

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**5 NOVEMBER 2012**

1. **IMPLICATIONS FOR USING THE BRADFORD FACTOR FOR  
MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the contents of this report are considered and the Committee notes that the Bradford Factor is a mechanism to apply trigger point management for sickness absence.
- 1.2 That the Committee does not support the use of the Bradford Factor but agrees to implement the proposals outlined in 3.7 of this report.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

Following a request by the Committee at its meeting on 10 September 2012, this report is submitted to inform the Scrutiny Committee about the Bradford Factor which is a mechanism of applying trigger point management for poor attendance at work for sickness purposes.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This report provides a briefing to Scrutiny Committee members on the implications and use of the Bradford Factor.
- 3.2 The Bradford Factor is used as a means of measuring the number of spells absent an employee has. It identifies persistent short term absent individuals and is useful in assessing disruption to the Service. The theory is that short, frequent, and unplanned absences are more disruptive than longer absences. It equates an absence into a raw score. A higher score indicates a greater impact on the Service.

- 3.3 It was originally designed for use as part of the overall investigation and management of absenteeism. In contrast, if used as part of a very limited approach to address absence or by setting unrealistically low trigger scores it was considered short-sighted, unlikely to be successful and could lead to staff disaffection and grievances. The use of the Bradford Factor often provokes heated debate.
- 3.4 This system is a way to implement and define trigger points. However, caution is needed in the taking of action and a consequence of the data generated from the application of the Bradford Factor. This factor itself does not assist to manage attendance.
- 3.5 The impact of applying the Bradford Factor within West Midlands Fire Service:

- 3.5.1 The breakdown of sickness absence for non uniformed employees and Fire Control for the first quarter of this year is:

	Short Term	Long Term
April 2012	40%	60%
May 2012	42%	58%
June 2012	37%	63%

As shown in this table a majority of our sickness absence for this group of employees during the reporting period, is long term sickness absence.

- 3.5.2 It is also important to note that certain job types may be specifically disadvantaged by the implementation of a scheme which crudely measures employee attendance. Due to the nature of the work undertaken, i.e. cleaning, catering, admin support or mechanical engineering, the employee is required to attend a specific work location. In contrast to this, some employees (particularly more senior employees) may be more able to work from home or another location if they feel unwell rather than booking sick. This will have a direct impact on an employee's ability to maintain lower (improved) scores for attendance.

- 3.5.3 The employee groups mentioned in 3.5.2 also tend to be groups that are lower paid and/or are predominantly female.
- 3.5.4 As women are still predominately the main carers within a family unit research shows that some of the absences may be as a result of caring responsibilities. Therefore, it is important that employees and managers work together to consider flexible working options which can benefit the employer, employee and the family.
- 3.5.5 It is necessary to note that the rigid application of the Bradford Factor can unfairly discriminate against people with ongoing conditions or disabilities that result in more frequent short term sickness absence.

### 3.6 Management of Attendance

- 3.6.1 The Health and Safety Executive and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development state that sickness absence is not just a matter of ill-health. It is affected by a combination of the health condition, personal and work/organisational factors. The role of the line manager and early intervention is key in managing attendance at work. The sooner action is taken, the better the chances are of an employee making a full and speedy return to work. Work in a well-managed workplace is a treatment for people recovering from sickness absence and an early return to work improves both mental and physical recovery. Simple adjustments can enable workers to return to work safely before their symptoms completely disappear. Workers can normally return before they are 100% fit.
- 3.6.2 Attendance at work is supported by a healthy life style and a clear understanding of role and its fit with the Service, Therefore, good line management can lead to good health, well being and improved performance. When an employee is absent from work the manager has significant scope to facilitate an employee's early return from that absence. Regular contact between managers and employees whilst an employee is absent assists the employee to understand the attendance management policy and how it will be applied. Managers should build relationships with their

employees as this aids discussion of sensitive issues. Employee contact is a key feature in managing absence and overall employee performance.

3.7 Recommended actions to improve employee attendance include:

- 3.7.1 Continuing to support positive health promotions such as: healthy eating and stop smoking initiatives, mental health wellbeing – including drug and alcohol awareness and diet and nutrition. Both managers and employees need to continue to recognise not only the importance of preventing ill health but also the key role the workplace can play in promoting health and wellbeing.
- 3.7.2 Managers continue to be proactive in the management of absence and ensuring that the absence management policy is robustly followed and that 'return to work' interviews are carried out for each absence. Early intervention will help to prevent short term absence from progressing to long term sickness.
- 3.7.3 Ensure necessary discussions take place with employees to prevent ill health as a result of working conditions and health and safety. For example: Display Screen Equipment Audit, Manual Handling Training.
- 3.7.4 Ensure that managers continue to develop relationships with their employees which considers style/approach/relationship and encourages employees to discuss sometimes sensitive issues with their manager. Managers continue to be honest about the possible outcomes and not build unrealistic expectations but be open to consider an alternative/flexible solution to resolve the issues. The alternative should never be 'not to manage the situation'.
- 3.7.5 Managers continue to make timely interventions and consider additional support an employee may require. This may be to support the work life balance of the employee. This could include contract variation, flexible working arrangement and flexible retirement.
- 3.7.6 Managers continue to use our management information systems (MIS) to assist them to manage and monitor

employee absence and attendance. These MIS will provide to managers a record of absence, summary of discussion of the return to work interviews and notifications when triggers have been reached and further action may be required.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report will not lead to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Scrutiny Committee Minutes 10 September, 2012