

# Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

## Planning Committee

Meeting to be held on 5 February 2024

### Staff Absence Key Performance Indicators

Contact for further information – Assistant Chief Fire Officer Jon Charters  
Tel: 01772 866802

#### Executive Summary

Further to performance information being shared with Members at the quarterly Performance Committee meetings, Members have requested that the Service conduct a review of the Staff Absence Key Performance Indicator (KPI) suite to provide options for change given a notable shift in absence levels in the post Covid era. The aim is to ensure that Service KPIs remain fit-for-purpose, appropriate to the operating environment and continue to provide effective methods by which Service performance is reported.

Recent reports to Members have provided both local and national context drawing comparative data from within the sector and from other external data organisations to inform discussions on the matter, and insights as to the national context and trends are detailed further within the paper.

#### Recommendation(s)

The Committee is asked to note the content of the paper in relation to the three current KPIs and approve the proposed changes to two, those being:

1. Staff Absence Wholetime (KPI 1.2.1) is uplifted from a standard of no more than 5 shifts lost per annum, to a new standard of no more than 8 shifts per annum.
2. Staff Absence Greenbook (KPI 1.2.3) is uplifted from a standard of no more than 5 shifts lost per annum, to a new standard of no more than 8 shifts per annum.

#### Information

The Measuring Progress report incorporates three measurements for Staff Absence KPI's:

- KPI 1.2.1 Staff Absence Wholetime
- KPI 1.2.2 Staff Absence On-Call
- KPI 1.2.3 Staff Absence Greenbook

Calculations to inform KPI 1.2.1 and 1.2.3 are based around the cumulative number of shifts lost due to sickness divided by the total average workforce strength for that staff group, commonly termed the number of days lost per shift/day per full-time equivalent (FTE)/employee.

The calculation for KPI 1.2.2. differs slightly due to the nature of the On Call duty system and measures the percentage of contracted hours lost due to sickness for all on-call contracted staff.

The Wholetime and Green book KPI's have both been 'in exception' (beyond the standard set) every quarter since quarter 1, 2022/23, so six reported quarters thus far. Prior to quarter 1, 2022/23, the KPI combined Grey Book and Green Book absences (formerly as KPI 4.2.1), and the only time it was not in exception was during June and July 2020, which was within the Covid period, where different reporting conditions existed.

Conversely the On-Call KPI (1.2.2) has not been in exception at any point over the same period.

The current standard for both the Wholetime and Green book KPI is 5 days/shifts lost per FTE. Pre-Covid, the Service reported meeting this target, however since Covid there has been a significant rise in absence levels.

An XpertHR report published in 2022, identified that despite many organisations had introduced and updated hybrid working policies; 50% of organisations reported an increase in total absence rates.

An XpertHR report published in May 2023, reported that whilst there was a decrease in absence rates as the effects of Covid subsided, rates remained high. The same report also identified that whilst many respondents mentioned a lesser impact from Covid on sickness rates, they also noted that the return to work seemed to have brought new challenges - from lower immunity to general sickness such as cold and flu, and an increasingly stressed workforce. Responses to the research were received from 172 organisations, with a combined workforce of 220,204 employees.

The Service has experienced similar issues with an increased number of staff being absent due to respiratory infections than was previously seen, as well as high levels of absence attributed to muscular skeletal conditions and mental health.

The 23rd Annual Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey – 'Health and Wellbeing at Work' conducted from March to April 2023 found that the average level of employee absence rose to 7.8 days per employee. This is the highest level reported for over a decade. It also marks a considerable increase (two days per employee) compared with the low levels of pre-pandemic absence reported in 2020 (5.8 days from data collected in October/November 2019).

As in previous years, average absence levels are considerably higher in the public sector (10.6 days per employee) than in other sectors, particularly private sector services (5.8 days), although the upsurge in average levels of absence is observed across all sectors.

The Service benchmarks itself against National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) data and pre-Covid, reported top quartile performance in relation to absence levels. During year ended March 2023, the Service reported top quartile performance in relation to absence levels at an absence rate of 8.29 days lost, across a range of 6.33 to 21.06 days lost in other fire and rescue services. The current trajectory of performance across quarter 1 and quarter 2, 2023/24, indicates that whilst performance is just below top quartile,

should current absence rates continue, the out-turn at March 2024 will be 8.32 days lost.

Research indicates that several measures can support attendance at work including:

- Having an Absence Management Policy;
- Training for managers on having difficult conversations with staff in relation to absence;
- Return-to-work interviews;
- Employee assistance programmes;
- Wellbeing initiatives;
- Mental health training;
- Availability of Counselling;
- Referrals to occupational health;
- A HR Business Partnering Model.

The Service currently has all these measures in place and is exploring what other options are available to assist employees to remain in work and to return to work earlier.

Reflective of the position of attendance levels across the country and the sector, it is proposed to amend the Services KPI to 8 shifts/days lost per employee/FTE. This would still be top quartile across the sector and reflective of public sector performance levels whilst at the same time providing challenge and a driver for improvement.

### **Business risk**

LFRS must continue to apply robust absence management policy and procedures to maintain staff absences to the lowest possible levels whilst also ensuring that staff are provided appropriate welfare and support provisions tailored to their individual needs.

The KPI suite that measures performance in this regard must be realistic, achievable and commensurate with our ability to deliver effective frontline and support services that fulfil statutory requirements and that reflect current operating conditions.

### **Sustainability or Environmental Impact**

None.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

Whilst the Service has a duty to manage absence it must do so reasonably and fairly.

The Equality Act requires the Service to consider making reasonable adjustments where someone has a disability and falls under the legislation.

### **Data Protection (GDPR)**

Will the proposal(s) involve the processing of personal data? The KPI change proposals relate to performance reporting arrangements only.

However anonymised personal data is used for performance reporting purposes.

If the answer is yes, please contact a member of the Democratic Services Team to assist with the appropriate exemption clause for confidential consideration under part 2 of the agenda.

**HR implications**

None – relates to reporting of performance only.

**Financial implications**

None.

**Legal implications**

None.

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

**List of background papers**

Paper:

Date:

Contact:

Reason for inclusion in Part 2 if appropriate: Insert Exemption Clause