21. The total cost between January 2012 to January 2013 for sickness absence (excluding payments to cover absent posts) was £1,292,598.

### Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

22. The Authority place the highest importance on the health and safety of its employees, with extensive occupational health services, support and processes in place, which play a crucial role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of all employees.

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

23. A fair procedure and other procedures related to sickness absence are important to ensure that staff availability is given paramount consideration in keeping the communities of Merseyside and Firefighters safe.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

List any supporting documents/evidence here

**\*Glossary of Terms**

Please list any acronyms used within this Report and appendices, including their meaning.