

Performance report - Quarter 4

Finance & Audit Committee

1 January - 31 March 2024



DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE

Priority: Making every penny count

KLOE (Key Lines of Enquiry) 6: How well do we use resources to manage risk?

KLOE 6 Summary

The Service's business continuity arrangements were audited by the South West Audit Partnership during quarter 4, with a 'substantial' level assurance rating awarded for the second time (Substantial assurance was also awarded during the internal audit in 2018). This supports the assurance that the Service's business continuity, significant event and risk management arrangements, remain well embedded and robust, ensuring the Service continues to meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act (2004).

Procurement procedural and managerial arrangements continue to be in a positive position, with a key focus and approach to collaborative procurements, to support our approach to value for money. The transition to the new e-Tendering Procurement Hub has continued and the new system is due to go live on 1 April 2024. Following the Procurement Regulations 2024 being laid in Parliament, to bring some elements of the Bill and the wider regime into effect, the procurement officers and other key Service officers will be undertaking appropriate training, which goes live on 22 April 2024.

To maintain the accreditation to the International Standards Organisation's ISO55001 in Asset Management, the Service is preparing for the British Standards Institute auditors visit in May 2024. Maintaining this accreditation supports the Service to provide positive assurance across our management of assets.

The Service's estate rationalisation project has been commenced in quarter 4, following the appointment of a Senior Building Surveyor. This first phase of work is looking at the feasibility across four of our sites with the view to optimise usage and deliver efficiencies.

The solar panel installation, across the first five sites, is now complete. These will be operational in April 2024 and will be monitored over the first 12 months of usage. This review will be to analyse the impacts upon energy usage and consumption, understand the pay-back period and carbon reduction. This will inform future work and investment.

Information and Communications Technology capital and revenue programmes remain broadly on track, albeit with some amendments to the programming of activity to accommodate and plan for the worldwide supply issues, resulting global economic shocks, as well as ongoing supplier price increases. There are some expected and some unexpected cost increases arising from inflationary pressures, changes to supplier offerings (e.g. cloud only) and costs due to supply chain disruption. Despite this, the

Service continues to invest in key initiatives for improved technical sustainability and value for money to support front line services with affordable modern technology.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent are business continuity arrangements in place and how often are they tested?

The Service has a strong understanding of the current and future risks and threats to the Service. This is gained through regular horizon scanning, working as part of the Local Resilience Forums, having robust risk management arrangements across the Service and undertaking work like the Strategic Assessment of Risk. The Service's corporate risk management arrangements are regularly audited to ensure that they remain appropriate and comprehensive. Our internal auditors awarded the Service with 'substantial' assurance rating during the most recent audit in January with no supplementary actions.

The Services business continuity arrangements are designed to be proportionate to the event. During this quarter our business continuity events included full business continuity being enacted at Marlborough fire station, where the station was flooding during spate conditions and flooding of the site, and business continuity lite invoked during a loss of power at a fire station. In addition, the Service will use business continuity in the planning stages of work, for example during ICT or building works at our sites, to ensure that the Service is able to continue to provide an uninterrupted service to our communities. All are debriefed for further learning and improvement.

Our risk management arrangements provide clear awareness of the areas of focus and priorities within our business continuity arrangements. Having a strong link between our risk management arrangements and business continuity management ensures good planning and preparations, the continued maintenance of our critical activities and the continuation of service delivery through challenging times.

The Service's Business Continuity arrangements remain aligned to the Business Continuity Institute's (BCI) Good Practice Guidance (2018), ensuring that our arrangements are effective and strong. The recent quarter 4 internal audit into the Service's business continuity arrangements received 'substantial' assurance. Our business continuity, significant event and risk management arrangements remain well embedded and assured and aligned, ensuring the Service continues to meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act (2004).

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we show sound financial management of non-pay costs, including estates, fleet and equipment through benchmarking, contract renegotiation and procurement?

Procurement procedural and managerial arrangements continue to be in a positive position, with a continued focus and approach to collaborative procurements, to support our approach to value for money. The Service continues to make good use of national procurement contracts, which includes actively promoting and partaking in collaborative/ joint procurements. The Service is currently participating in collaborative procurements for:

- A command-and-control system with the Networked Fire Services Partnership, led by Hampshire County Council procurement team. This procurement also includes Kent Fire & Rescue Service, due to them joining the partnership, and is currently out to re-tender,
- Liquid Fuel, led by the Crown Commercial Services, with several public sector bodies participating in a mini competition exercise. This is now at the contract stage and through this Service will have one contract to cover our bulk fuel supplies for both Estates and Fleet,
- Water and Ancillary Services, led by Crown Commercial Services. Through this the Service participated in a bulk aggregation e-Auction exercise. This procurement is currently at the contract stage.

The transition to the new e-Tendering Procurement Hub continues, with the new system going live on 1 April 2024. The Service has extended the contract for the old system, until the end of June 2024, so that we can complete our procurements, archive the completed procurements and download these onto our system for retention.

When procuring goods, services and works, the Service continues to follow the national and local level regulations, including adhering to the Public Procurement Regulations. As part of this, the Service is required to ensure that the principles of transparency and fairness are applied throughout all stages of the procurement processes. Our approach to this is published on the Service's website.

In March 2024 the Procurement Regulations 2024 were laid in Parliament to bring some elements of the Bill and the wider regime into effect. This secondary legislation has now been published in draft. In support of this, e-learning modules have been provided for procurement and commercial practitioners from contracting authorities which goes live on 22 April 2024. The procurement

team and other professionals will be undertaking this training. The Cabinet Office in supporting Contract Authorities with the preparation for the Procurement Act 2023, are publishing a suite of guidance documents addressing all aspects of the new regime, covering subjects from transitional arrangements and cover procurement through to pre-market engagement, award rules, exclusions and contract modifications. Officers continue to work with both internal and external stakeholders, including suppliers, to strengthen relationships and planning to meet the ongoing challenges and the general uncertain economic position.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand what assets we are responsible for across the Service and how do we demonstrate effective management of these assets?

The Service continues to keep abreast of the economic situation with regard to parts, materials, and labour costs increasing significantly, along with global supply chain disruptions and challenges. This focus enables appropriate decisions to be made regarding ordering timeframes and stock levels.

Maintenance of the ISO55001 accreditation continues with preparation for the next external audits in May 2024. The 'Bluelight' Asset Management System continues to be developed and improved as the number of assets recorded on the system grows. Maintaining the ISO55001 accreditation ensures that the organisation adheres to nationally recognised standards for asset management. This not only enhances operational efficiency, risk management, and budget management but also demonstrates the organisation's ability to effectively manage its assets.

The wider Estate rationalisation project is now in the feasibility stage. This is looking at three Service locations to consolidate resources and improve efficiencies. Through our Estate work the Service continues to incorporate affordable quick-win environmental improvements through the reactive maintenance programme and the cyclical refurbishment programme. Due to the economic situation, material & labour costs continue to increase, although the level of inflation has stabilised, it remains high which impacts the quantity of work that can be instructed within the allocated budget. A detailed analysis of all Service sites, to determine if Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was present, has been completed. This work has identified that the Service has no RAAC present within the estate.

The fleet programme continues to progress well, with a firm awareness of the challenges with the supply chains and delays. The Service's first fully electric van has now been delivered and will now undergo trials and evaluation across several departments to help us be better informed for future investment. We have also extended the electric vehicles in the Service by ordering two new

electric vans to replace the ageing fleet equipment vans. Following the successful procurement of a telematics system, for the Fleet, a programme of installation will commence in Q1 2024/25. This system, along with the electric vehicle trials will allow the gathering of data, which will help the Service develop an electric vehicle implementation strategy. The Service's fleet is largely procured using procurement frameworks that ensure the best value. We constantly assess products and prices across the markets for best value. The total sale of old vehicles and equipment this year so far has generated over £200k.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand and manage our impact upon the environment?

The Service successfully recruited to replace the previous Environmental & Compliance Manager, with the new person beginning within this post during this period.

The Service's first phase of solar panels has now been completed, with five installations of photovoltaics (solar panels) at Marlborough, Blandford, and Sturminster Newton, Wareham, and Warminster. These will be switched on in April and will be reviewed over a 12-month period to measure their effectiveness against our existing energy usage at the sites. This review will provide practical information on how effective they are at reducing our reliance on carbon powered solutions and an indication of payback time for the investment. It is hoped that this investment in green energy will prove successful and pave the way for more installations across the service.

As part of our Environmental programme, the Service is supporting all Watch Managers to become positive Green Champions. Through this the Watch Managers are the key contact for the Environmental Team across the 50 sites and they are working together to instil behaviour change across the workforce. By instilling behaviour change across the workforce the Environmental Team can create a culture of sustainability and environmental consciousness. This will not only lead to reduced waste and energy usage, but also improved recycling practices and overall environmental stewardship throughout the organisation.

A review of waste management, across the estate, is well underway. This has included the removal of some unused waste and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) bins which will make some small financial savings for the Service. This work will continue as part of our environmental programme into awareness and behaviour change. The Service continues to also work externally

with our with partner agencies both at national and local levels to learn from their experiences and to seek opportunities for joint working on environmental projects.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do our plans address the risks identified in the integrated risk management plan?

The Service delivers a Strategic Assessment of Risk (SAR) on a two-yearly basis. This document incorporates essential local, national, and global references, along with Group Level PESTELO (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal and organisational) analysis, aligned to our operational groups. This information, combined with our risk and demand data, and an organisational review, ensures the delivery of a comprehensive and robust SAR. Our SAR plays a critical role in guiding decision making and planning and serves as a foundation in the shaping of our Community Safety Plan (CSP).

The most recent SAR is published on our website and covers 2023-25. Prior to its publication the documents went through a consultation process with our key partners. During 2023-24 the Service has been using this SAR to support the development of our new CSP, along with other key documents and pieces of work. This includes delivering a robust and comprehensive Fire Cover Review, looking at risk, demand and vulnerabilities, the Service's Cultural Action Plan and the Medium-Term Finance Plan. The draft CSP 2024-28 was presented to the Authority during Q4, at its February meeting and is currently on a 12-week public consultation. The consultation process adheres to the Gunning principles and utilises a variety of means to try and reach all demographics of our communities, to hear their views. The consultation responses will be collated during mid-May and any resulting changes to the CSP will be provided prior to the Fire Authority meeting in June 24. Subject to Members approval in June the final CSP will be published on the Service's website.

Through our Community Risk Management process, the Service is committed to continue to maintain alignment with the Fire Standards Board's Community Risk Management Plan standard and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) requirements. The delivery of our CSP is monitored and reviewed through our performance management system and management arrangements.

KLOE 6 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we demonstrate effective management of Information and Communication technology?

The Service continues to support investment into the Service's ICT infrastructure and security as a priority in supporting the frontline. We continue to maintain and develop our infrastructure to ensure a joined-up approach across operations, governance, security and data. The Service has an ICT Strategy to ensure effective delivery of ICT objectives which is continually aligned to the CSP. A plan is in place to ensure that projects and activities are being monitored and prioritised to meet business needs.

The security of our infrastructure is continually monitored and tested through annual ICT health checks and subsequent activities to assure compliance. Furthermore, the Service will be resubmitting for Cyber Essentials accreditation in Q3 financial year 2024/2025 which will help support also achieving future additional accreditation of Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) in line with the NCSC recommendations.

We continue to invest in key initiatives to support sustainability and value for money to support front line services with the most modern technology and hardware available. ICT capital and revenue programmes are continually reviewed against the ICT Strategy and scheduling adapted to meet the changing needs of the service.

Digital Transformation Programme migrating systems into Office 365 from Notes is progressing well. HRMIS out to procurement for a second round to assure a correct solution is found. A new Programme Manager has started with the service. Changes to the structure of resources in the Project Team are underway due to leavers and the opportunity of making best use of skills and planning forward.

ICT management system has been procured. Phase one implementation is ahead of schedule enabling the Phase two ICT Service Desk module work to commence. Phase three will create opportunities for wider Service use for 'triage' and job request flow to support efficiencies in other service provision areas such as estates, HR etc to assist in removal from reliance on notes for this type of work.

KLOE 7: How well are we securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?

KLOE 7 Summary

Financial management and governance remain strong, and the Service is consistently rated highly in audit and inspection processes. The Service remains concerned about the medium to longer-term financial sustainability of the Authority. As well as additional cost increases linked to the wider inflationary environment, it is possible to foresee that there will be further funding pressures on the Service moving towards a General Election and new Parliament, with the Government needing to reduce the national debt and balance overall public spending.

The Service continues to engage with all relevant stakeholders to influence the debate on financial sustainability for fire and rescue services and, in particular, to maintain increased council tax flexibility. The Chief Fire Officer is influencing the national debate through his role as Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council's Finance Committee. This included detailed discussion around planning for the 2024-25 Local Government Finance Settlement and positioning the sector in readiness for the next Comprehensive Spending Review. Along with other fire and rescue services, the Service continues to write to the Local Government Minister and Chief Secretary to the Treasury setting out our case.

The Service has managed to set a balanced budget for 2024-25, despite additional precept flexibility not being granted. The Service is increasingly reliant on grant income over which there is no certainty or guarantee for future financial years, so will need to develop plans to reduce levels of spend to avoid a growing financial deficit over the medium term. Taking account of the operational pay awards for 2022 and 2023 that were agreed after the 2023-24 budget as set, and the 2023 pay award made to corporate staff, the latest Medium Term Finance Plan deficit forecasts are £2m for 2025-26, rising to £3.1m for 2027-28 (Fire Authority Budget Setting paper, 8 February 2024).

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we understand and take action to mitigate our main or significant financial risks?

For some time now, the Service have been engaging with local Members of Parliament, the Home Office and National Fire Chiefs Council to influence the debate on financial sustainability for fire and rescue services and, in particular, lobby for council tax flexibility. This has included briefing sessions for local MPs and letters from the Chair and Chief Fire Officer to relevant government ministers. In October, the Service again wrote to the Local Government Minister and the Chief Secretary to the

Treasury putting our case forward for continued council tax flexibility. This flexibility was not granted for 2024-25 so the Service will need to look for further savings to ensure that it remains in a sustainable financial position.

The audited financial statements for 2021-22 were signed off by the Finance & Audit Committee in December 2022. Our auditors, Deloitte LLP, provided an 'Unmodified' opinion on the Statements and updated the Committee in March 2023 with the outcome of the Value for Money work. This also showed an 'Unmodified' opinion. Unfortunately, the Service are still waiting for formal sign-off of the Statements, which has been delayed due to auditing of pensions information. This is expected to be resolved imminently, with the sign-off of the 2022-23 financial statement also then likely to be completed. Preliminary and interim audit work with our new Auditors, Bishop Fleming, has been completed for 2023-24, and the main audit work is expected to be completed in late Summer 2024.

South West Audit Partnership completed two financial review scheduled internal audits for 2022-23. For 2023-24 they reviewed payroll and pensions procedures in quarter 3 and fuel cards and procurement cards in quarter 4. The Medium Term Financial Plan audit scheduled for 2024-25 is due to be completed in quarter 1.

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent do we have a track record for achieving savings and avoiding any residual future budget gaps?

Members approve the Service budget and Medium Term Finance Plan annually each February. The 2024-25 settlement from Central Government did not provide further £5 council tax flexibility but did provide additional grant income which enabled a balanced budget to be presented and approved by Members for 2024-25. The future provision of grant income has not been confirmed beyond 2024-25 by Government and the Service will need to develop plans to reduce spending. These decisions are guided by the work of the Resources and Savings Programme which has a schedule of work which includes regular reviews of our financial assumptions and options for making further savings and efficiencies.

KLOE 7 sub-diagnostic

To what extent is our use of reserves sustainable and promoting new ways of working?

The Service continually monitors its plans for reserves usage to ensure sufficient levels are maintained to support financial sustainability. The reserves plan and general balances risk assessment are approved annually by Members at the Authority each

February for the approaching financial year. Levels of reserves and general balances are then reviewed and published as part of the annual Statements of Accounts process. The Finance & Audit Committee are updated quarterly on the current reserves position as part of the wider financial position update. The usage of reserves is subject to a stringent process aligned to key priorities and supporting strategic projects.

KLOE 12: How effective is the Occupational Health and Safety management system in the Service?

KLOE 12 Summary

The Service continues to exhibit a strong health and safety performance. There are no strategic issues to raise with Members. The work-related absence due to physical injuries or ill health quarterly is down from 479 to 193 days over the same time last year. In this quarter, 10 people are contributing to these figures. Of the 10 people, five are designated long term sick or in long term recovery and their days lost account for 85% of the total for quarter. The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 has decreased over the same quarter last year from 11 down to 3.

KLOE 12 sub-diagnostic

How well structured and embedded is the Health & Safety policy, practices and culture to ensure a safe and legally compliant Service?

Health and Safety arrangements continue to operate well, with no causes for concern to raise with Members. Our trend analysis within the report is based on the same time as last year to allow for seasonal influences.

- The quarterly trend in work-related absence due to physical injuries or ill health is down from 479 to 193 days compared to the same time last year. In this quarter, ten people are contributing to these figures. Of the 10 people, five are designated long term sick or in long term recovery and their days lost are 85% of the total in quarter four.
- The number of reportable incidents to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) has decreased over the same quarter last year from 11 down to 3. All occurrence reports have been fully investigated and actions taken where required.

The Service has good levels of compliance in relation to Health and Safety and this is upheld by the Service being accredited to International Organisational Standardisation 45001 Occupational Health and Safety Management system standard. All minor conformities have been actioned from the previous audit in November 2023. The next audit by British Standards Institute auditors will be in May 2024.

KLOE 13: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place?

KLOE 13 Summary

The governance arrangements for the Authority and Service are well embedded and work well. These arrangements have been assured through peer review and internal audit mechanisms, with good levels of assurance being awarded. The Service aligned its governance, from performance through to assurance, to the Key Lines of Enquiry from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Through this the Service uses the inspectorate's methodology as a baseline assessment to review arrangements and performance against their 'good' assessment.

Following the Authority providing approval for an application to be made to join the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP), an application was made. This was accepted by the SWAP Board in December 2023 and a full four year internal audit strategy and the annual plan for 2024-25 was approved at the Finance & Audit Committee in March 2024.

Members can be assured that the Service is proactively managing its information and security compliance requirements. There are strategic and tactical processes that broadly align to the principles of British Standards Institute 27001. Cyber security arrangements are operating well and monitored on a continual basis. Annual Information and Communication Technology testing is conducted externally giving additional assurance of the robust arrangements in place. Due to the continued proactive work in this area, risks are reducing, and any remedial action prioritised and regularly monitored. This includes work to enable re-accreditation of Cyber Essentials with suppliers to ensure multi factor authentication is in place on third party systems. An assessment of the Cyber Assessment Framework led by the Home Office also demonstrates the Service is in a positive position for its cyber security arrangements.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How well does the Fire and Rescue Authority have oversight and scrutiny to ensure that the Service is appropriately effective and efficient in ensuring the safety of communities from fire and other risks?

The Authority has five key priorities and performance against these are overseen and scrutinised by Members on a quarterly basis. Priorities one, two and three are reviewed at the four Local Performance & Scrutiny Committee meetings. These took place to consider quarter 3 performance in February. Priorities four and five were reviewed at the Finance & Audit Committee at their meeting in March for quarter 3 performance.

The performance reports and presentations at these meetings provide details on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Service, as well as looking at how the Service is supporting, developing, and ensuring the health and wellbeing of its people. The Annual report is approved by Members and published each year in September. This is further supported with a Statement of Assurance providing assurance of the previous year's governance, finance, and operational matters. The process of developing the Statement of Assurance received a 'substantial' assurance rating from internal audit and was commended by the Local Government Association peer review team led by the Chair of the Authority. The internal audit annual report from South West Audit Partnership awarded the Service an overall grade of 'substantial assurance' following delivery of the 2022-23 audit programme.

The Authority oversees and scrutinises the development and delivery of the Community Safety Plan (CSP), which includes the Service undertaking consultation and community engagement. Public consultation was underway in quarter 4 on the revised community safety plan and the results of this will be presented for Members approval in June 2024. A presentation of overall performance against each priority is provided to the Authority at six and 12-month intervals.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How effective and efficient are our governance arrangements?

The annual internal audit report, provided by our internal auditors the Southwest Audit Partnership (SWAP), awarded the Service with an overall grade of 'substantial assurance', following the completion of the 2022-23 audit programme. The 2023-24 audit programme was completed during quarter 4, with the final two audits being undertaken. In December 2023, the Authority's

application to join the SWAP was approved by their Board, following this the Finance & Audit Committee (during March 24) were presented with the four-year internal audit strategy and annual plan for 2024-28, which Members endorsed and approved. The strategy and plan were collaboratively developed by SWAP, the Service, and the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee and reviewed by External audit.

The Service continues to have comprehensive assurance arrangements in place, to ensure the maintenance of good performance levels across the Service. This includes internal audits, external audit, British Standards Institute audits (for International Organizational Standardisation (ISO45001 and ISO55001), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspections and peer reviews. These, in conjunction with our internal Service assurance mechanisms, contribute to the development of the annual Statement of Assurance. The Authority approved the 2022-23 Statement of Assurance at their meeting in September 2023, which provided assurance in line with the inspectorate's methodology. The Statement of Assurance and supporting information for 2022-23 is published on the Service's website.

The Authority and Service took deliberate steps in 2019, to ensure alignment with HMICFRS methodology, from policy development to operational implementation. This alignment is substantiated by our Key Lines of Enquiry, which adhere to the inspectorate's judgment criteria and their 'good' rating standards. To sustain this alignment, a review against the 'good' criteria is conducted annually, along with quarterly performance reports to provide ongoing evidence supporting the Service's pursuit of a 'good' rating. This approach has undergone audit scrutiny by our internal auditors, who granted a 'substantial' assurance rating.

Performance management arrangements are well-established across the Service and up to Authority level, with clear reporting requirements and oversight. This robust system connects performance reporting from the Community Safety Plan and the Authority's five priorities down to team and watch levels. These reports are gathered and presented through our performance management tool and comprehensive suite of station-level performance dashboards.

KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic

How effective and efficient are we at managing data?

Members can be assured that the Service is proactively managing its information and security compliance requirements. There are strategic and tactical processes that broadly align to the principles of British Standards Institute 27001 and are detailed in the supporting documentation associated with the Statement of Assurance, which was approved by Members in September 2023.

Two subject access requests were received in the last quarter and there were 45 Freedom of Information requests due for response in quarter 4, 98% of these were responded to within 20 working days. The average response time was ten days. This quarter we have noticed an increase in the number of requests which are concerning lithium battery, E-scooter, E-bike and electric cars.

Twelve complaints were due to be responded to this quarter. Of these 83% were resolved within 14 days. The number of complaints that were not upheld was 50%. One complaint was referred to senior management. Pleasingly, there were 24 compliments this quarter, 14 related to our response to an incident.

Four security incidents were reported during the quarter. Each incident is investigated, risk assessed, and relevant learning is shared with the respective team/manager.

The Service continues to monitor progress against its cyber action plan and is focused on work to ensure third party cloud services have multi factor authentication in place. The Service has completed a gap analysis against the National Fire Chiefs Council's Cyber Assessment Framework at the request of the Home Office. Confirmation has been received that we meet all but one of the baseline requirements and this will be addressed through delivery of the cyber action plan.

A mitigation plan from the annual Information and Communication Technology health check conducted in June has ensured 95% of the risks have been addressed.

All staff are mandated to complete Information Security/Data Protection e-learning to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities regarding data. The Service monitors the completion rate of this e-learning, and as of 31 March 2024, 95% of all employees had completed their mandatory data protection and cyber security training.

Priority: Supporting and developing our people

KLOE 8: How well do we understand the wellbeing needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce wellbeing?

KLOE 8 Summary

In quarter 4, long-term sickness was the largest contributing factor to the absence figures for wholetime and on-call staff groups this quarter with short term absence being the largest contributing factor for Corporate and Fire Control. Musculoskeletal was the

highest causation of absence for operational staff (35% wholetime and 45% on-call) this quarter. However, Mental health absence was the second highest causation for absence for operational staff (34% wholetime and 22% on-call). Mental health was the highest cause of absence for corporate staff and fire control staff.

The Service has a corporate target to achieve average sickness levels lower than the previous five-year average. The cumulative target (wholetime/corporate/fire control) for quarter 4 was 9.3 shifts lost per person, but this was narrowly exceeded with a cumulative actual figure of 9.5 shifts lost per person, and therefore we did not achieve the corporate target for this year. Sickness absence is professionally managed through our dedicated health and wellbeing team who work closely with line managers and Human Resources Business Partners. Sickness procedures are robust and a range of support mechanisms such as counselling and physiotherapy are in place to support staff including, through a cost benefit analysis, funding for private investigations if it is considered that National Health Service (NHS) waiting times are delaying treatment and/or recovery. NHS waiting times remain an area of concern and some members of staff have had planned operations cancelled, which will impact on absence levels.

In quarter 4, 92% of staff passed their fitness test and 10 new fitness improvement plans were put in place for staff which includes the provision of advice and guidance on fitness improvement, including weight management and nutritional information. As a result, a total of 22 fitness improvement plans are now in place.

Our personal private healthcare scheme through salary deduction commenced on 1 March 2024. Our membership at this point was 316, comprised of 167 with the remaining 149 being dependants. With such a scheme in place, decisions regarding payment for private treatment will consider whether such treatment would have been available through this arrangement and will therefore be approved by exception.

During quarter 4 a number of key health messages, such as Time to Talk day, Firefighter Charity crisis line, heart health and alcohol awareness were publicised. The Service continues to promote and participate in free preventative Wellness Workshops provided by the Firefighters Charity and Managers were reminded of these provisions during our Managers Engagement Days.

KLOE 8 sub-diagnostic

How well do we understand the wellbeing needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce wellbeing?

The Service has a robust and audited health and wellbeing programme to support staff. A range of health and wellbeing procedures are in place which outline all the support mechanisms available to all staff including mental health support, peer support and other external self-service provisions.

Absence management continues to be a key focus with robust monitoring arrangements in place. Long-term absence was the largest contributing factor to the absence figures in quarter 4 for operational staff (wholetime and on-call) with short term sickness being the largest contributing factor of corporate and fire control staff.

Musculoskeletal was the highest causation of absence for operational staff (35% wholetime and 45% on-call) this quarter. However, Mental health absence was the second highest causation for absence for operational staff (34% wholetime and 22% on-call). Much of the Mental Health absences for operational staff were due to historic matters, where TRiM interventions had been set in place. Mental health was the highest cause of absence for corporate staff and fire control staff.

The Service has a corporate target to achieve average sickness levels lower than the previous five-year average. The cumulative target for quarter 4 was 9.3 shifts lost per person (wholetime/corporate/fire control), but this was narrowly exceeded with a cumulative actual figure of 9.5 shifts lost person, therefore the corporate target for this year was not achieved. The long -term trend analysis shows average sickness levels are increasing.

Management of long-term absence is more complex than short-term absence as the illnesses/conditions may be serious and involve surgery and recovery time. With any long-term absence, staff are referred to occupational health from day 28 of the absence for advice and recommendations.

Sickness absence is professionally managed through our dedicated health and wellbeing team who work closely with line managers and Human Resources Business Partners. Sickness procedures are robust and a range of support mechanisms such as counselling and physiotherapy are in place. National Health Service (NHS) waiting times remain an area of concern with some operations being cancelled this quarter impacting on sickness levels. The Service does consider, through a cost benefit analysis, funding for private investigations if it is considered that NHS waiting times are delaying treatment and/or recovery.

In quarter 4, 92% of staff passed their fitness test and 10 new fitness improvement plans were put in place for staff which includes the provision of advice and guidance on fitness improvement, including weight management and nutritional information. As a result, a total of 22 fitness improvement plans are now in place.

Our personal private healthcare scheme through salary deduction commenced on 1 March 2024. Our membership at this point was 316, comprised of 167 with the remaining 149 being dependants. Whilst it is too early to obtain quantitative data, since its implementation our usage is: 24 hour GP advice line – 63.16%, Diagnostics consultation and tests – 26.32%, Physiotherapy – 10.35%. As Members are aware the Service offers physiotherapy but this healthcare scheme will provide additional numbers of treatment. With such a scheme in place, decisions regarding payment for private treatment will consider whether such treatment would have been available through this arrangement and will therefore be approved by exception.

During quarter 4 a number of key health messages, such as Time to Talk day, Firefighter Charity crisis line, heart health and alcohol awareness were publicised. The Service continues to promote and participate in free preventative Wellness Workshops provided by the Firefighters Charity and managers were reminded of these provisions during our Managers Engagement Days.

KLOE 9: How well trained and skilled are staff?

KLOE 9 Summary

The Service continues to conduct training delivery in accordance with the Annual Training Action Plan and on-call quarterly training programme. Our training delivery is supported by additional e-learning modules and virtual delivery. Our competence recording system, which covers all staff, developed with a private sector partner, has been successfully embedded with competence levels monitored by Officers.

KLOE 9 sub-diagnostic

How well do we understand the skills and capabilities of our workforce?

All operational members of staff are required to maintain competence for their respective roles. Operational competence is demonstrated by satisfactory performance at real incidents, during simulations, exercises, drills or centrally run training courses. Training delivery continues to be supplemented by additional E-learning and virtual course delivery.

Our competence recording system, which covers all staff, developed with a private sector partner, has been successfully embedded. Officers monitor competence levels to ensure that staff are allocated to appropriate operational license courses. Maintenance of skills training is delivered through localised training in line with the training planners and the needs of the station.

An outline of our revised Leadership Development programme was discussed at the Managers Engagement Days in March.

KLOE 10: How well do we ensure fairness and diversity?

KLOE 10 Summary

The opportunities for feedback from our staff are aligned to the internal communications and engagement plan. They include a range of channels and methods to ensure the involvement of all parts of our workforce. Communications plans are a standard element of the project management process to ensure that stakeholders engage in Service projects.

Robust workforce and succession planning arrangements are in place that support each stage of the employment cycle. Heads of Department complete an annual department succession plan and a five-year retirement profile is monitored regularly to aid wholetime recruitment decision making.

The Service continues to use social media as a key part of our positive action work. Community profile information is available to crews, so that the Service can target our 'Have a Go' recruitment and social media campaigns. This information also enables the Service to better support and strengthen our community engagement activities.

The diversity of our workforce is monitored on a quarterly basis and our corporate target to improve the diversity of our workforce as a whole compared to the last five years continues to make positive progress with our actual workforce diversity in quarter 3 being 23.1% against a target of 21.9%. Pleasingly this means the corporate target has been exceeded.

Equality data of all starters and leavers is captured to monitor trends and of the 51 new starters in quarter 4, 32 were commencing employment as firefighters (15 wholetime and 17 on-call); three of whom were female.

There were 41 leavers in quarter 4, 12 females and 29 males, given our workforce composition, the fact that almost a third of leavers this quarter are female is noted and will be monitored closely in future reporting periods. The top three reasons for leaving for all staff was due to retirement – 9 people (22%), personal/work commitments – 8 people (19.5%) and obtained employment elsewhere – 6 leavers (14.5%). There were no significant trends by staff group.

As part of our approach to strengthen our case management arrangements additional resources commenced in post this quarter. There were nine new disciplinary cases, two preliminary investigations and one appeal in quarter 4, resulting in a total of 18 performance management cases in progress. There were two hearings held in quarter 4, both at Stage 3 (possible sanction up to and including dismissal) and six cases were concluded this quarter. Of these cases, one was determined as 'no case to answer', three resulted in local management action, one received a final written warning and one did not progress as the individual was dismissed through our sickness review meeting process. Post case reviews are held for all closed cases with the aim of them taking place within four weeks of the case concluding. Post case reviews enable lessons learnt, potential procedural changes and organisational learning and improvements to be captured. One employment tribunal claim was settled prior to court, resulting in two employment tribunal claims in progress.

KLOE 10 sub-diagnostic

How well do leaders seek feedback and challenge from all parts of the workforce?

The Service has a structured approach to staff communications and engagement. An internal communications engagement plan is in place to ensure there is opportunity for all parts of the workforce to provide feedback and challenge to leaders which was a focus for the latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

In quarter 4, six manager engagement days were held, focused on future financial challenges of the Service and our Culture Action Plan, specifically around support, wellbeing, and leadership arrangements. These sessions provided our supervisory and middle managers the opportunity to raise concerns, feedback views from their teams about what was missing within the action plan, what more could be done by all leaders in the Service to improve the culture of our workplaces.

As part of the launch of our 'SafeTo' portal a staff suggestion form is included so all staff can feedback suggestions to improve ways of working across the organisation. During quarter 4 one suggestion was received through this route.

The Service continues to engage with representative bodies on a regular and structured basis through liaison meetings attended by senior managers. This enables effective and timely two-way dialogue between the Service and staff representatives. Good local relationships are being maintained and this has been evidenced with our approach to the resourcing and savings programme.

KLOE 10 sub-diagnostic

How well do we identify and address potential disproportionality in recruitment, retention, and progression?

The Service's recruitment processes are transparent and reviewed to ensure there are no unintentional barriers to recruitment. A wide range of initiatives are in place to support our work to increase the diversity of our workforce. The Service continues to use social media as a key part of our positive action work. Community profile information is available to crews, so that the Service can target our 'Have a Go' recruitment and social media campaigns. This information also enables the Service to better support and strengthen community engagement activities. A positive action steering group is in place and good progress is being made in developing our programme of work ahead of plans to undertake a wholetime recruitment campaign in the latter part of quarter 2 2024/2025.

The diversity of our workforce is monitored on a quarterly basis and our corporate target, to improve the diversity of our workforce as a whole compared to the last five years, continues to make positive progress with our actual workforce diversity in quarter 4 being 23.1% against a target of 21.9%. This means the corporate target for this area has been exceeded.

Equality data of all starters and leavers is captured to monitor trends and of the 51 new starters in quarter 4, 32 were commencing employment as firefighters (15 wholetime and 17 on-call); three of whom were female.

There were 41 leavers in quarter 4, 12 females and 29 males, given our workforce composition, the fact that almost a third of leavers this quarter are female is noted and will be monitored closely in future reporting periods. The top three reasons for leaving for all staff was due to retirement – nine people (22%), personal/work commitments – eight people (19.5%) and obtained employment elsewhere – six leavers (14.5%). There were no significant trends by staff group.

Of the 41 leavers this quarter, 37 were offered leavers discussions (90%). Of those that were offered a leavers discussion, no one declined. The leavers discussion form includes two free text questions. Analysis of the responses to these questions has not identified any organisational trends, including any trends from staff with a protected characteristic; sex (gender), sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion and belief. The feedback from the leavers discussion is valuable in helping to identify organisational learning with comments raised also passed to HR Business Partners to escalate where appropriate.

As part of our approach to strengthen our case management arrangements additional resources commenced in post this quarter. There were nine new disciplinary cases, two preliminary investigations and one appeal in quarter 4, resulting in a total of 18 performance management cases in progress. There were two hearings held in quarter 4, both at Stage 3 (possible sanction up to and including dismissal) and six cases were concluded this quarter. Of these cases, one was determined as 'no case to answer', three resulted in local management action, one received a final written warning and one did not progress as the individual was dismissed through our sickness review meeting process. Post case reviews are held for all closed cases with the aim of them taking place within four weeks of the case concluding. Post case reviews enable lessons learnt, potential procedural changes and organisational learning and improvements to be captured. One employment tribunal claim was settled prior to court, resulting in two employment tribunal claims in progress.

KLOE 11: How well do we develop leadership and capability?

KLOE 11 Summary

All joiners are invited to a corporate induction with two corporate inductions taking place in quarter 4. The one-to-one personal review process is embedded with completion monitored to ensure that all staff have at least one personal review during a 12-month period. The completion rate for 1:1s at quarter 4 is 92%, this is a significant improvement from the previous year (72%). Great progress has particularly been made by our on-call staff group, where completion rates have improved from 47% to 96%.

Following promotion, staff meet with the Learning & Development team to identify the development programme appropriate to their role. The Service's Leadership Development Programme ensures leaders at each level in the organisation are equipped with the skills to successfully carry out their role.

Middle and strategic managers attend our Leaders' Forum which consists of two hour 'bitesize' workshops on a bi-monthly basis and cover a range of cultural and leadership topics aligned to our Strategic Assessment of Risk. Corporate staff are also encouraged to complete development pathway activities relevant to their role.

Supervisory managers undertake their initial incident command training using the facilities at the Fire Service College, which enables them to be assessed at a range of incidents. A comprehensive and structured rota group training programme is in place for Flexible Duty Officers. This ensures skills are refreshed and provides a good practice forum to share and learn from incidents recently attended. This is being further enhanced to standardise monthly tactical decision-making exercises.

The Service's apprenticeships cover a wide range of areas including Operational Firefighter, Emergency Contact Handle (Control Firefighters), Leadership Development, Finance, Human Resources and Facilities Management. In quarter 4, 27 members of staff are undertaking apprenticeships.

The Service's coaching procedure also supports staff in their development. The Service have several coaches qualified at the Institute of Leadership & Management level 3 and level 5. The Learning Hub provides a one-stop blended learning resource and is widely used by staff.

The Learning & Organisational Development team restructure has enabled a reappropriation of staff responsibilities. The Service have several coaches qualified at the Institute of Leadership & Management level 3 and level 5 and the Service is looking at how to reinvigorate coaching and mentoring arrangements alongside the revision of leadership development programmes. The Service also uses the NFCC Coaching (and mentoring) portal where staff can register as a coach but also access coaching support. The Woman in the Fire Service are also part of the NFCC coaching portal which ensures a diverse range of coaches and support are available for staff across the Fire Service sector. The Service's Learning and Organisational Development team are also actively involved in the development and delivery of our culture action plan.

KLOE 11 sub-diagnostic

How well do we manage and develop the individual performance of our staff?

Two corporate inductions were held in quarter 4. Where individuals are not able or fail to attend the corporate induction within the agreed timescales, this is escalated to the line manager to ensure attendance.

Following the corporate induction, a survey regarding the effectiveness of the process is sent out. All respondents across both sessions confirmed the induction met or exceeded their expectations. Respondents were positive about the informative and engaging content, the informal nature of the session, the opportunity for corporate and operational staff to come together and the quality of the presentations.

Another way that the Service evaluates how successful the induction period has been for a new starter is data from probation reviews. Year to date, since 1 April 2023, 78 probations have been met, two has been extended, and no staff contracts have been terminated during their probation period. There are 15 final probation reviews outstanding at the end of the year.

The one-to-one personal review process ensures that a discussion and appraisal take place at least once a year and focuses on wellbeing, performance and development. One-to-one reviews are recorded over a rolling 12-month period and completion rates are monitored. Trend analysis suggests that reviews tended to be conducted quite evenly over the 12-month period. The completion rate at quarter 4 is 92%, this is a significant improvement from the previous year (72%). Significant progress has particularly been made by our on-call staff group, where completion rates have improved from 47% to 96%.

KLOE 11 sub-diagnostic

To what extent are the career pathways of all staff effectively managed?

Following promotion, staff meet with the Learning & Development team to identify the development programme appropriate to their role. The Service's Leadership Development Programme ensures leaders at each level in the organisation are equipped with the skills to successfully conduct their role. Middle and strategic managers attend our Leaders' Forum which consists of two hour 'bitesize' workshops on a bi-monthly basis and cover a range of cultural and leadership topics aligned to our Strategic Assessment of Risk. Corporate staff are also encouraged to complete development pathway activities relevant to their role.

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The Service's apprenticeships cover a wide range of areas including Leadership Development, Finance, Human Resources and Facilities Management. Figures for quarter 4 show that 27 Service personnel are undertaking apprenticeships.

The Learning & Organisational Development team restructure has enabled a reappropriation of staff responsibilities. The Service have several coaches qualified at the Institute of Leadership & Management level 3 and level 5 and the Service is looking at how to reinvigorate coaching and mentoring arrangements alongside the revision of leadership development programmes. The Service also uses the NFCC Coaching (and mentoring) portal where staff can register as a coach but also access coaching support. The Women in the Fire Service are part of the NFCC coaching portal which ensures a diverse range of coaches and support are available for staff across the Fire Service sector. The Service's Learning and Organisational Development team are also actively involved in the development and delivery of our culture action plan.