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Agenda item: 06

People and Culture Activity Report

People and Culture Committee

Date:	23 January 2026
Submitted by:	Director of People and Culture
Purpose:	To inform Members of HR activity to the end of September 2025, incorporating data for Quarter 2 (July 2025 to 30 September 2025).
Recommendations:	That Members note the content of the report.
Summary:	This report informs Members of key data relating to the functional areas within the People Directorate

Local Government (Access to information) Act 1972

Exemption Category:	None
Contact Officer:	Head of People, Joanne Hardcastle Joanne.Hardcastle@westyorkshire.gov.uk
Background papers open to inspection:	None
Annexes:	None

1. Introduction

This report informs Members of organisational people data.

2. Information

Employee Profile (employee headcount)

This summary table shows our current headcount as a full time equivalent (FTE) value against our target establishment.

To update to latest quarter.

	FTE Headcount (Sept 2025)	Target Establishment	Variance`
Fire Control	41.11	44	-2.89
Green Book	312.8	322	-9.2
On Call	70.47	120	-49.53
Whole time	945.8	938	7.8
Total	1370.18	1424	-53.82

The Wholetime (WT) operational headcount and strength is as follows. The figures in black relate to the total headcount whilst red relates to the FTE headcount.

Wholetime Headcount (FTE in Red) as at 08/12/2025

	Total	FF	CM	WM	224 WM	SM	GM	AM
Total	968	604	191	55	61	40	11	3
FTE Total	945.80	592.90	187.10	50.80	61.00	38.00	10.00	3.00
Corporate Services	5	0	0	1	0	3	1	0
	5.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	3.00	1.00	0.00
People and Culture	19	6	1	6	0	4	2	0
	6.40	1.40	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.00
Service Delivery	876	571	164	39	61	30	7	2
	868.00	564.50	162.50	39.00	61.00	30.00	7.00	2.00
Service Support	68	27	26	9	0	3	1	1
	66.40	27.00	24.60	8.80	0.00	3.00	1.00	1.00

The table below details the On-Call headcount for each station as well as FTE headcount in red. Establishment at On-Call station includes 1 x WM, 2 X CM, 9 X FF (total 12 FTE).

On-Call

	Total	
Featherstone Station	9	4.28
Holmfirth Station	16	8.90
Ilkley Station	14	6.02
Meltham Station	12	6.60
Mirfield Station	14	6.80
Mytholmroyd Station	14	7.79
Otley Station	15	8.60
Silsden Station	8	3.65
Skelmanthorpe Station	17	10.18
Slaithwaite Station	14	7.65
Total	133	70.47

The table below details the Fire Control headcount at each level in Fire Control as well as current FTE headcount in red.

	Total	CM	FF	GM	WM
Control	45 41.11	14 12.00	22 20.50	1 1.00	8 7.61

The table below details our current headcount in black across all enabling directorates, as well as FTE headcount in red.

Enabling Directorates (Green Book)

Headcount (FTE in red)	Total	
Corporate Services	21	17.89
Finance & Procurement	20	19.71
People and Culture	46	43.46
Service Delivery	138	120.84
Service Support	116	110.89
Total	341	312.80

The tables below show the ethnic diversity of our workforce as of 5 December 2025.

Wholetime

Ethnicity	Q1 (Apr 25- Jun 25)	%	Q2 (Jul 25- Sep 25)	%	Q3 (Oct 25- Dec 25)	%	Q4 (Jan 26 - Mar 26)	%
Total	949	%	968	%		%		%
Arab	1	0.11	1	0.10				
Any other Ethnic Group	5	0.53	5	0.51				
Any other Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Background	5	0.53	6	0.61				
Any Other White	13	1.37	14	1.44				
Asian or Asian British	16	1.69	15	1.54				
Black or Black British	4	0.42	4	0.41				
Chinese	2	0.21	2	0.20				
Indian	2	0.21	2	0.20				
Mixed	11	1.16	11	1.13				
Not Declared	53	5.58	48	4.95				
Pakistani	2	0.21	2	0.20				
Prefer not to specify	7	0.74	7	0.72				
White and Asian	1	0.11	1	0.10				
White and Black African	3	0.32	3	0.30				
White and Black Caribbean	7	0.74	10	1.03				
White British	178	18.76	204	21.07				
White British or Irish	639	67.33	633	65.39				
SUMMARY ROW WHITE BRITISH/IRISH	817	86.09	837	86.46				
SUMMARY ROW ETHNIC MINORITY	72	7.59	76	7.85				
SUMMARY ROW NOT DECLARED	60	6.32	55	5.68				

The ethnicity profile of our WT Firefighter cohort remains broadly consistent with Q1, with a slight improvement in diversity. In Q2, **7.85% of the cohort identify as one of the ethnically diverse groups other than White British and White Irish**, compared to **7.59% in Q1**. This represents a small but positive shift.

Disclosure improved (Not Declared dropped from 6.32% → 5.68%).

Fire Control

Ethnicity		Q1 (Apr 25- Jun 25)	%	Q2 (Jul 25- Sep 25)	%	Q3 (Oct 25- Dec 25)	%	Q4 (Jan 26 - Mar 26)	%
Total		46	%	45	%		%		%
Mixed		0	0	0	0				
Not Declared		2	4.35	2	4.44				
White and Asian		0	0	0	0				
White British		13	28.26	13	28.88				
White British or Irish		31	67.39	30	66.66				
SUMMARY ROW	WHITE BRITISH/IRISH	44	95.65	43	95.55				
SUMMARY ROW	ETHNIC MINORITY	0	0	0	0				
SUMMARY ROW	NOT DECLARED	2	4.35	2	4.44				

On-Call

Ethnicity		Q1 (Apr 25- Jun 25)	%	Q2 (Jul 25- Sep 25)	%	Q3 (Oct 25- Dec 25)	%	Q4 (Jan 26 - Mar 26)	%
Total		142	%	143	%		%		%
Any Other White		1	0.70	1	0.69				
Chinese		1	0.70	2	1.39				
Not Declared		9	6.34	7	4.89				
Prefer not to specify		1	0.70	1	0.69				
White and Asian		1	0.70	1	0.69				
White and Black African		0	0	1	0.69				
White and Black Caribbean		1	0.70	1	0.69				
White British		22	15.49	25	17.48				
White British or Irish		106	74.65	104	72.72				
SUMMARY ROW	WHITE BRITISH/IRISH	128	90.14	129	90.20				
SUMMARY ROW	ETHNIC MINORITY	4	2.82	6	4.19				
SUMMARY ROW	NOT DECLARED	10	7.04	8	5.59				

Enabling Directorates

Ethnicity		Q1 (Apr 25- Jun 25)	%	Q2 (Jul 25- Sep 25)	%	Q3 (Oct 25- Dec 25)	%	Q4 (Jan 26 - Mar 26)	%
Total		342	%	344	%		%		%
African		2	0.58	2	0.58				
Any other Asian Background		1	0.29	1	0.29				
Any other Black / African / Caribbean Background		2	0.58	2	0.58				
Any other Ethnic Group		1	0.29	1	0.29				
Any Other White		6	1.75	7	2.03				
Asian or Asian British		9	2.63	8	2.32				
Caribbean		2	0.58	2	0.58				
Gypsy or Irish Traveller		1	0.29	1	0.29				
Indian		4	1.17	4	1.16				
Irish		1	0.29	1	0.29				
Mixed		1	0.29	1	0.29				
Not Declared		14	4.09	14	4.06				
Pakistani		3	0.88	4	1.16				
Prefer not to specify		3	0.88	3	0.87				
White and Asian		2	0.58	2	0.58				
White and Black African		2	0.58	2	0.58				
White and Black Caribbean		1	0.29	1	0.29				
White British		125	36.55	125	36.33				
White British or Irish		162	47.37	163	47.38				
SUMMARY ROW	WHITE BRITISH/IRISH	287	83.92	288	83.72				
SUMMARY ROW	ETHNIC MINORITY	38	11.11	39	11.33				
SUMMARY ROW	NOT DECLARED	17	4.97	17	4.94				

Sickness Absence

This section provides a concise overview of sickness absence trends across West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) for Q1 and Q2 of 2025/26, with benchmarking against sector averages.

Average Days Lost per Employee

During Q1 and Q2 of 2025/26, West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service (WYFRS) experienced notable changes in sickness absence rates across its staff groups. This section provides a comparative overview, highlighting key patterns, sector benchmarks, and implications for organisational management.

Staff Group	Q1 (April-June) 2025/26	Q2 (July-Sept) 2025/26	Sector Average (Q2)
Wholetime	2.22 days	5.6 days	5.7 days
On-Call	0.45 shifts	2.79 shifts	4.16 shifts
Enabling (Support)	2.16 days	3.0 days	3.3 days
Fire Control	Included in Enabling	Included in Enabling	~3.0% est.

Summary

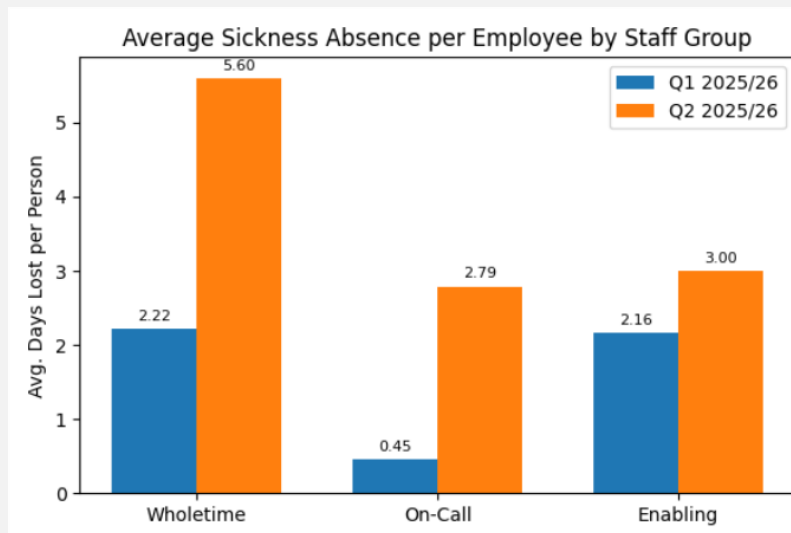
- **Wholetime:** Absence rates rose from 4.25% in Q1 to 5.6% in Q2, reflecting a marked increase in duty days lost. The average number of working days lost per Wholetime employee also increased, exceeding sector averages for this period.
- **On-Call:** Absence rates saw a significant rise in Q2. Despite this increase, On-Call absence remained below the sector average. Average working days lost per On-Call employee, while higher than Q1, remain comparatively favourable.
- **Enabling teams:** Absence rates remained relatively stable and consistently below sector norms throughout both quarters. The average working days lost per employee for this group was lower than sector benchmarks.

- **Fire Control:** Absence figures for Control are incorporated within Enabling data. National benchmarks, such as NW Fire Control's rate of 0.33%, suggest that Control staff absence is low overall.

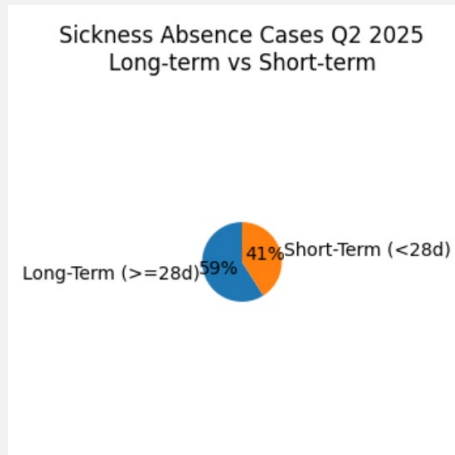
Key Patterns and Trends

- **Increase in Absence Rates:** The most pronounced shift was the rise in Wholetime and On-Call absence rates in Q2, with operational employees particularly affected.
- **Long-Term Sickness:** 59% of all sickness cases in Q2 were categorised as long-term (≥ 28 days), accounting for the majority of duty days lost. This trend was especially evident among operational staff.
- **Main Causes of Absence:** The principal drivers of long-term absence remain physical health issues and mental health conditions, in line with national patterns.

Average Sickness Absence by Staff Group (Q1 vs Q2):



Long-Term vs Short-Term Sickness (Q2 2025):



WYFRS's sickness absence profile for Q1 and Q2 2025/26 broadly reflects national post-pandemic trends, with an ongoing predominance of long-term sickness and increasing operational staff absence. The Supporting Good Attendance Project remains a key initiative to address these challenges and promote staff wellbeing across all groups.

Health and Safety Performance 1 July 2025 – 30 September 2025

Lost time up to 3 days

Actual performance 2025/26	Target 2025/26
14	19

Lost time over 3 days

Actual performance 2025/26	Target 2025/26
16	28

RIDDOR Major injury/disease

Actual performance 2025/26	Target 2025/26
1	No target set

Occupational Health Key Performance Indicators.

Period 1st July 2025 – 30th September 2025

Ref No.	KPI	Target	Quarter 1 ST July 2025 —30 th September 2025	YTD 1 st April 2025 – 31 st March 2026	Target achieved for present quarter
1	Management referral to appointment date (3 weeks)	90%	5%	25%	NO
2	AMA report to management within 48hr	90%	90%	91%	YES
3	No. of Did Not Attends (DNA's) or cancellation <48 hr notice*		0 Nurse 0 AMA	0 0	
4	No. of physiotherapy referrals		48	96	
5	No. of counselling referrals		52	103	
6	No. of management referrals		20	32	
7	No. of health screenings		203	394	
8	No. of self-referrals		2	2	
9	No of AMA consultations		123	272	

Please note the health screenings include the Asbestos medicals.

Discipline and Grievance Cases

01/07/25	30/09/25	Total Disciplinarys Completed.		Current Live Cases.	Time to Complete if Outside of Target, Examples.
	Total started in Period.	In Target [within 60 days].	Out of Target [over 60 days].		
Green Book.	2	2	0	0	Completed within 60 days = 1 Written Warning, 1 Summary dismissal
Control.	0	0	0	0	N/A
On Call.	1	1	0	0	Completed in 60 days = 1 Informal warning
Wholetime.	12	11	1	0	Completed with 60 days = 8 informal warnings, 2 Written warnings, 1 No further action Out of Target of 60 days = 1 Written Warning (61 days)
Total.	15	14	1	0	

01/07/25	30/09/25	Total Grievances Completed.		Current Live Cases.	Average / Time to Complete.
	Total Received in Period.	In Target [under 30 days].	Out of Target [Over 30 days].		
Green Book.	0	0	0	0	N/A
Control.	0	0	0	0	N/A
On-Call.	1	1	0	0	Dealt with informally
Wholetime.	3	2	1	0	X1 dealt with informally X1 Not Upheld X1 Partially Upheld
Total.	4	3	1	0	

Recruitment Statistics

External Recruitment by Directorate 1 July 2025 to 30 September 2025.

Directorate.	Total Received	Total Complete in Period	Total Complete Within Target	Total Complete Outside Target	Live cases	Average time to complete (Days)	Vacancies not appointed to	Target Timescale
Finance & Procurement.	1	1	1			32		
Service Delivery.	3	3	3			32		Green < 84 Days
Corporate Services.	1	1	1			33		Red > 84 Days
Employment Services.	2	2	2			58.5		
Service Support.	4	3	3		1	41		

Internal Only Recruitment by Directorate 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025.

Directorate.	Total Received	Total Complete in Period	Total Complete Within Target	Total Complete Outside Target	Lives cases	Average time to complete (Days)	Vacancies not appointed to	Target Timescale
Finance & Procurement.	0							
Service Delivery.	5	3	2	1	1	29	1*	Green <30 Days
Corporate Services.	0							Red > 30 Days
Employment Services.	1	1		1		37		
Service Support.	4	2	2		2	10.5		

1* On-Call Crew Manager (Development and Promotion) - no applicants shortlisted. To be re-advertised December 2025.

3. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. Legal Implications

The Monitoring Officer has considered this report and is satisfied it is presented in compliance with the Authority's Constitution.

5. People and Diversity Implications

This report concentrates on People and Diversity implications.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

Are the recommendations within this report subject to Equality Impact Assessment as outlined in the EIA guidance? No

7. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Implications

This report considers health and safety and wellbeing as part of the content and narrative.

8. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

9. Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

10. Duty to Collaborate Implications (Police and Crime Act 2017)

None.

11. Your Fire and Rescue Service Priorities

This report links with the Community Risk Management Plan 2025-28 strategic priorities below:

- Provide a safe, effective and resilient response to local and national emergencies.

- Focus our activities on reducing risk and vulnerability.
- Enhance the health, safety, and well-being of our people.
- Prioritise a people first mindset through ethical and professional leadership and management.
- Work with partners and communities to deliver our services.
- Use resources in an innovative, sustainable, and efficient manner to maximise value for money.
- Further develop a culture of excellence, equality, learning, and inclusion.

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Agenda item: 07

Spotlight On Reports

People & Culture Committee

Date:	23 January 2026
Submitted by:	Director of People & Culture
Purpose:	To provide members with an update on the work of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) team focusing on work around positive action and community outreach/engagement initiatives.
Recommendations:	That members note the content of the reports.
Summary:	The Spotlight On reports showcase work delivered by the DEI team and highlight the range and reach of work which is designed to delivery focused interventions to support positive action, community outreach and enable community engagement.

Local Government (Access to information) Act 1972

Exemption Category:	None
Contact Officer:	Ian Stone, Head of Organisational Development, Skills & Talent. Ian.Stone@westyorksfire.gov.uk
Background papers open to inspection:	None
Annexes:	Spotlight on reports - DEI & Positive Action and Community Outreach

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) team report their activities into the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board (DEIB). DEIB includes representatives from each of the colleague networks, senior officers and representation from this committee. The DEI Board oversees and contributes to the work of the DEI team and ask Members to note the significant range of successful initiatives and projects making impacts across West Yorkshire.

2. Information

- 2.1 The Spotlight On reports attached showcase work delivered by the DEI team. The spotlights highlight initiatives over the previous months and shares some of the DEI teams forward plans over the next cycle. These activities focus on two key strands:
- Positive Action and Community Outreach and Engagement activities.
 - White Ribbon Campaign and International Men's Day 2025

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The activities carried out in the development of the work described come from existing revenue budgets.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer has considered this report and is satisfied it is presented in compliance with the Authority's Constitution.

5. People and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 The DEI team delivers work to reach our communities where they are, showcase West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue as an employer of choice, and supports our commitment to an inclusive workforce, reflecting the diverse communities we serve.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 Are the recommendations within this report subject to Equality Impact Assessment as outlined in the EIA guidance? No

7. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Implications

- 7.1 There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications arising from this

8. Environmental Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

9. Risk Management Implications

9.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report

10. Duty to Collaborate Implications (Police and Crime Act 2017)

10.1 There are no duty to collaborate implications arising from this report

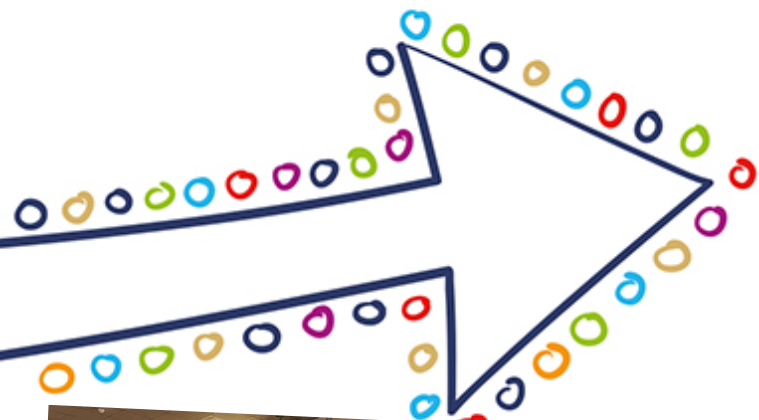
11. Your Fire and Rescue Service Priorities

11.1 This report links with the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-25 strategic priorities below:

- Achieve a more inclusive workforce, which reflects the diverse communities we serve.

12. Conclusions

12.1 The Spotlight On reports bring together some of the key activities delivered by the team demonstrate how the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team are delivering organisational objectives and providing innovative and meaningful initiatives that impact positively on the organisation, the workforce and the community



Spotlight on...

Positive Action & Community Engagement

October – December 2025



What was the need, how was it identified?

This quarter has seen a strong focus on positive action initiatives designed to prepare potential candidates for our wholetime recruitment, alongside a return of awareness and 'Have a Go' sessions for underrepresented groups. We have also seen significant engagement with Public Services students beginning courses across West Yorkshire and continue to support local colleges to visit our fire stations and gain insights into the breadth of our work.



What did we do?

Application Support Sessions

The PA team ran an online application support session for ethnically diverse candidates preparing for the application stage of wholetime recruitment. It was identified through data that ethnically diverse candidates are less likely to be successful at application. We continue to mitigate barriers to recruitment by ensuring applications are anonymised, with no identifying data (i.e. name, gender, etc.). The sessions focused on an in-depth exploration of the STAR method,

drafting and double-checking techniques when completing applications. We continue to evaluate and update sessions to ensure they are impactful and accessible for candidates.

Women-Only Fitness Development

In line with our current Wholetime Firefighter recruitment process, the PA team ran a 6 - week fitness development programme for women applying for the firefighter role. This programme has been a success and lots of positive feedback has been shared. This work continues to have a positive impact.

“

I appreciated the positive atmosphere and the camaraderie among both the instructors and the women attending.

”

Hosting sessions and utilising HQ facilities, such as the gym, enabled better access for attendees; people were given individualised support to develop their fitness week on week in readiness for the following weeks sessions.



We invited our newly qualified female firefighters to share their experiences so women engaged with sessions had a greater understanding of our expectations and required standards of fitness and the course.

Interview Support Session

The PA team ran online interview support workshops for our ethnically diverse candidates. Recruitment data shows ethnically diverse candidates are more likely to find the interview stage a barrier, due to several factors such as less likelihood they will know someone working for WYFRS who can provide advice.

“
They are a good insight for people unsure of what to expect & it also gives people the opportunity to find out more information on the job role & allows them to work on certain aspects they have identified that they struggle with.
”

The session focused on understanding what our behavioural-style interviewing approach is, the STAR method and supporting effective interview preparation techniques.

Sharing interview questions with all candidates ahead of the interview ensures candidates have opportunity to reflect on their experiences when responding to questions, enabling

people to consider the best situations or experiences to draw on in interview.

'Have a Go' Session

We held the first of our new sessions with support from Leeds Blue Watch on 06/12, focusing on inspiring people to actively engage with recruitment when it next opens and sharing a realistic job preview. We delivered an opportunity for candidates to engage with firefighters and ask questions about shift patterns, work, pension and responsibilities.

This positive action initiative is focussed on enabling ethnically diverse candidates and aims to improve the number and quality of applications for firefighter roles. We are planning more sessions throughout 2026 across the West Yorkshire.

Careers Talks

We have supported several careers events over the past quarter, particularly supporting links with local colleges and their Public Services students. Alongside we hosted workshops and talks for Kirklees College, Leeds City College and Bradford College, with mock interviews to support in the calendar over coming months.

We attended a Leeds Women's Employability Hub event to support Leeds Women's Aid alongside WM Ralph; we also supported Skills House at a Bradford careers event held at the Bradford Bulls stadium.

Fire Service Awards

Our work has been commended this quarter, including receiving the Leeds City Council Diversity Project of the Year award for our Killingbeck Summer Sessions. Mani, one of our PA Officers was also nominated for the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Positive Action award and at the Excellence in FRS's 'Most influential ethnic minority individual of the year' award.



What are we doing next?

Work Experience: Conversations are ongoing with District representatives as plans take shape to create a work experience programme for around 15 students starting in June 2026.

Wholetime Recruitment: The team continue to deliver significant support for Firefighter recruitment, including as panel members in interviews. Once we conclude the current the process, we begin connecting new recruits with buddies; we will also carry out a comprehensive impact analysis of initiatives and each stage of the recruitment process to gather data to inform our planning for future positive action initiatives.



Contact

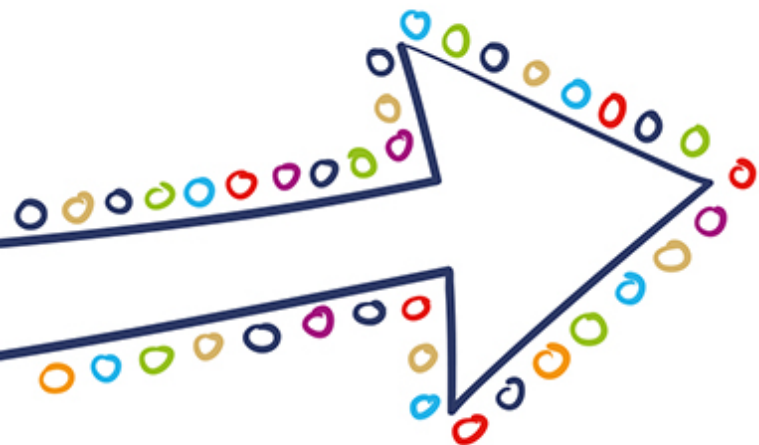


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Spotlight on...

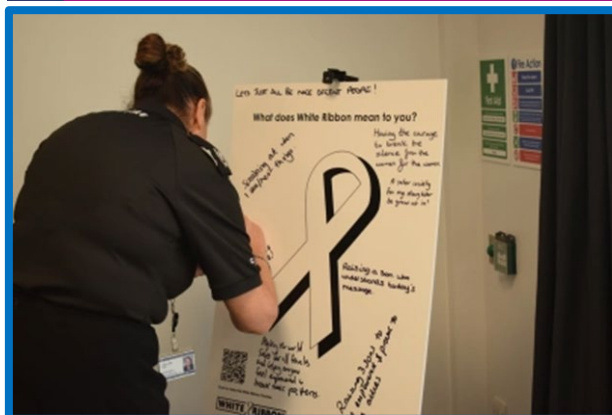


West Yorkshire
Fire & Rescue Service

Our White Ribbon Commitment and International Men's Day 2025



➡ What did we do?



WYFRS supports the White Ribbon Campaign, a global initiative to reduce violence towards women and girls (VAWG) through male role models highlighting the roles men and boys have in calling out harmful behaviours and raising awareness.

During the 'Lunch and Learn' on 25 November 2025, our White Ribbon Ambassadors shared their stories, and we heard from organisations working with women and girls: Get Away Girls and Behind Closed Doors who shared their

work to support and encourage women and girls to reach out and access services.

This year's theme is 'We Speak Up' and several of our WYFRS Ambassadors shared their personal stories and the work they do to speak up for women and girls.



In addition to the event WYFRS is supporting the campaign by committing to 16 days of action, sharing **why** the campaign is important across WYFRS and on our social media pages.

Event Highlights

Our White Ribbon event was opened by Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Dave Walton who gave a powerful speech on the dangers of violence by men.

Our White Ribbon lead, Station Manager Sophie Green shared our progress to date and outlined next steps. The event also included speeches from Head of OD, Skills and Talent, Ian Stone and Kirklees DC Dale Gardner who shared their experiences and why the White Ribbon Campaign matters to them

16 days of action

Members of Leeds White Watch, officers, and colleagues joined in with the Parkrun at Woodhouse Moor wearing T-shirts with the White Ribbon logo to show their support for two important campaigns: the White Ribbon Campaign and [Leeds City Council's Jog On initiative](#).



Colleagues joined in by wearing White Ribbon T-shirts whilst running, jogging and playing sport to highlight the campaign.



Our fire appliances also 'wore' the White Ribbon to highlight our commitment. We are proud to fly the White Ribbon flag at HQ to demonstrate our commitment.



This year's International Men's Day theme is "Supporting Men and Boys". Our event took place on 19 November. Colleagues from across WYFRS reflected on how we can better support men at every stage of life, particularly the influences of high-profile men on boys and men.

Session including Pilates and a panel session where men here at WYFRS shared what being a man means to them in the 21st Century, opening discussions about how we can all be people other men and boys look up to, particularly during adolescence, where identity and values are

still forming aligning nicely with our wider White Ribbon work.



We also provided a room for men to talk about their mental health, delivered by a Men in Need Together (MINT) volunteer which will be the first of many.



 **Diversity & Inclusion Team**

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Agenda item: 08

Supporting Good Attendance

People and Culture Committee

Date: 23 January 2026

Submitted by: Director of People and Culture

Purpose: To update Members with the progress of the Supporting Good Attendance Project

Recommendations: That Members note the content of the report

Summary: In the wake of a nationwide post-COVID surge in sickness absence, and following the recommendations of the Operational Staffing Project, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) launched the Supporting Good Attendance Project in July 2025 as a proactive measure to improve employee attendance and wellbeing. This report showcases how WYFRS's forward-thinking leadership identified a national issue relating to increased sickness levels and how the project is driving a culture change.

Local Government (Access to information) Act 1972

Exemption Category: None

Contact Officer: Steve Briddon, T/SM Supporting Good Attendance Project lead. Steven.Bridon@westyorkfire.gov.uk

Background papers open to inspection: None

Annexes: None

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In the wake of a nationwide post-COVID surge in sickness absence, and following the recommendations of the Operational Staffing Project, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) launched the Supporting Good Attendance Project in July 2025 as a proactive measure to improve employee attendance and wellbeing. Building on the operational staffing project's findings, the initiative has quickly established a foundation for change, engaging extensively with employees, reviewing policies and data, and implementing initial improvements, despite some unavoidable delays.
- 1.2 The project, strongly endorsed by WYFRS's Executive Leadership Team, aligns with the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and specifically the strategic priorities of:
- providing a safe, effective, and resilient response to local and national emergencies
 - Using resources in an innovative, sustainable and effective manner to maximise value for money, and
 - enhancing the health, safety and wellbeing of our people.
- 1.3 Early achievements include widespread crew engagement by carrying out station visits and conducting surveys, formation of a stakeholder working group, introduction of new guidance, business plan development and standardisation of absence categories in line with national best practices.
- 1.4 This report showcases how WYFRS's forward-thinking leadership identified a national issue relating to increased sickness levels and responded promptly by commissioning this project. It highlights key findings from the project's research (spanning data analysis, Employee consultations, and benchmarking with other fire services) and outlines recommendations for next steps. Ultimately, the Supporting Good Attendance Project is driving a culture change that will reduce avoidable absence, improve service delivery and productivity, achieve cost savings through reduced overtime/backfill, and enrich employee engagement and experience. The Committee's continued support and oversight will help sustain this momentum and ensure the benefits are realised over the coming year and beyond.

Post-COVID Increase

40%

Rise in WYFRS sickness absence since 2019
(reflecting national post-COVID surge)

Employee Engagement

329

Survey responses in 2025
(firefighters, staff, managers)

Long-Term Sickness

59%

Share of long-term sickness in Q2 2025
(vs 41% short-term)

Reimbursed leave cost

£170k+

Representative amount from Last
financial year

2. Information

2.1 National Context:

Sickness absence rates across the UK have risen significantly in the aftermath of COVID-19, creating a new, higher baseline across the public sector. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the overall workforce lost 2.6% of working hours to sickness in 2022, compared to 1.9% pre-pandemic, a roughly 35% increase nationally.

The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work 2025 report and ONS both report that the average UK employee took 9.4 days of sickness absence in 2025, up from 7.8 days in 2023. This trend highlights a sustained increase in absence levels post-pandemic.

It is also notable that there is a gender disparity nationally, with women reporting higher sickness absence rates than men. This is particularly relevant when considering operational roles and the representation of females within Fire and Rescue Services.

Recent Home Office figures show English fire services averaged 5.2% of work hours lost in 2023/24, more than double the national workforce average from data published by the home office. Mental health and burnout-related absences in emergency services have surged, compounding the impact of COVID itself. In short, the pandemic created a new, higher baseline of sickness absence across the public sector.

2.2 WYFRS Absence Trends:

WYFRS has not been immune to these pressures, in fact its sickness figures mirror the national pattern. By 2023, WYFRS's absence rate was approximately 40% higher than in 2019, essentially erasing previous gains in attendance. Drilling into the current financial year, during Q1 2025/26 (April–June 2025) WYFRS Wholetime firefighters lost 4.25% of total duty days to sickness (sector average of 4.86%). This placed WYFRS near the lower end of the fire sector in that quarter, indicating a relatively good position. However, by Q2 2025/26 (July–Sept 2025) the Wholetime absence rate had risen to 5.6%, roughly on par with the sector average of 5.7%. Enabling teams' sickness was 2.83% in Q1 and ticked up to 3.0% in Q2, remaining below the 3.3% sector average. While WYFRS's absence rates are still below many peers and wider public-sector comparators (e.g. NHS at 5.0%), the upward trend is a concern. Notably, analysis shows that long-term sickness

(extended absences over 28 days) makes up about 59% of all current sickness cases, versus 41% short-term, in WYFRS. This skew toward long-term absence is significant and above historical norms, indicating many Employees are dealing with serious or chronic health issues post-pandemic.

2.3 Operational Impact:

Elevated absence levels have direct consequences on service delivery and finances. When multiple crew members are off sick, WYFRS must rely on measures like pre-arranged detached duties (PADDs), temporarily assigning firefighters to different stations, and overtime shifts to keep fire appliances available. In the last reported quarter, WYFRS logged hundreds of PADD shifts and substantial overtime to cover essential crewing gaps. Despite these efforts, there were frequent breaches of minimum staffing levels, leading to short notice overtime or appliance derogation. This puts extra strain on on-duty teams and can impact emergency response times.

It is important to reassure that, even amid these operational pressures, WYFRS maintains robust risk-based planning assumptions. These ensure that emergency cover is prioritised and critical resources are always directed where the need is greatest. The Service's established procedures and dynamic risk assessment framework mean that, while staffing challenges can create pressures, public safety remains at the forefront of all deployment decisions. Actions taken to mitigate risk are carefully aligned with WYFRS's statutory responsibilities and are kept under continual review to adapt to changing circumstances.

These principles support the CRMP objective to provide a safe, effective and resilient response.

The human toll is also notable: backfilling duties often requires firefighters to work in different locations, adjusted travel times all contributing to fatigue and potentially further sickness in a vicious cycle. In addition to these operational pressures, there is a significant administrative burden placed on managers and support staff, who must respond quickly to breaches in staffing levels. This involves urgent rostering, redeploying employees, and managing overtime requests, creating additional work and stress for those coordinating the response, and making the task of maintaining safe and effective service delivery even more challenging.

2.4 Project Initiation:

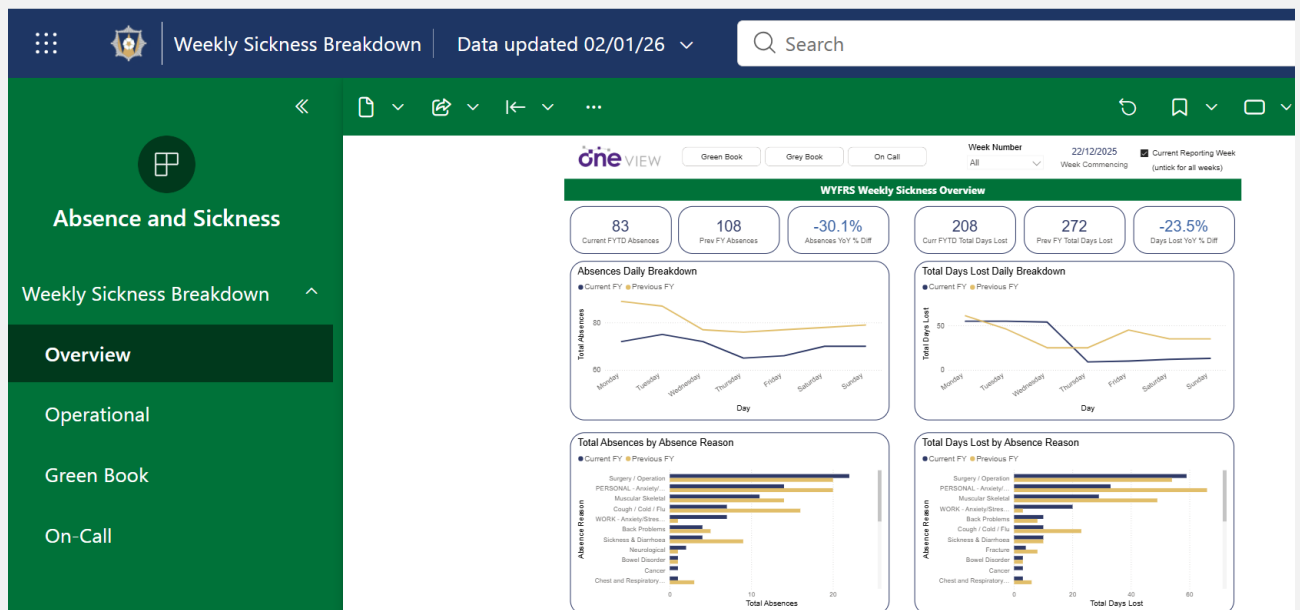
In response, WYFRS's Executive Leadership Team acted decisively in mid-2025. Acknowledging that the post-COVID absence surge was a strategic threat, and seeing similar trends emerging nationally, the Supporting Good Attendance Project was commissioned in July 2025. This initiative was chartered to transform absence management in the Service, with a mandate to address both the procedural and cultural root causes of sickness absence and to shift mindsets. The project is explicitly aligned with WYFRS's core priorities: Provide a safe, effective and resilient response to local and national emergencies; Use resources in an innovative,

sustainable, and efficient manner to maximise value for money; Enhance the health, safety, and wellbeing of our people (as set out in the CRMP).

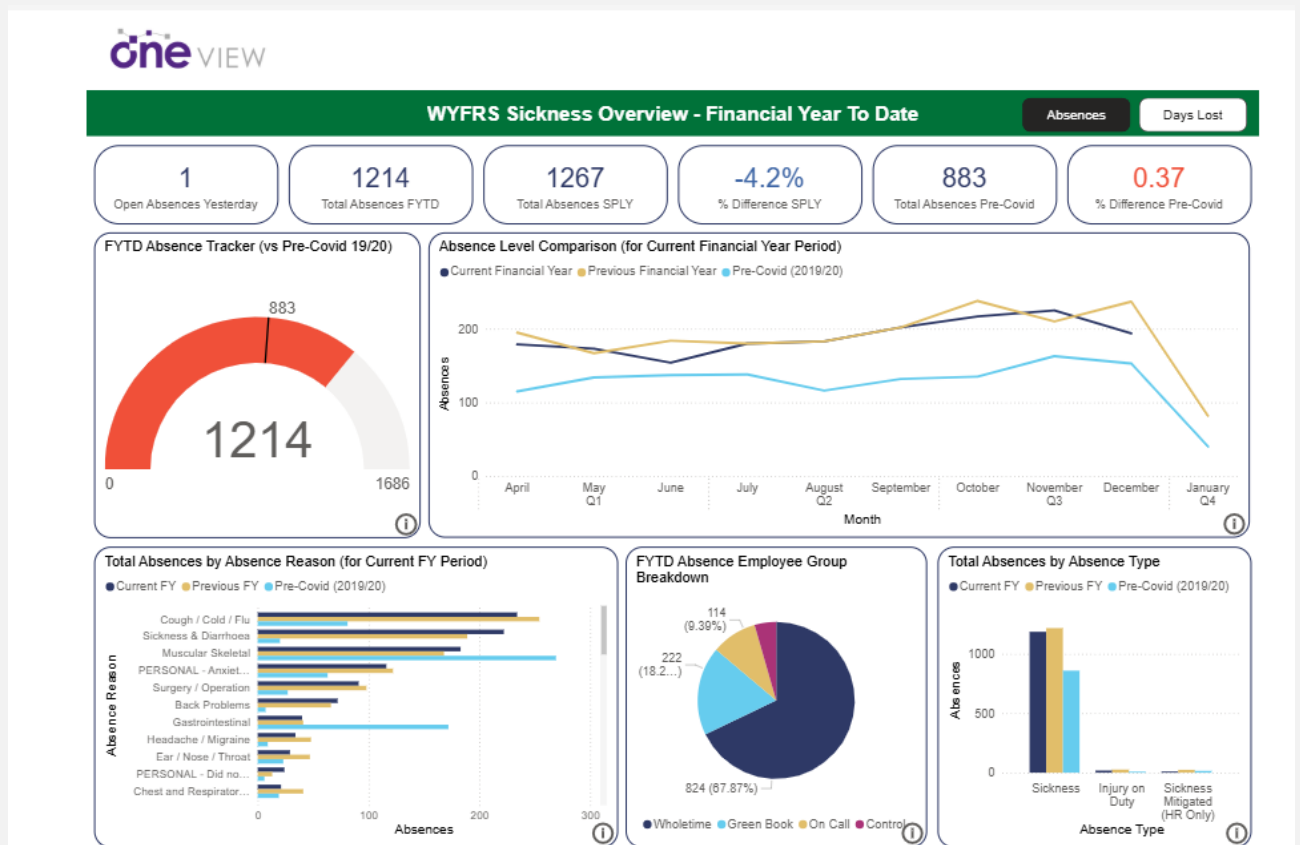
2.5 First Phase Progress:

From late July to October 2025 (approximately 14 weeks), the project concentrated on evidence gathering, research, diagnostics, and laying groundwork for change. Despite some delays this first phase achieved significant milestones:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The project lead conducted in-person visits to fire stations and held virtual meetings, reaching operational crews across all duty systems, as well as enabling teams. This ensured inclusive input from a wide cross-section of the Service. At the same time, key departments like HR, Training, Occupational Health, and representative bodies (Trade Unions) were engaged to form a broad stakeholder group guiding the effort.
- **Surveys and Feedback:** Two employee surveys were launched to capture candid feedback. The Sickness Culture & Support Survey, sent to approximately 1400 employees, received 232 responses in August, representing around 17%. The targeted Managers' survey (Crew and Watch Managers), issued to about 380 people, received 97 responses, equating to a response rate of roughly 26%. The high participation in both surveys provided a wealth of information on attitudes and experiences around attendance.
- **Policy and Data Review:** Every policy, process, and data source related to sickness absence is being mapped and reviewed. A comprehensive "as-is" process map was created with the help of a Business Analyst, highlighting bottlenecks and inconsistencies in how absences are reported and managed. Simultaneously, current sickness coding was audited and a proposal developed to recategorise absence reasons to standardise with NHS, ONS and NFCC norms. This would improve data accuracy and enable meaningful benchmarking externally.
- **Initial Reforms:** Even in this diagnostic phase, some quick-win improvements were initiated. Notably, WYFRS has developed new Menopause and Menstrual Health guidance for employees, recognising these as significant factors that had lacked formal support, this work is currently sat with the MAGNET working group for discussion prior to publishing. Also, a business case to tighten the Reimbursed Leave policy (to curb potential misuse of converting annual leave to sick leave, enabling leave to be readded to the leave entitlement and re: taken at a later date) was drafted and put forward. Additionally, the project team worked with the Data & Digital team (DDaT) to start building an absence dashboard in the OneView system, aiming to give managers real-time insight into sickness levels and trends. Please see below visuals of the reporting dashboards:



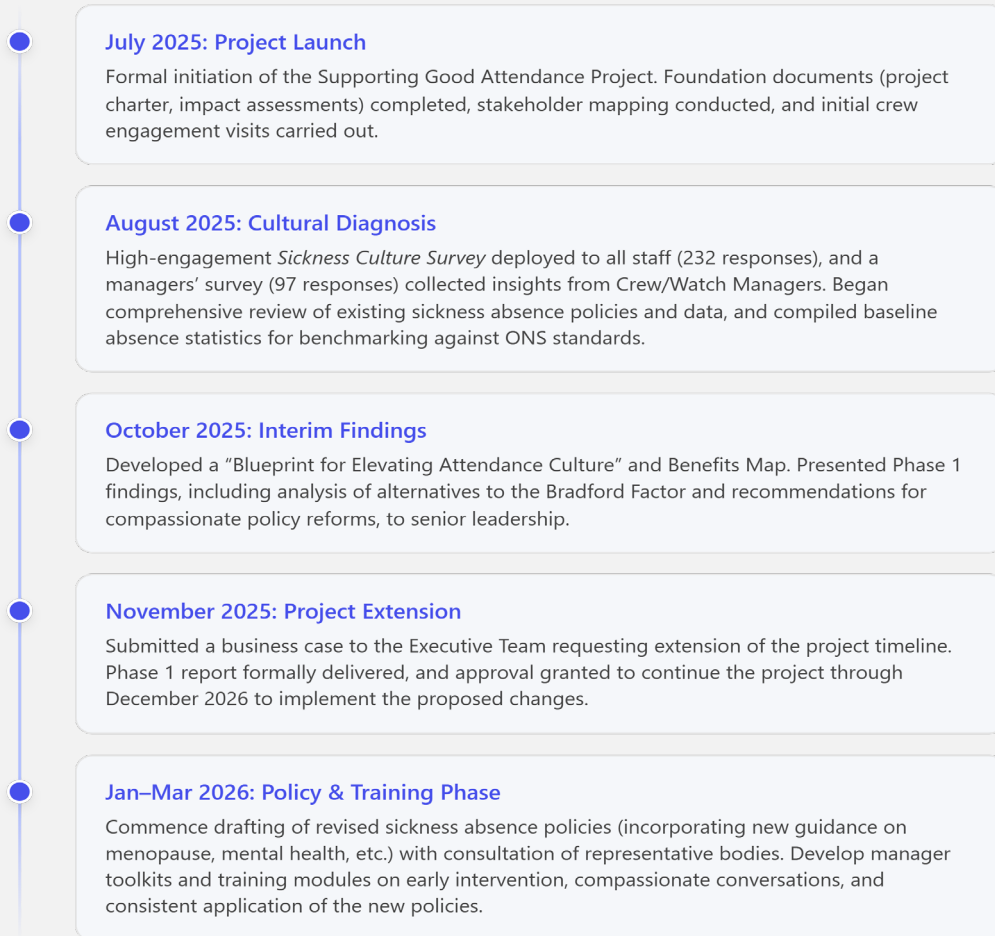
Weekly Sickness Breakdown report



FYTD WYFRS Sickness Overview

- 2.6 By October 2025, the project produced a Phase 1 Key Findings Report and a strategic blueprint for “elevating attendance culture” at WYFRS. In November 2025, these findings were presented to the Executive Leadership Team alongside a request to extend the project timeline so that the recommended solutions could be fully implemented. The Executive Leadership Team agreed, and the initiative was formally extended through December 2026. This extension reflects the commitment

to seeing the cultural and procedural changes through to full effect, rather than treating it as a short-term analysis effort. The project's work now continues with detailed design and implementation phases into 2026, with regular oversight planned via the People and Culture Committee and Change Management Board.



(Phases beyond March 2026 will include rolling out the new policies/service-wide training, monitoring impact mid-2026, and a final review in late 2026 to ensure sustainable improvements.)

3. Key Findings

- 3.1 The first phase of the Supporting Good Attendance Project produced a thorough, evidence-based picture of WYFRS's attendance challenges and their causes. It drew on extensive employee engagement, detailed data analysis, and benchmarking against other services. The following were the key findings:

Engagement and Research Undertaken

- 3.2 From the outset, the project emphasised gathering input from those most affected by sickness absence policies, the workforce. The engagement efforts were wide-ranging and inclusive:

- **Employee Consultations:** Project lead visited stations across all districts, speaking with firefighters and control room employees face-to-face, and held Teams meetings to include on-call and Enabling teams who could not attend in person. This ensured firefighters on various duty systems (Wholetime, Day-crewed, 2-2-4 shift system, On-Call) all had a chance to voice their perspectives. Enabling teams and Fire Control employees were also consulted, as were the employee networks and the Fire Brigades Union and UNISON representatives. The engagement was both extensive and proactive, fostering a sense of collaboration around the project's goals.
- **Surveys:** To capture quantitative and broad qualitative feedback, two major surveys were conducted. The first was a Sickness Absence Culture Survey sent to all employees in August 2025, asking about their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding sickness and attendance. It received 232 responses in just two weeks – a very strong participation level for an internal survey. The second survey targeted Operational Managers (Crew and Watch Managers), those who directly manage attendance on stations. This received 97 responses. The survey data underwent detailed thematic analysis, and the insights (summarised below) were shared with senior leadership to shape the project's focus areas.
- **Stakeholder Working Group:** To maintain momentum and continue getting diverse input, a dedicated stakeholder group was established comprising representatives from HR, H&S, Occupational Health Unit (OHU), district management, and employee representatives. This group meets regularly to review progress, provide feedback on proposals, and ensure ongoing buy-in.

3.3 Between June and the end of 2025, several stakeholder-focused meetings were arranged and delivered as part of the Sickness and Absence Project. These included the main stakeholder meeting held in early September, along with supporting activities such as distributing thematic analysis, sending follow-up communications, and arranging future engagement sessions. Collectively, these actions demonstrate that structured and ongoing stakeholder engagement has taken place throughout the second half of 2025.

- **External Research and Benchmarking:** The project did not work in isolation; it leveraged national data and best practices to contextualise WYFRS's situation. For example, absence data was benchmarked against Office for National Statistics (ONS) workforce averages and National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) metrics to confirm how WYFRS compares. The team consulted guidance and reports from the NFCC, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the NHS, and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to gather insights on absence causes and effective interventions. In essence, the project tapped into the collective knowledge emerging nationwide post-COVID, including trends like increased mental health sick leave and strategies that other services are trying, to inform WYFRS's

approach. Liaison with other Fire & Rescue Services (through informal contacts and NFCC forums) indicated that many are facing similar challenges, reinforcing that WYFRS's initiative is timely and necessary.

Sickness Absence Landscape at WYFRS

3.4 The data analysis and benchmarking carried out by the project yielded a clear picture of when, where, and why absences are happening in WYFRS:

- **Elevated Absence Levels:** Overall, WYFRS's sickness absence is higher than pre-pandemic norms and above average in certain areas. The analysis highlighted particularly high absence rates in some operational groups, notably among Day-Crewed firefighters and those on the 2-2-4 rota system. These patterns suggest that certain working arrangements (e.g., the demands of 24-hour shifts in 2-2-4) might be linked to higher sickness. There are persistent challenges in managing both short-term and long-term absences, as confirmed by benchmarking against national standards. The project confirmed that, consistent with national trends, WYFRS's sickness levels in 2023/24 were roughly 40% higher than in 2018/19 (pre-COVID), a significant jump reflecting the "new normal" of higher illness and absence post-pandemic.
- **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Absence:** A striking finding was the dominance of long-term sickness in WYFRS's absence figures. In Q2 2025, approximately 59% of all sickness cases were classified as long-term (over 28 days), versus 41% short-term. This imbalance means that a majority of the duty days lost are due to a relatively small number of individuals who are off for extended periods (due to serious injury, illness, or mental health recovery). Long-term cases have a big impact on workforce availability, and the high percentage signals a need for stronger focus on helping colleagues return from long-term sick in a timely and supported way. Short-term absences (under 7 days, often minor illnesses) are still happening frequently, but they account for a smaller share of total lost time. The Bradford Factor analysis (discussed later) and manager feedback also indicated that repeat short-term absences in some cases are a concern, albeit secondary in impact to the long-term cases.
- **Comparative Position:** When compared to other Fire and Rescue Services, WYFRS currently sits around the middle of the pack, although absence rates are trending upward. In Q1 2025/26, Wholtime employees recorded an average of 4.25 working days lost per person, slightly better than the sector average of 4.86 days. On-call absence was exceptionally low, with only 0.45 shifts lost per firefighter compared to a sector average of 3.40, making WYFRS the best performer nationally in this category. Enabling teams also performed well, averaging 2.8 days lost against a sector average of 3.3. This represented a strong start to the year. By Q2 2025/26, however, absence increased across all groups. Wholtime employees rose to 5.6 days lost, roughly equal to the sector average of 5.7. On-call absence climbed to 2.79

shifts per firefighter, though still significantly better than the sector average of 4.16, reflecting continued strong attendance despite the increase. Enabling teams also saw a slight rise to 3.0 days lost but remained below the sector benchmark.

- 3.5 Overall, WYFRS remains in a relatively positive position within the fire sector—not among the worst performers and, in some areas such as On-call, among the best. Absence rates also compare favourably to other public services, with NHS England averaging 5.0 days lost in 2024. However, the upward trend through 2025 is a concern. Without intervention, WYFRS risks slipping above sector averages. The data makes clear that there is no room for complacency; continued focus is needed to reverse the trend and maintain WYFRS's favourable position.
- **Operational & Financial Effects:** Analysis of 2025 data shows that high sickness absence has had direct and measurable operational consequences. WYFRS has incurred hundreds of PADD (detached duty) movements in recent reporting periods to keep appliances on the run, alongside significant overtime usage. The financial impact is substantial: overtime expenditure in the last financial year totalled £1.4 million, and reimbursed leave costs exceeded £170,000.
- 3.6 Operationally, sickness continues to be a major driver of crewing degradation, contributing to pump derogations and lastminute resource shuffling to maintain minimum crew levels. This pressure is amplified by the current sickness profile, where 59% of absence is long term.
- 3.7 This quantifiable picture, high long-term sickness, heavy reliance on PADDs, and rising financial costs, highlights why improving attendance is critical. Even modest reductions in long-term sickness would directly reduce the requirement for detached duties and overtime, stabilising appliance availability and lowering cost pressures.

Policy and Process Insights

- 3.8 A core part of the project's first phase was diagnosing issues in WYFRS's policies, procedures, and systems related to attendance. The review, which included comparing current practice to best-practice guidelines, found several areas needing improvement:
- **Absence Recording and Coding:** Standardised the way sickness absences are categorised across WYFRS to match national standards, making data clearer and more useful.
 - **Modified Duties & Return-to-Work:** Introduced a structured process to support employees returning to work on lighter duties, ensuring fair opportunities and earlier reintegration.

- **Bradford Factor & Attendance Triggers:** Updated the approach to absence monitoring so it considers a broader range of absence patterns, not just the Bradford Factor score alone.
- **Reimbursed Leave Policy:** Tightened the rules around reclaiming annual leave lost to sickness, to prevent misuse and promote fairness.
- **Health and Wellbeing Guidance:** Added specific support for menopause, menstrual health, and mental health, encouraging open conversations and early intervention.
- **Data Systems and Reporting:** Unified all absence records into a single digital system to improve accuracy, reporting and strategic oversight.

Cultural and Employee Sentiment Findings

3.9 Beyond the numbers and policies, a significant component of the project's diagnosis was understanding the culture around attendance at WYFRS, how people feel about sickness absence, and the informal norms or attitudes that influence behaviour. The surveys and focus groups revealed several important themes:

- **Stigma and Emotions Around Absence:** Many employees, especially firefighters, expressed feelings of guilt, anxiety, or stigma when they take sick leave. There is a strong work ethic in the fire service, and people don't want to let their watch or team down. However, this can result in employees coming to work when unwell (presenteeism) or feeling mentally distressed about being off. For short-term absences, respondents reported worrying about accruing a high Bradford score or being judged by colleagues and managers. For absences due to mental health, some felt there is still a taboo; one comment was that it's "easier to say you have the flu than admit you're struggling mentally," due to fear of stigma. Fear of repercussions, like triggering a formal attendance review, also contributes to stress. These feelings can paradoxically worsen the situation (stress about being off can delay recovery or make someone return before they are ready).
- **Perceptions of Fairness and Misuse:** A nearly universal sentiment was a desire for fairness and consistency in how attendance issues are handled. Many employees shared frustrations about perceived misuse of sickness leave by a minority, for instance, suspicions that some individuals take advantage of lenient policies or "play the system" (e.g., timing absences to avoid certain duties or using the reimbursed leave policy to effectively extend holidays). Whether or not these perceptions are accurate, they can damage morale. Employees want to see that good attendance is recognised and that any abuse of the system is addressed, as this affects team trust. At the same time, there was criticism that management's application of policy can be inconsistent, some people "get away with" patterns that others would be pulled up for. This inconsistency undermines confidence in the system's fairness.

- **Variable Management Support:** How an employee experiences sickness absence often hinges on their line manager. The project heard a range of experiences: positive examples where managers kept in touch during someone's illness, showed empathy, and helped them reintegrate smoothly (these employees felt valued and were often eager to return). On the other hand, negative examples where there was little to no contact, or the only communication was sending policy letters, left employees feeling isolated or even punished. Some operational managers admitted they were unsure how best to support someone on long-term sick or were "too busy" to check in, pointing to a skills gap. Overall, employees appreciate compassionate, human-centric management of absence, and the inconsistency in approaches (by different managers or different departments) was noted as a problem itself. This emphasises the need for standard manager training and expectations (addressed in recommendations).
- **Openness to Change:** Encouragingly, despite the issues raised, the sentiment among the workforce is largely supportive of making changes to improve attendance culture. People indicated that if changes are transparent, evidence-based, and applied evenly, they would welcome them. For example, many agreed that the Bradford Factor in its current form is not ideal and are open to new methods, as long as they don't feel punitive. There is also an appetite for more recognition of good attendance, employees want a positive attendance culture, not one that only pays attention when things go wrong. This feedback gives the project a mandate to proceed confidently with reforms, knowing that the average employee will embrace a system seen as fair and supportive.

Root Causes Summary

3.10 By synthesising all the above (data, policies, and sentiment), the project identified several root causes behind WYFRS's attendance issues:

- **Reactive Processes:** The Service has been in a reactive mode e.g., finding out about absences late and scrambling to cover them, rather than proactive (preventing absence or planning contingencies). This reactive footing creates stress and errors.
- **Policy Complexity/Ambiguity:** Some policies (like the various categories of leave, or differing rules for different employee groups) are overly complex or not well understood, leading to inconsistent application and opportunities for misunderstanding or misuse.
- **Cultural Barriers:** There's a cultural hesitancy to talk openly about certain health issues (mental health, menopause, etc.), and a "cultural script" in the fire service that values toughness and might inadvertently discourage taking time off when genuinely needed. This can delay people seeking help and then result in longer absences later.

- **Work Environment Challenges:** The nature of firefighting and emergency response, 11 or 13 hour shifts, physical demands, exposure to trauma, lack of flexible work options, can exacerbate health problems or make it harder for someone to continue working with a minor ailment. For example, an office worker might work from home with a bad back, but a firefighter cannot; without alternatives, they go off sick. The requirement for operational staff to be 100% fit, contributes to absence rates.
- **Data and Systems Gaps:** Fragmented data and lack of prompt reporting tools have made it difficult to spot trends or intervene early (e.g., noticing that one station has an emerging pattern, or that an individual is nearing a concerning threshold). This delayed insight means problems can fester.

3.11 Each of these root causes is addressed by the project's planned interventions. In essence, the findings reinforced that improving attendance isn't just about a policy tweak or two; it requires a multi-faceted approach touching people, process, and culture.

4. Recommendations and Next Steps

4.1 Armed with the above findings, the Supporting Good Attendance Project has formulated a comprehensive action plan. The following recommendations are put forward for consideration of and approval by the Supporting Good Attendance Working Group, with many already in motion. These steps aim to showcase WYFRS's commitment to its people by fostering a healthier attendance culture while also ensuring operational reliability and financial prudence.

Revise and Implement Attendance Policies (Compassionate & Consistent)

4.2 The project recommends a series of policy updates that create a clearer, more supportive and modern framework for managing attendance. These changes shift the focus from punitive triggers to a more balanced and contextual approach. Key developments include introducing holistic attendance triggers, formalising the modified duties and return-to-work pathway, tightening reimbursed leave rules, and adopting new menopause and wellbeing guidance. Policies will also be rewritten using plain language and consistent absence categories so managers and employees understand the processes that apply. Collectively, these updates establish a fair, compassionate and consistent foundation for attendance management across WYFRS.

Empower and Train Managers for Early Intervention

4.3 To ensure managers can confidently and consistently apply the updated attendance approach, the project proposes enhanced mandatory training from Q1 2026. The programme will focus on early identification of attendance issues, use of

compassionate and supportive conversations, correct application of updated policies, and legal and welfare considerations such as confidentiality and reasonable adjustments. Practical tools including checklists and templates will be introduced to standardise practice. Strengthening management capability in this way will promote early intervention, reduce inconsistency and support employees more effectively.

Invest in Further Targeted Wellbeing and Health Interventions

- 4.4 Reducing absence sustainably requires targeted action on the underlying health factors that drive time off. The project recommends further strengthening mental health support, expanding musculoskeletal and physical health initiatives, embedding menopause and menstrual health guidance into day-to-day practice, and offering flexible working options where appropriate. These actions support early intervention, promote recovery, and help employees remain engaged in meaningful work. A more robust wellbeing offer will contribute directly to reducing long-term absence and improving workforce resilience.

Foster an Open and Supportive Attendance Culture

- 4.5 Cultural change is essential to embedding improvements in attendance. The project recommends a culture that values attendance while supporting individuals when unwell. This includes leaders modelling positive behaviours, celebrating improvements and team resilience, and encouraging open dialogue through feedback channels and staff engagement. Clear expectations around respectful attitudes to sickness, together with team-based resilience practices, will help shape a culture that balances personal wellbeing with collective responsibility. A supportive culture reduces both presenteeism and inappropriate absenteeism while improving morale and trust.

Utilise Data and Technology for Proactive Management

- 4.6 The Service now has significantly improved data tools that should be fully embedded into routine management practice. Rollout of the OneView dashboard will provide real-time insight into attendance trends, enable managers to spot emerging issues early and strengthen decision-making. Regular reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and Committee will enhance accountability and track progress against agreed targets. Standardising data coding, retiring legacy systems and maintaining high data quality will ensure attendance information is accurate, consistent and actionable. This will support a more proactive, evidence-based approach to attendance management.

Continue Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing (Internal & External)

- 4.7 Sustained improvement will require ongoing collaboration across departments and with external partners. Maintaining a cross-department steering group, continuing engagement with Representative Bodies and stakeholders, and participating in

NFCC and regional networks will ensure the Service remains aligned to best practice. A commitment to continuous improvement, including a formal review in early 2027, will allow WYFRS to evaluate progress, address emerging challenges and refine approaches over time. Ongoing collaboration and learning will ensure attendance management remains responsive, credible and sector leading.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Delivering these recommendations will necessitate appropriate investment, particularly for developing updated policies, implementing comprehensive training, enhancing wellbeing provisions, and deploying advanced digital reporting systems. The project is funded from existing Service budgets, with the expectation that any upfront expenditure will be offset by long-term savings through reduced overtime, fewer reimbursed absences, increased productivity, and a more resilient workforce. Financial performance will be closely monitored and reported regularly to both the Senior Leadership Team and the People and Culture Committee to ensure continued value for money.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Monitoring Officer has considered this report and is satisfied it is presented in compliance with the Authority's Constitution.

7. People and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 The Supporting Good Attendance Project highlights that attendance and wellbeing are experienced differently across employee groups, requiring approaches that are fair, inclusive and consistent. National evidence shows higher sickness absence among women, with menopause and menstrual health contributing; WYFRS's new guidance strengthens support, reduces stigma and improves fairness, particularly for women in operational roles.
- 7.2 The project also reflects the differing demands across operational, oncall, control and enabling teams. Updated policies, clearer expectations and improved training will support compassionate and consistent management across all duty systems. Emphasis on early intervention, reasonable adjustments and structured return to work processes aligns with equality obligations and strengthens support for employees with longterm health needs.
- 7.3 Overall, the recommendations promote equity, reduce inconsistencies and support a culture that prioritises wellbeing, reinforcing WYFRS's wider diversity and inclusion commitments.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Are the recommendations within this report subject to Equality Impact Assessment as outlined in the EIA guidance?

Yes, but these will be completed periodically throughout the life cycle of the project

The EIA is available on request from the report author or from diversity.inclusion@westyorksfire.gov.uk

9. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Implications

- 9.1 The Supporting Good Attendance Project has clear implications for the health, safety and wellbeing of employees across the Service. High levels of long term sickness and inconsistent management approaches present risks to employee welfare, workplace safety, and overall organisational resilience. Strengthening early intervention processes, improving return-to-work pathways and embedding compassionate, consistent policies will help ensure employees receive timely support, reducing the likelihood of conditions worsening or becoming prolonged.

10. Environmental Implications

- 10.1 The Supporting Good Attendance Project is not primarily an environmental initiative, but it does have several indirect positive environmental implications. Improved employee attendance and reduced sickness related disruption can lead to more efficient workforce deployment, resulting in fewer detached duties (PADDs), reduced travel between stations, and lower fuel consumption. This contributes to modest fuel efficiency gains and associated CO₂ emission reductions by limiting unnecessary vehicle movements.

11. Risk Management Implications

- 11.1 Sickness absence continues to present a significant organisational risk to WYFRS, affecting operational resilience, workforce capacity and financial stability. High levels of long term absence, which account for the majority of duty days lost, increase the likelihood of appliance derogations, reliance on overtime, and greater pressure on core staffing arrangements.
- 11.2 The project's proposed actions, policy revisions, enhanced manager training, strengthened wellbeing provision and improved data tools directly mitigate these risks by promoting earlier intervention, better oversight and greater consistency in managing attendance. Embedding the OneView dashboard and standardised absence coding will improve organisational visibility of emerging trends and support timely decision-making.

12. Duty to Collaborate Implications (Police and Crime Act 2017)

12.1 During the research phase of the Supporting Good Attendance Project, direct engagement was carried out with several fire and rescue services and policing partners to ensure our work was informed by wider sector experience and best practice. Discussions were held with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, and West Yorkshire Police. These conversations provided invaluable insights into national trends, shared challenges, and approaches being taken elsewhere to address sickness absence and support workforce wellbeing. The learning gained from these engagements has strengthened the evidence base for our recommendations and reaffirmed that WYFRS is aligned with sector-wide developments.

13. Your Fire and Rescue Service Priorities

13.1 This report links with the Community Risk Management Plan 2025-28 strategic priorities below:

- Provide a safe, effective and resilient response to local and national emergencies.
- Focus our activities on reducing risk and vulnerability.
- Enhance the health, safety, and well-being of our people.
- Prioritise a people first mindset through ethical and professional leadership and management
- Work with partners and communities to deliver our services.
- Use resources in an innovative, sustainable, and efficient manner to maximise value for money.
- Further develop a culture of excellence, equality, learning, and inclusion.

14. Conclusions

14.1 The Supporting Good Attendance Project demonstrates West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's commitment to its people and its service mission in equal measure. By tackling the complex issue of sickness absence head-on, WYFRS is proactively addressing a challenge that many organisations are facing in the post-pandemic world. The findings and recommendations in this report make it clear that improving attendance is not about pushing employees to come to work at all costs, it is about creating a supportive environment and robust systems so that employees can be healthy, present, and productive to the greatest extent possible. In doing so, WYFRS will enhance its operational resilience, reduce unnecessary costs, and improve the work experience of its employees.

14.2 The project has already laid a strong foundation: it engaged hundreds of employees in honest dialogue, benchmarked performance and identified gaps, and initiated concrete changes like new data tools and policy drafts. This has all been accomplished with remarkable speed and thoroughness, reflecting great credit on the project team and the many contributors across the Service. It also reflects foresight from WYFRS's leadership, recognising the national rise in absences early and acting

swiftly to mitigate it, which positions WYFRS ahead of the curve relative to some peers.

14.3 By implementing the recommendations in this report, WYFRS aims to achieve a measurable reduction in sickness absence over the next 12–18 months (targeting 10% improvement), bringing it well below sector averages, and to realise associated benefits such as improved appliance availability and financial savings that can be redirected to frontline services. Just as importantly, success will mean a cultural shift: a workplace where employees feel supported when they face health challenges and are motivated to maintain good attendance because they know it's valued and everyone is doing their part. The ultimate vision is a high-engagement, high-wellbeing culture, one where conversations about health and attendance are constructive and without fear, where policies are trusted and fair, and where data-driven management goes hand in hand with empathy and understanding.

14.4 This vision directly aligns with WYFRS's organisational priorities of keeping our communities safe through a reliable emergency response, taking care of our employee's wellbeing, and using resources wisely. By maximising attendance, we maximise the effectiveness of our greatest asset, our people, and thus our ability to serve the public. Fewer absences mean more consistent crew levels, less pressure to hold over or mobilise reserves, and ultimately, a stronger fire and rescue service for West Yorkshire.

14.5 Members of the People and Culture Committee are invited to:

- Note the progress and insights detailed in this report, which illustrate both the challenges and the positive steps taken to date.
- Endorse the ongoing implementation of the Supporting Good Attendance Project's action plan, including the policy changes and initiatives outlined in the recommendations section.
- Support the cultural change by championing the importance of employee wellbeing and good attendance in your scrutiny and advocacy roles. This might include seeking updates on key metrics in future meetings and celebrating the project's successes publicly.
- Acknowledge the dedication of WYFRS employees and managers who have contributed to the project, their engagement is driving this forward-thinking work, showcasing WYFRS as a service that invests in its people for the betterment of all.

14.6 By working together on this important initiative, WYFRS and the Committee can ensure that the Service not only navigates the post-COVID sickness absence challenge but emerges as a national leader in fostering a healthy workplace culture and resilient workforce. This will ultimately translate into better service for the communities of West Yorkshire and a positive, sustainable work environment for our

employees. The achievements and momentum so far are evidence that WYFRS is well on its way to “supporting good attendance” in every sense, to the benefit of our people, our Service, and the public we proudly serve.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE YORKSHIRE & HUMBER EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION HELD VIRTUALLY ON TUESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2025

Present:

Metropolitan Districts

Cllr Silvia Dacre	Calderdale MBC
Cllr Carole Pattison	Kirklees Council
Cllr Robert Frost	Barnsley MBC
Cllr Debra Coupar	Leeds CC
Cllr Simon Ball	Rotherham MBC

Unitary Councils

Cllr Katie Lomas	York CC
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In Attendance

Rebecca Hardwick	Doncaster CC
Jackie Addison	Calderdale MBC
John Ward	Wakefield MDC
Laura Piercy	East Riding
Michael Potter	Barnsley MBC
Amy Leech	Rotherham MBC
Jayne Healey	Kirklees Council
Claire Matson	Leeds
Emma Lawer	Bradford
Jane English	Sheffield CC
Jenny Sharp	WYCA
Sophie Draper	York
Julie Brookes	YHEA

Employers Secretary

Martin Williams (YHEA),

1. Introductions and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of
Cllr Cliff Lunn - North Yorkshire Council

2. Minutes and Matters Arising from Meeting held on 10th June 2025

Minutes were agreed. No matters arising were reported.

3. Audit Report 2024/25

Audit report was agreed.

4. Membership Fees Report

Membership fees have not increased in the region since 2016. In 2023/24 a balance budget was delivered due to consultancy work and the previous Regional Employers Director's reduction in hours.

In 2024/25 the consultancy income was not available.

This year 2025/26 will be challenging again. Consultancy fees will be brought into the organisation, but a balanced budget will not be achieved. Moving forward the organisation is not self funding.

Across the country all Regional Employers Association are experiencing the same issue, it is not unique to Yorkshire and Humber.

A briefing note circulated prior to the meeting is asking members to agree a 10% increase in subscriptions for 2026/27. Martin will also undertake a review of the funding in 2026.

Cllr Coupar asked if a 5% increase could be applied as Councils were all strapped for cash, so any increase is a big jump.

Martin explained that he is trying to bring other organisations in the region on board and offer consultancy options to bring in more funding.

Cllr Dacre, Deputy Chair said she understood the concern's, but increases should have happened previously.

Cllr Coupar agreed that she would be willing to agree with the majority after listening to the reasons behind the increase.

Members agreed to the 10% increase for 2026/27.

5. Update – Equal Pay

If Councils and Members are struggling with Equal Pay issues the LGA are available to help. A number of resources are available for Elected Members. This is causing significant issues across all regions.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/equal-pay-proforma-elected-members>

6. Regional Joint Council Agenda Items

A new Chair and Deputy will need to be appointed. The position of Chair Will rotate to the Trade Unions for 25/26. If they decline the post Cllr Cliff Lunn has agreed to take on the role.

Neelam Bhambra-Hilton is the new Unison regional representative for Local Government.

GMB has also announced Peter Davies as their representative. Peter has asked for Domiciliary Care and the Fair Pay Agreement to be placed on the agenda.

Consultation on the Fair Pay Agreement is in ongoing. LGA are expecting 100,000 employees to transfer out of NJC Local Government Services if the agreement includes Local Government.

7. Meeting Arrangements for 2026

Dates for future meetings are 20th January 2026. 9th June 2026 and 17th November 2026 all to be held virtually and commencing at 10.00am.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

Regional Pay Consultation will take place on Tuesday 13th January at 9.30am.

9. Close of meeting