

Communities Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 14th January 2015
10:00am Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr P Smyth (Chair)

Mr C Aldred
Mr B Borrett
Mr J Childs
Ms E Corlett
Mrs H Cox
Mr A Dearnley
Mrs M Dewsbury
Mr N Dixon

Mr J Law
Mr W Northam
Mr D Roper
Mr M Sands
Mr N Shaw
Mr D Thomas
Mr J Ward
Mrs M Wilkinson

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Harry Humphrey (substituted by Bill Borrett).

2. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014.

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014 were agreed as an accurate record by the Committee and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments;
- P9, point 14.2, change 'capital' to 'revenue'
 - P9, Members wanted it noted that a discussion had been held noting that the savings held against the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service of £450k would not be at the detriment of the Fire Service alone if other services within the department did not achieve their savings.
 - It was noted that some Members had not received the information which related to firefighter absence as per point 13.2. The information is attached to these minutes at Appendix A.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 No interests were declared.

4. To receive any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

- 4.1 There were no urgent items.

5. Local Member Issues / Member Questions

- 5.1 No member questions had been received prior to the meeting.

6. Update on Key Service Issues and Activities

- 6.1 The Committee received the report from the Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services which provided Members with fortnightly updates about key service issues and activities. The update enabled Members to discuss the latest position and identify any areas where the Committee would like to receive further information or update.
- 6.2 The Committee were appreciative of the information contained in the update, and it was recognised that hard work goes into the formulation of the update for every Committee meeting.
- 6.3 A member of the Committee asked, in relation to the automated service being implemented into customer services, how many calls the automated service was projected to divert and an outline of any cost saving used to business case the implementations, and are any negative impacts foreseen? The Chair replied that a written response would be given.
- 6.4 The Committee **RESOLVED**:
- To note the latest service update.

7. Service and Financial Planning 2015-18

- 7.1 The Committee received the report from the Interim Executive Director of Environmental and Community Services. The report identified proposals which had been put to public consultation and would contribute towards Norfolk County Council setting a legal budget for 2015/16 which would mean its total resources of £1.4 billion focused on meeting the needs of residents.
- 7.2 Although it was noted by the Committee that there were fewer responses to the public consultation than the previous year, it was explained that there were fewer proposals to consult on which also equated to a smaller total amount of savings.
- 7.3 One Member expressed concern about the value of the consultation as it had produced few responses. It was noted that a lot of effort had been put into analysing the responses. However, not only was the consultation a legal requirement but it was also beneficial to talk to the people of Norfolk. A range of people had taken the time, in some cases hours, to respond to the consultation about areas they felt passionate about.
- 7.4 Some Members were surprised by the lack of response to the consultation from a number of the groups who are funded by Norfolk County Council. It was clarified that individuals from those groups may have responded, but not formally on behalf of the group they belonged to.

- 7.5 In response to a question from the Committee, the Equality Impact Assessment appeared to be quite strong as it needed to provide a robust analysis of the impact of the proposals in question. The proposal which related to the arts grant funding would have the most impact on vulnerable people as a number of Arts organisations involved or were used by vulnerable people.
- 7.6 It was clarified by the Chief Officer, that the £450,000 which related to the Fire Service savings mentioned in the report was outside of the direct control of the fire service, resting instead on other departments using fire premises.
- 7.7 As the Fire Service had real estate in their possession it was hoped that access could be given to other departments by key fob method for other uses. Departments were always looking across one another to help make efficiencies.
- 7.8 The following amendment to the second recommendation was moved by Cllr Bill Borrett and was duly seconded;
- To ask the Policy and Resources Committee not to continue to reduce reserves as part of the financial plan.
 - And allocate the savings of the Fire Service which are out of their control to finance general and compensate the Fire Service accordingly.

After a show of hands, with 9 votes to 8, the amendment was **LOST**.

- 7.9 In response to a question by Members which concerned exhausting the potential for library buildings and making savings it was confirmed by the Assistant Director Community and Environmental Services (Cultural Services) that there were always lots of opportunities for libraries in terms of developments, buildings, and partnership. The library service continued to look for potential savings, including making use of opportunities in respect of real estate when they arose.
- 7.10 The Vice-Chair acknowledged the hard work of library staff, and commented that it would be a real shame to lose staff who had implemented some good work. It was confirmed that the staff savings costs mentioned in the budget proposal centred on vacancy management and existing temporary contracts.
- 7.11 It was confirmed by the Assistant Director, Chief Fire Officer that work was being developed out in Trading Standards department to carry on with the good work that had already been completed, especially with respect to the Trusted Trader scheme.
- 7.12 Upon a show of hands with 9 votes for and 8 against, the Committee **AGREED** and recommended the budget as set out in Appendix A of the report and any associated risks or issues to Policy and Resources Committee for consideration on 26 January 2015, to enable Policy and Resources Committee to recommend a sound, whole-Council budget to Full Council on 16 February 2015.
- 7.13 **The Committee RESOLVED;**

- **Consider and agree** the findings of equality and rural assessment, and in doing so, note the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- **Agree and recommend** the budget as set out in Appendix A of the report and any associated risks or issues to Policy and Resources Committee for consideration on 26 January 2015, to enable Policy and Resources Committee to recommend a sound, whole-Council budget to Full Council on 16 February 2015.

8. Finance Monitoring Report at Period Eight 2014-15

- 8.1 The Committee received the report from the Interim Director of Communities and Environmental Services. The report provided the Committee with information on the financial position of the Service for 2014-15 and was the third financial monitoring information for the new financial year. It provided information on variances from the original budget, emerging issues and the position on the expected use of reserves for Communities purposes.
- 8.2 In response to a question by a Member, the Committee heard that Norfolk County Council carried approximately £100million worth of borrowing but there was a downward trend, and cashflow was used to cover borrowing. The Interim Director of Finance agreed to send the Member further details regarding this.
- 8.3 Concerned was expressed by the Committee in relation to the use of reserves. The purpose of holding reserves was to mitigate a more risky future but if the reserves were continued to be used, it would provide less provision against such risk. It was noted that there should be a process in place to assess and measure the risk. It was clarified that there had been some long term planning carried out by the Fire Service and Appendix C of the report detailed the use of future reserves, and managing grant money effectively over the forthcoming years. Assurance was given that reserves were being spent on earmarked projects as required.
- 8.4 It was clarified to the Committee, that the figures on p27 of the report with relation to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service reflect the changing picture of grant funding by the DCLG. Staff vacancies were not being filled until the budget had been agreed and therefore this meant that agency staff had been taken on in order to fulfil work commitments.
- 8.5 **The Committee RESOLVED to note;**
- **The forecast revenue outturn position for 2014-15 as at Period 08 of a £0.023m underspend.**

- The forecast capital outturn position for the 2014-15 capital programme.
- The current forecast for use of reserves.

9. Member Working Groups – Terms of References

- 9.1 The Committee received the report from the Interim Director of Communities and Environmental Services which outlined the terms of references, along with outline timetable information and details of the group membership for the proposed working groups under the headings of Libraries, Fire and Rescue and Adult Education.
- 9.2 It was clarified that details of the Public Health Working Group would be brought to the meeting in March.
- 9.3 **The Committee RESOLVED;**
- To agree the proposed terms of reference for the Libraries Working Group set out in Appendix A of the report.
 - To agree the proposed terms of reference for the Fire and Rescue Working Group as set out in Appendix B of the report.
 - To agree the proposed terms of reference for the Adult Education Steering group set out in Appendix C of the report.
 - To agree the outline timescales for all three Working Groups set out in para 1.4 of the report.

10. Forward Plan

- 10.1 The Committee received a copy of the forward plan for information. The plan set out the items and decisions programmed to be brought to the Committee for consideration
- 10.2 **The Committee RESOLVED;**
- To note the forward plan.

The meeting closed at 12:15pm.

CHAIRMAN



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Firefighter sickness absence

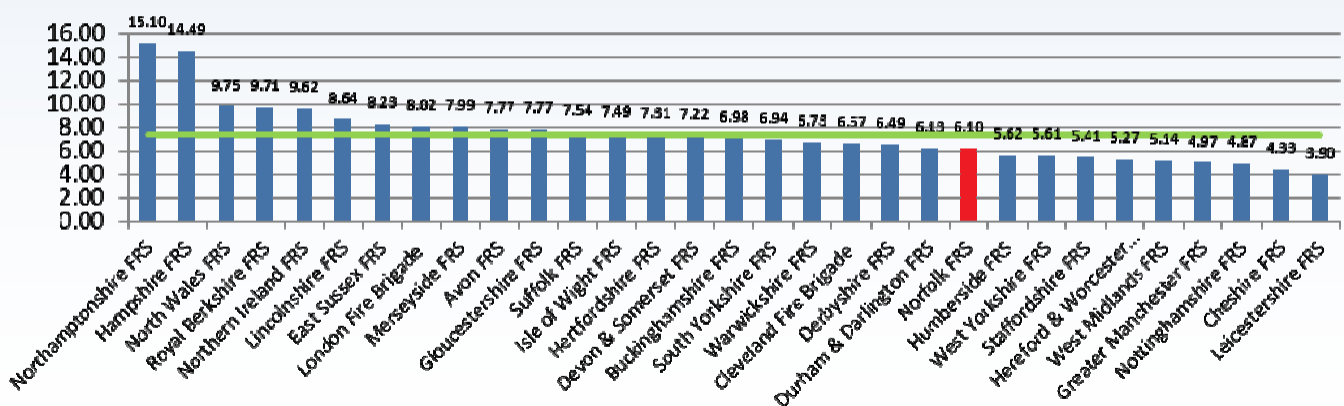
This report provides information in relation to questions arising from Communities Committee on 19 November 2014 regarding wholetime and retained duty system (RDS) firefighter sickness absence.

Overview of performance in 2013/14

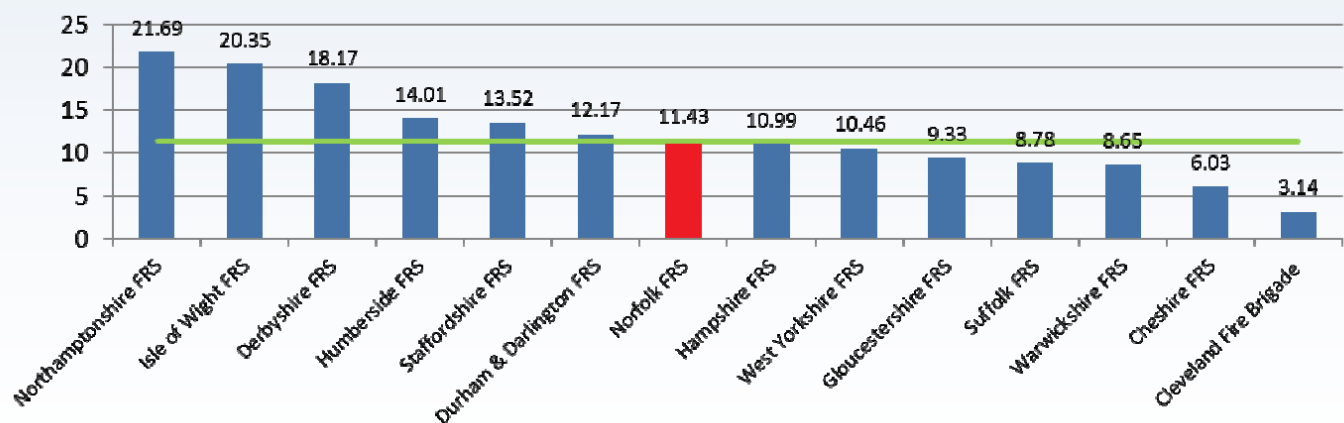
Wholetime firefighter sickness absence in Norfolk is generally low, and below the benchmark average.

Retained firefighter sickness absence is higher (in part due to a different recording method) but Norfolk's result is around the benchmark average.

Number of days/shifts lost to sickness per person - Wholetime Firefighters



Number of days/shifts lost to sickness per person - Retained Firefighters



Sickness absence in quarter two 2014/15

Wholetime firefighter sickness absence has increased by 0.78 days per when compared with quarter two 2013. However absence levels continue to be low at 3.19 days and continue to be below the benchmark average of 3.61 days (see Figure 1).

Retained firefighter sickness absence has fallen 0.42 days to 4.99 days per FTE. This is just above the quarter two benchmark average of 4.44 days (see Figure 2).

	2012/13	2013/14				2014/15				Difference between Q2 2013 and Q2 2014
	Q1-Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Wholetime	7.40	1.28	2.41	4.08	6.10	1.37	3.19			0.78
Retained	9.83	2.71	5.41	8.60	11.43	2.91	4.99			-0.42

Figure 1: Quarter two 2014/15 – Whole time firefighters

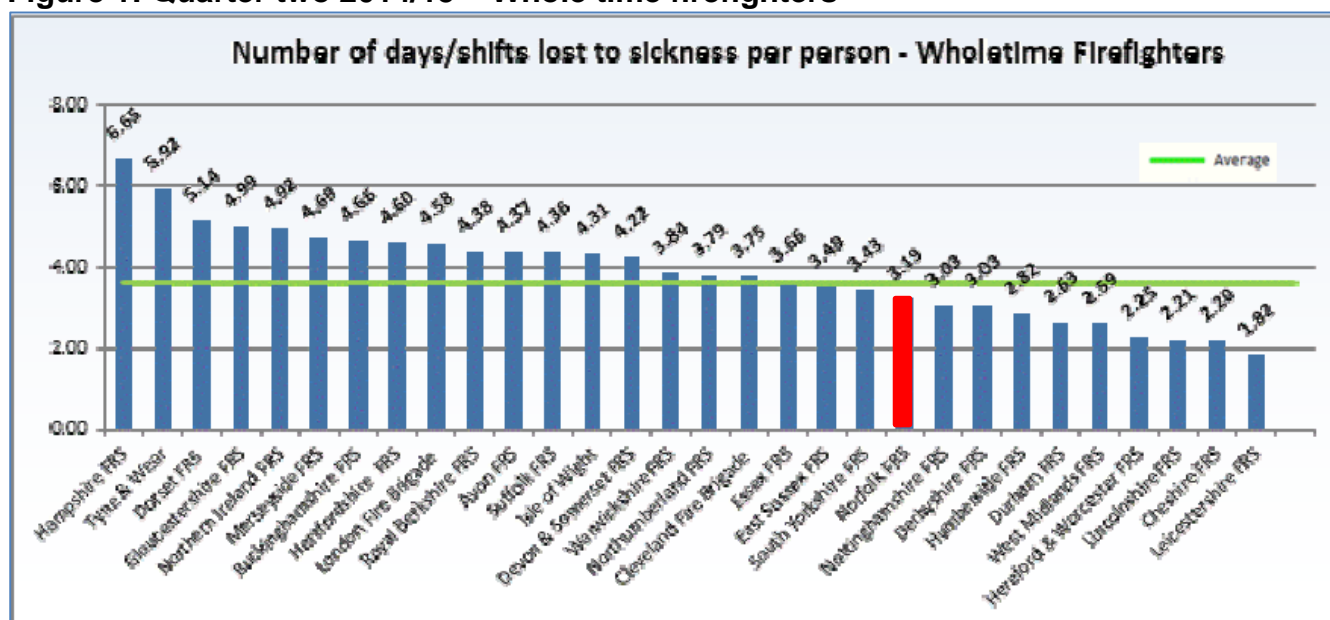
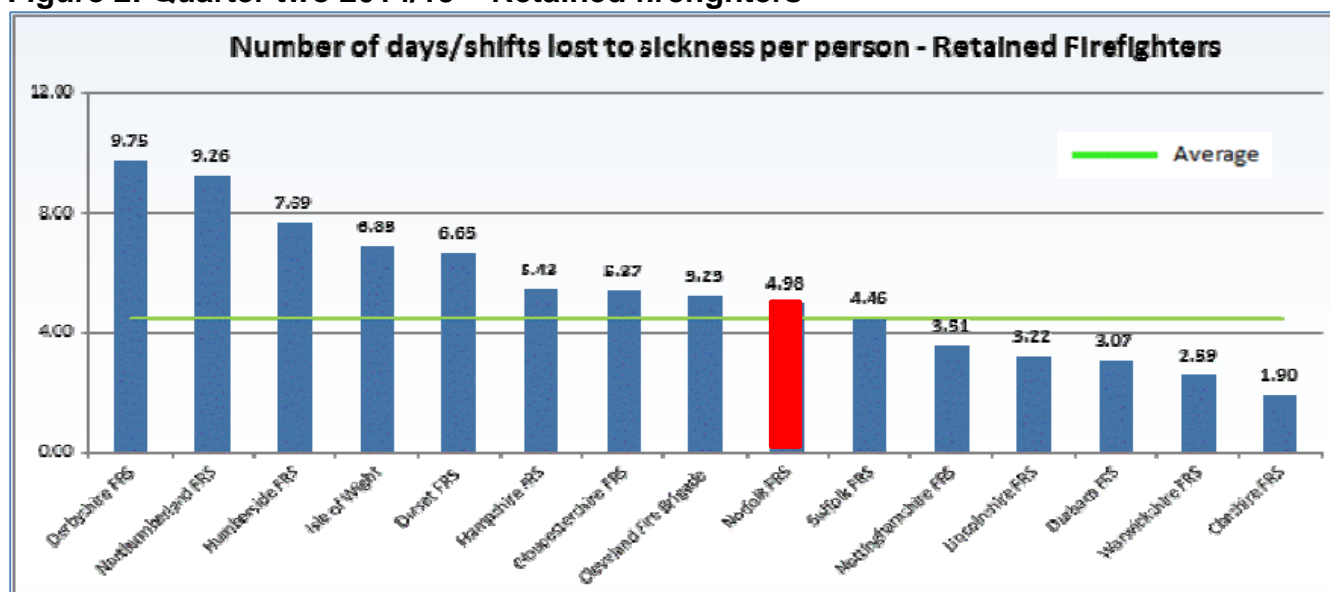
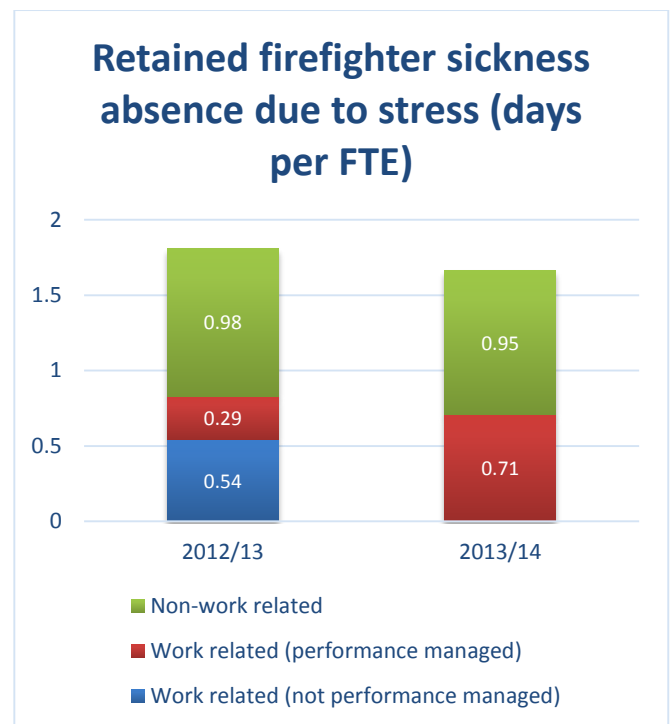
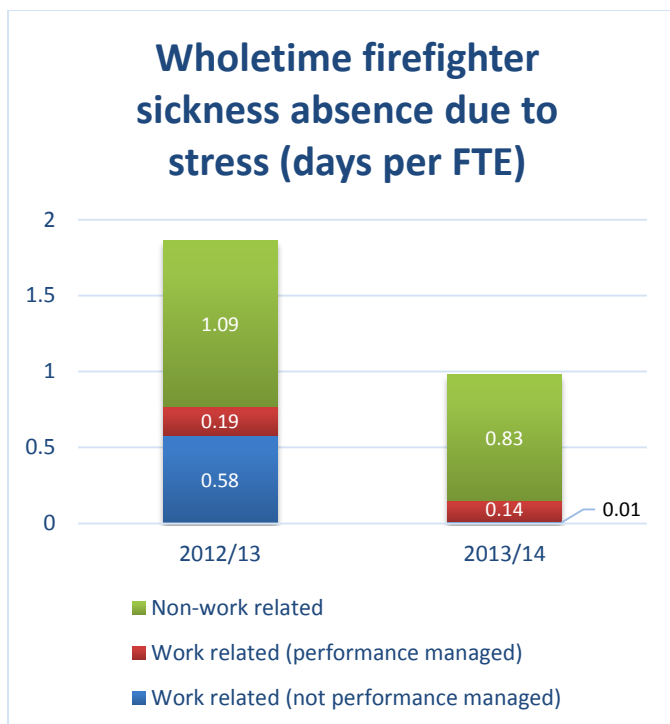
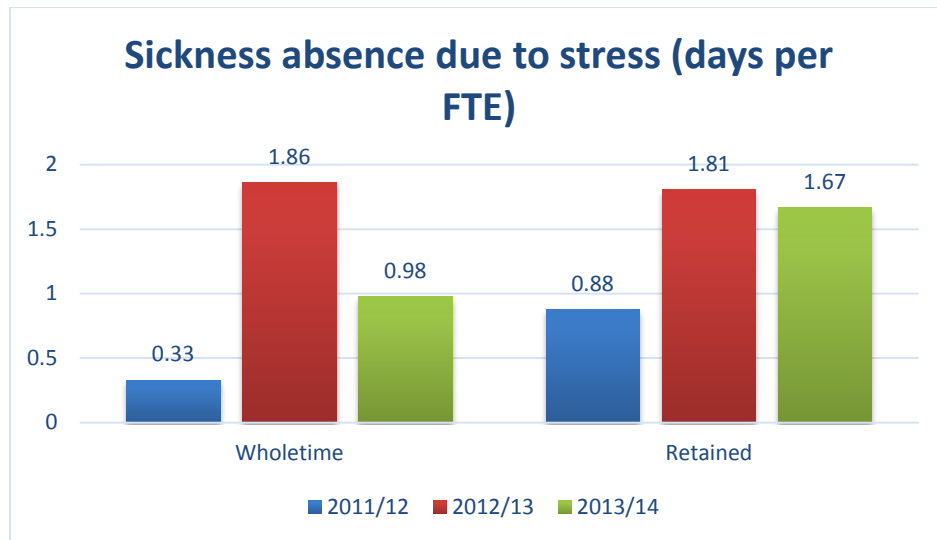


Figure 2: Quarter two 2014/15 – Retained firefighters



Sickness absence due to stress

In 2012/13 Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service tightened performance management arrangements to ensure that firefighters were fulfilling their contractual obligations with regards to availability. At this time the service also began distinguishing between the causes of stress related absence - breaking work related stress down to identify that caused by performance management. The following tables show how sickness absence due to stress increased in 2012/13, before falling in 2013/14. The majority of stress sickness absence is due to non-work related causes.



Contextual Notes

1. In reviewing this data it is important to note that wholetime and retained firefighter sickness absence are not directly comparable as they are calculated differently as follows. This means recorded sickness absence is expected to be higher for retained firefighters.

A. To calculate retained firefighter sickness absence Norfolk has adopted the nationally agreed method of making sickness absence *payments* to retained firefighters i.e. there are 365 days a year when a retained firefighter could potentially be absent due to sickness. Sickness absence is counted from the first day of absence until the last day, irrespective of whether the retained firefighter was due to be available for work.

B. For wholetime firefighters sickness absence is only recorded if it falls on a day when they were due to work a shift (i.e. there approx.183 days per year when a wholetime firefighter could be absent from work).

2. NFRS sets a target to reduce sickness absence at Brigade level (not for each employment type). For 2014/15 this is set at 7.13 days per FTE. The measure and target excludes retained firefighters due to the different method of calculation used in determining retained firefighter sickness absence.

3. This report draws on benchmarking data from the National Fire and Rescue Occupational Health performance report produced by Cleveland Fire Brigade.

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4 December 2014