Health & Safety Strategy

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Leading the way to a healthier and safer workforce

2023 - 2027

Foreword

The biggest asset available to our fire and rescue service is the people who work for us. Their dedication and skill, and the respect they command from our communities makes them a crucial part of the public safety system.

Whilst it is imperative that our staff return to their families safe and well physically, it is also vital that they go home mentally fit and well. The biggest concern, following the pandemic, is mental ill health. The HSE's Senior Psychologist Peter Kelley has identified that "*the pandemic has left a legacy of mental ill health which will be prevalent for the next decade*". To protect staff against mental ill health, the Service has implemented a robust support network that staff can access, including a cohort of Mental Health Champions who will listen to those affected and sign post them to the most appropriate source of help.

It is recognised that a positive health and safety culture and effective health and safety performance stems from leaders and managers consistently promoting and visibly role modelling positive health and safety behaviours. This in turn, brings their staff along with them who then will also display the appropriate behaviours. The challenge is how we ensure that this is known, understood and becomes embedded in everyone's thinking and in all of our actions.

Leaders and managers are committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees and the communities we serve. By working together, we can build on the achievements made in safety; we can seize the opportunity to improve both physical and mental health and wellbeing, which will result in keeping employees and the communities safe, healthy, and well; reduce sickness absence, improve productivity, and keep business costs down.

This health and safety strategy sets out the strategic direction for the next four years and focusses on how positive leadership is key in improving health, safety, and physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace.

Jason Thelwell
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive of
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire
Authority

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the strategic objectives for the next four years and focusses on how leadership is key in setting out the direction to improve health, safety, and physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace.
It sits alongside the Well-being Strategy, dovetails into the People Strategy, and aligns with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority's Public Safety Plan.

Looking back over the past four years, the successful implementation of the previous Health and Safety strategy has seen improvements across the 5 key areas:

- **Working together:** evidenced through the COVID-19 pandemic where all staff came together in working safely to reduce the risk of transmission resulting in reduced cases, 8 successful Health and Safety Executive (HSE) COVID-19 spot inspections and ensuring we could continue to deliver our statutory duty and assist our partner agencies.

- **Drive continuous improvement in health, safety, and wellbeing:** Anticipate and solve new health and safety challenges – this again was evidenced through the response to the pandemic and the implementation of a resource management system that monitors the hours worked and rest taken by staff for legal compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998.

- **Build an even better health and safety culture:** Raise awareness of and promote the benefits of an improved culture – this was evidenced through the second Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMI) report where the Service was praised for its positive health and safety culture as confirmed by their observations and interviews with staff.

- **Effectively manage risk:** Simplify, wherever possible, risk management to ensure safe people and processes – evidenced through the provision of an electronic risk assessment database which is simple to use along with the requirement for risk assessments to be carried out for *on and off fire station drills and exercises* a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) requirement following a firefighter fatality during water rescue training in Mid and West Wales.

- **Engaging together:** This is evidenced through a continued reduction in accident statistics and equipment and vehicle damage. The graph published at the quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meetings identifies a steady downward trend which could not be achieved without engagement by all staff.

Introduction

With the introduction of the Government's White paper of reform for the Fire and Rescue Service the Home Secretary states "*Now the government must take action to enable fire and rescue services to perform and fulfil their core functions of prevention, protection, response, and resilience effectively in a way that responds to the local needs, the changing risks and challenges faced, and that enables collaboration with other emergency services on a range of public safety challenges. This white paper sets out this government's vision for fire reform*". The Government's vision of the future of the fire and rescue service is as follows:

"*We want to see services providing excellence in their core prevention, protection, response, and resilience functions, responding to local needs in line with national expectations and guidance. Services will be helped to make the best use of the resources available to them, with the ability to come together quickly and respond safely to local and national emergencies, based on good data and evidence. Services need to be more able to adapt to changing threats and risks, working flexibly with other local partners.*

Chief fire officers will be skilled leaders and managers, with clear responsibility to run and manage their services effectively and efficiently, in order to meet their local risk. Strong political, executive oversight will ensure services are properly accountable to the communities they serve and run in the public interest.

Twenty-first century fire and rescue services will embrace an ethical culture that attracts and retains talented people, values diversity and reflects the communities they serve. Their employees will be well supported and trained to do their jobs. At the same time, services will embrace learning, use data and evidence to inform their decision-making, and share best practice and innovation.

Employment arrangements across the sector need to be modernised. They need to be more transparent and should recognise staff for their skills and competence and not just for time served. The interests of all parties will be fairly represented during discussions on pay, terms and conditions and other workplace matters".

This will no doubt bring about a further period of change and the Service is committed to striving for excellence and delivering its priorities in line with this reform agenda and its 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan.

It is clear that, as a result of the pandemic, mental ill health is on the increase. Peter Kelley HSE Senior Psychologist has gone on record to say that the pandemic has left a legacy of mental ill health which will be prevalent for the next decade. This will present challenges for both employers and employees.

Challenges for the Service moving forwards are:

- Recruitment of firefighters and Support staff in a national climate where there are "more jobs available than people to fill them" and difficulty in attracting new and high performing staff at the remuneration rate available
- Ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of staff as a result of living through the pandemic and the exponential rise in the cost of living which may result in financial hardship for staff.
- The requirement for staff to "do more with less" on an ongoing basis, potentially resulting in "burn out" and compromising their safety and affecting their wellbeing.

Whilst these challenges will prove difficult the Service continues to have a health and safety record to be proud of. The bedrock for this is a robust safety management system which is regularly monitored and audited; simple, effective, and standardised risk management; the training of staff and a positive behavioural safety culture.

Positive health and safety performance is, without exception, every member of staffs' responsibility and this is reinforced to staff via an e-learning training package "Employee Responsibilities under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974" completed on an annual basis.

Improving health and safety in the workplace starts at the highest level within the Service. Leaders are required to model the desired behaviours and lead by example. This in turn will cascade down throughout the Service with all staff following the example set thus improving health and safety performance.

Our Vision

Our vision is to "*make Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest areas in England in which to live work and travel*".

Robust health and safety processes are the golden thread that runs through all Service activities ensuring employees carry out those activities in a safe and systematic way, protecting themselves and those affected by their activities, thus helping to achieve our vision.

Mission statement

Leading the way to a healthier and safer workforce.

The five strategic themes

- **Positive and effective leadership:** leaders and managers to promote and visibly role model positive health and safety behaviours, bringing with them their staff thus improving health and safety performance and culture.

- **Drive continuous improvement in health and safety performance:** Anticipate and solve new health and safety challenges as part of "business as usual".

- **Lead the way in reducing work related ill health, with a specific focus on mental health and stress:** Promote the importance of good physical and mental health and identify ways to improve both.

- **Lead the way in protecting the environment:** Educate operational personnel in the importance of completing Environmental Risk Assessments where necessary in order to play our part in helping to protect the environment.

- **Continue to drive a positive and effective health, safety, and wellbeing culture:** Seek to continuously improve communications on health, safety, and well-being matters.

Key points

- There needs to be greater visibility of commitment to health, safety, and wellbeing by leaders across the Service.
- It is vital that every member of staff recognises the importance of and works to drive continuous improvement in health, safety, and wellbeing.
- Seek ways to reduce the likelihood of "burn out" due to workloads and capacity amongst staff to improve both physical and mental health moving forwards
- Continue to work together to drive improvements in our health, safety, and wellbeing culture.

The implementation of this strategy will result in an uplift in visible leadership across the Service thus encouraging staff to follow in the drive for continuous improvement in health, safety, and wellbeing performance. A reduction in sickness absence and improving both physical and mental health will result in a healthier workforce and improved productivity and risk management.

Positive and effective leadership

Whilst positive health and safety behaviour is the responsibility of all staff and is an integral part of the health and safety culture of the Service, without strong leadership this is not easy to achieve. Leaders are required to role model positive behaviours in all they do; this is especially important in terms of health and safety. Leaders need to visibly demonstrate their commitment to health and safety to give them credibility and encourage others to follow their behaviours. Anything less could result in the erosion of standards and a subsequent downturn in health, safety, and wellbeing performance.

The Service has recently committed to providing a Leadership and Development programme for all its managers which is being delivered by an external training provider. This programme takes an in-depth look at what behaviours leaders and managers should be role modelling and the impact that this has on others in the workplace. Conversely, the programme also examines the impact of leaders' role modelling negative behaviours and how this results in a deterioration in working relationships and the mental wellbeing of staff.

Case study: Health and Safety tours

As part of a peer audit process the Service's safety management system HSG 65 is regularly audited. This audit looks at both the safety management system and the practical application of the same.

As a result of the last audit, a recommendation was made for senior leaders to conduct health and safety tours on all stations and sites to visibly demonstrate their commitment to health and safety as a way to improve the safety culture. This recommendation was adopted, and a series of tours were carried out. This involved talking to staff about health and safety, listening to their concerns and taking on board their ideas for improvement.

Health and safety, to some, is a dry subject which can inhibit engagement with staff. To ensure this did not occur, a set of "playing cards" covering a range of health and safety subjects were purchased from the Health and Safety Laboratory a part of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). At each visit, the staff were put into teams, and they competed against each other in answering the multi choice questions; this led naturally to a conversation on health and safety where concerns were highlighted, and ideas were exchanged.

At one visit a crew member highlighted how difficult it was for crews to deal with Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) during the hot summer months as they were required to wear their structural fire kit which has thermal properties to protect them against the effects of fire resulting in physiological stress. As a result, the Service procured a Rescue Jacket which was lighter but still had the necessary protective properties. This jacket is now on the national PPE framework and purchased by all fire and rescue services. An excellent example of the success of such an initiative which may not have been realised if the safety tours had not taken place.

▪ Drive continuous improvement in health and safety performance

Overall, health and safety performance in the Service is very good, however, there can be no room for complacency. Personal injury, equipment, vehicle, and property damage is monitored and reported on at the quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meetings where costs of repairs and/or replacement are shared.

Recommendations from investigations into these events are implemented to prevent a reoccurrence This is known as reactive monitoring.

"Near misses" (events where there has been no injury or financial loss) are also investigated and recommendations implemented to prevent an injury or damage occurring in the future. This is known as proactive monitoring.

Nationally and regionally, learnings from accidents and injuries at incidents are shared with all fire and rescue services in the UK. The Operational Assurance Team are required to conduct a gap analysis against what is in place in the Service and what is necessary to meet the requirements of this learning. Appropriate actions are then taken to ensure any necessary processes are implemented and identified gaps are closed.

Health and safety training is provided to all staff as part of an induction programme on recruitment. Role essential health and safety training is provided to staff including the IOSH Safety for Executives, NEBOSH General Certificate, Accident Investigation training, IOSH Managing Safely for leaders and managers.

Dependent on role and legislative requirements other staff will receive specific health and safety training such as COSHH Assessors, Fire warden and First Aid at Work. Examples of other training that staff must undertake as a legislative requirement are Manual Handling, Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and Fire Safety arrangements. These are delivered as training packages on our e-learning platform and the completion of these are monitored by the line manager and the Health and Safety team.

Last year saw the implementation of health and safety specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The KPIs set are as follows:

- Investigations to be completed within the set timeframes of 2 weeks for a level 1 investigation and 4 weeks for a level 2 - achieved on 75% of occasions with a 10% tolerance.

- Health and safety acquisition training to be completed prior to going into role on 85% of occasions and 100% of occasions on substantiation of the role.

- Health and Safety training packages to be completed on 90% of occasions with a 10% tolerance.

These KPIs were approved at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and progress against these KPIs is reported at each meeting.

There will be an additional KPI set for the next year which relates to the completion of recommendations made as a result of safety event investigations. The target set will be that the recommendations will be completed on 80% of occasions with a 10% tolerance either way.

These KPIs are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (SMART).

As part of the governance process, progress is also monitored through the Performance Management Board.

Case study: Monitoring the working time of employees

Whilst some employees are required to "opt out" of the 48-hour working week under the European Working Time Directive and do so, it was identified that the Service had no means of monitoring the working hours of employees. This was a risk for the Service as not having a robust monitoring system in place could lead to a breach of the Working Time Regulations 1998 and potentially enforcement action by the HSE.

A resource management system was procured which allowed the Service to set parameters that capture the requirements of the Working Time Regulations e.g., a maximum of 84 hours in a working week, wherever possible 11 hours rest between shifts and 24 hours uninterrupted rest in any 7 days or 48 hours in any 14 days. Once set, the system has the ability to identify potential and actual breaches of the Working Time Regulations and will alert the line manager and the Resource Management Team.

As best practice the Service decided to set the maximum hours in a working week to 78 in a bid to further reduce the potential of fatigue.

An excellent example of how the Service values the welfare of its staff.

■ Lead the way in reducing work related ill health, with a specific focus on mental health and stress

Mental health is about how we think, feel, and behave. Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems. They are often a reaction to a difficult life event, such as bereavement, but can also be caused by work related issues.

A legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns is how it has affected people's mental health and wellbeing. Peter Kelley, HSE's Senior Psychologist recognises that over the next decade more people will suffer from mental ill health.

Throughout the pandemic the Service implemented measures to protect the mental health of its staff which included, team "coffee mornings" giving all team members the opportunity to socialise during lockdown. Return to work risk assessments and return to work checklists for those vulnerable members of staff to keep them safe, reassure them and ease them back into workplace life. In addition to signposting staff to the range of support networks that are in place to enable them to seek help if they feel they are suffering both physically and mentally. All of which was deemed to be best practice by the HSE.

Case study: Mental Health Champion network

To raise awareness amongst staff and to remove the stigma associated with talking about mental ill health the Service invested in Mental Health First Aid training for staff who volunteered across the Service. Upon completion of the training, staff were made aware of the Mental Health Champions who they could talk to about any mental health issue and who in turn could sign post them to help and support. This initiative has proved to be very successful with referrals to the Employee Assistance Programme and specialist services such as counselling increasing.

In addition, a Trauma Support debriefing team have been trained to facilitate debriefs of traumatic incidents attended by operational personnel. This has seen a rise in the number of requests for debriefs and has resulted in staff feeling able to talk more freely about mental health.

A great example of engagement by staff with a subject that is still often seen as taboo.

▪ Lead the way in protecting the environment:

The Health and Safety, and Operational Assurance team educate and encourage operational staff in the importance of carrying out Environmental Risk Assessments at incidents. This ensures that the consideration of risks and appropriate control measures to protect the environment are captured as part of the tactical mode for resolving the incident. This offers assurance to the Environment Agency.

▪ Continue to drive a positive and effective health, safety, and wellbeing culture

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) last report dated 2021/22 states that *"staff work hard to keep people safe and secure"* whilst this related to the communities we serve; it can also be applied internally.

Since the last behavioural safety culture survey, accidents and damage events are on a downward trend. The reporting of "near misses" has increased and the quality of risk assessments, including Analytical Risk Assessments (ARAs) used at operational incidents has improved considerably.

Through education, staff will seek advice from the Health and Safety team prior to undertaking a drill or exercise or other activity rather than rushing headlong into something without considering the implications holistically.

In addition, the national statistics for injuries to firefighters, received annually from the Home Office highlight the Service in the top 3 of 5 of the 7 categories.

Case study: HMICFRS report – Effectiveness, efficiency, and people

The report from 2021/22 states "There is a positive health and safety culture within the Service." It goes on to say "*The Service continues to have effective and well understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. The health and safety documents we reviewed were in date and comprehensive. The interviews we conducted with staff were positive about the health and safety culture within the Service. The Service has a health and safety management board that is attended by a representative of the fire authority. Reviews of the information that supports the health and safety culture take place regularly.*

Policies and procedures are readily available and effectively promoted to all staff. It is pleasing that of those who responded to the staff survey, 97.3 percent said that they feel their personal safety and welfare is treated seriously at work. Additionally, 74.1 percent agreed that they have access to the time and equipment needed to maintain operational fitness. The representative bodies for the service also reported that the service provides a supportive approach to health, safety, and wellbeing for staff. Both staff and representative bodies have confidence in the health and safety approach taken by the service".

An excellent commendation for the health and safety culture within the Service.

Making it happen

We will continue to strive for excellence in our health, safety and wellbeing performance.

The fundamental requirements for positive and effective health and safety remain:

- Strong, visible leadership.
- Visible commitment to health and safety across all levels of the Service.
- Collaboration and partnership working, engaging with employees and other stakeholders.
- Managers and their staff across all levels having the competence to identify and control the risks created by their activities.

This strategy is the foundation on which the Service can build on, providing direction to all employees and relevant stakeholders on how we will improve health, safety, and wellbeing, including the culture over the next four years.

The Health and Safety team will support those efforts by capturing and promoting both learning and successes and in developing measures to track progress on both the KPIs mentioned above and the delivery of the five strategic themes.

How we are going to do it

These measures are not limited to, but will include the following:

Positive and effective leadership

- All leaders and managers to participate in the Leadership and Development programme wherever possible and commit to model the required behaviours in all they do including health and safety matters.

- Senior leaders to develop and participate in a series of regular safety tours, capturing all staff groups and visibly demonstrate their commitment to health and safety.

- The health and safety issues raised and suggestions for improvements made at these safety tours are to be followed up and resolved and suggestions implemented so far as is reasonably practicable.

Drive continuous improvement in health, safety, and wellbeing

- Support better outcomes, innovation, and the safe and effective use of new technologies.

- Continue to set realistic and achievable targets (KPIs) for a reduction in safety events, an increase in active monitoring, safety event investigations to be completed within the allocated timeframe and the completion of the health and safety e-learning training packages.

- Educate staff on the importance of effective health and safety performance along with the benefits of a positive health and safety culture and how they can play their part.

Lead the way in reducing work related ill health, with a specific focus on mental health and stress

- Assist in the progression of the work of the Wellbeing Group, Employee Relations Team, and the Welfare Officer in implementing processes to protect the physical and mental health of all staff.

- Continue to raise awareness of mental ill health throughout the Service to further reduce the stigma associated with it. Highlight areas of concern e.g., "burn out" amongst staff and areas of good practice.

- Identify and where appropriate, implement new initiatives to prevent both physical and mental ill health.

Lead the way in protecting the environment

- Consistently consider the environmental impacts of our activities and continue to risk assess these impacts, especially in the operational arena.

Continue to drive a positive and effective health, safety, and wellbeing culture

- Develop and implement an internal behavioural safety culture survey. The results of which are to be analysed and outcomes and actions shared with all staff.

- Introduce a health, safety and wellbeing recognition scheme for all Authority stations/sites to participate in. The highest achieving station/site to be nominated for a Service Award for Excellence.

- Continue to develop and maintain effective working relationships with all staff, stakeholders - both internal and external and the Representative Bodies and the Representatives of the Employees.

The Equality impact table

Assessment of impact table

Does the activity have the potential to impact differently on individuals in different groups? To complete the table ✓ the likely impact. If an EIA action plan is necessary, this can be downloaded from the Intranet.

Assessment of impact on groups in **bold** is a legal requirement. Assessment of impacts on groups in *italics* is not a legal requirement, however it will help to ensure that your activity does not have unintended consequences.

Protected characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Rationale for decision
Individuals of different ages			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Disabled individuals			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals transitioning from one gender to another			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals who are married or in civil partnerships			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the

				specific protected characteristic
Pregnancy, maternity and new parents			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals of different race			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals of different religions or beliefs			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals' gender identity			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals' sexual orientation			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals living in different family circumstances			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Individuals in different social circumstances			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Different employee groups			✓	No discernible positive or negative impact to the specific protected characteristic
Other, please specify				N/A