

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

3 March 2021

Present:

Councillors Hannaford (Chair), Best, Peart, Thomas, Wheeler and Vjeh (Vice-Chair).

Apologies:

Councillor Clayton.

* **HRMDC/19** **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

* **HRMDC/20** **Health, Safety and Wellbeing Progress Report**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Director of Governance & Digital Services (HRMDC/21/1) that set out the progress made in respect of monitoring the health, safety and wellbeing of staff during 2020-21.

The following key points were highlighted:

Proactive monitoring:

- there had not been any progress made since the previous meeting in October 2020 on moving forward the actions in the Service Safety Management Systems audit due to the spike in Covid-19 in January 2021. 67% of areas reviewed had been identified as compliant with the Service was working towards the 26% outstanding and this remained the position to date in 2020-21. The Service would be looking at the risks associated with the remaining actions and then work through the high risk areas;
- Workplace (Health and Safety) Inspection & Assessments – this was now 84% completed in quarter 3 of 2020-21 as compared with 55% in quarter 2 which was very positive. The chart now showed the target as 100% as requested by the Committee at its meeting in October 2020;

Reactive monitoring:

- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) – there had been an increase in reporting of RIDDOR events in quarter 3 of 2020-21 with 6 Occupational Disease reports submitted to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). This was due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the increased risk at incidents. Each incident had been investigated carefully and the HSE was content with the outcomes and the Service's response to the pandemic;

- Personal injuries – the trend line showed this area had decreased over the past four years as the approach taken was to report and investigate all injuries to seek learning points so this was a very positive position. Sprains, strains and musculoskeletal were the primary injuries received which was reflected with other fire & rescue services;
- Vehicle incidents showed a reduction in 2020-21 to quarter 3 with 32 reported as compared with 75 in 2019-20. The Occupational Road Risk Group met quarterly to review vehicle related incidents and take action as appropriate which could include corrective measures such as driver training;
- The Health & Safety team continued to provide advice, guidance and support to the Service's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and thus high volumes of work continued. As a result, the Service was looking to outsource some elements of this work to assist workloads such as on vibration assessments.

The interim Head of Human Resources advised the Committee that sickness absence continued to be below the target of 8 days per person/shifts lost in quarter 3 of 2020-21 at 6.0 days, a reduction of 16.4%. On Call sickness absence was higher than other staff categories, however, at 9.61 days although this was measured over a 7 day period rather than shifts lost or working days. She added that the overall trend for absence had continued to decrease due to Covid-19 largely but the Service could not rely on this to be the rationale so would be looking in detail at the figures and how this was managed. There had been an increase in areas such as mental health, however, due to Covid-19 and the isolation factor associated with working at home. The Service would be reviewing the absence figures in depth with a view to providing additional information in future reports.

The Committee drew attention to the following points in particular:

- how previous Authority decisions had improved the Health & Safety of staff. A briefing paper was requested to cover the way in which previous Authority decisions such as approval of capital budget for vehicles and equipment had resulted in a safer working environment. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that new Breathing Apparatus had been rolled out to all stations funded by capital reserves and that new, smaller vehicles such as Rapid Intervention Vehicles (RIVs) and Light Rescue Pumps (LRPs) carried lighter, modern equipment that should result in decreased musculoskeletal injuries. The Service was also funding new escape hoods as a result of the Grenfell recommendations and these were going on all frontline appliances.

- vehicle incidents – more detailed information was requested on what the different types of incidents were. The Health & Safety Manager advised that a new system was being developed which would do this. He added that lot of vehicle collisions were due to narrow streets, scraping appliance bays or hedges and low level slow speed manoeuvring incidents. The nature of the incident dictated the level of investigation. This information could be captured in future reports to the Committee;
- whether the Service could sustain some of the benefits gained during the lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic. The Health & Safety Manager advised that he would like to see the more safety conscious environment and mind set continuing in future years but this required cultural change as well to achieve a positive safety culture. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that Covid marshalls had been introduced on all stations. It was hoped this would translate into Health and Safety representatives on all stations in future to keep up the positive work undertaken.

* **HRMDC/21** **People Strategy Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (HRMDC/21/2) that set out the progress made to date with implementation of the Service's People Strategy.

It was noted that there had been good progress made with implementation of many areas of the Strategy. A review had been carried out to determine key actions that would make the difference between improvement and transformation in order to achieve the outcomes set out within the Strategy which were being called "game changers". The report, together with a presentation made at the meeting, set out the key actions taken, including:

Leadership:

- A talent management system had been introduced;
- A comprehensive, curated approach to how the Service developed its future leaders underpinned by the National Fire Chief Councils (NFCCs) Leadership Framework;
- Working with leaders and managers to create a common message about the Service's culture.

Learning & Development:

- Ensuring people feel safe through the "Safe To" initiative, including learning from our experiences, successes and mistakes and sharing ideas to make things better;
- Developing non-technical skills through curating learning content and allowing people to take ownership of their personal development in line with their role and their aspirations; and

- Technical competency through utilising expertise as a technical training partner provider to maximise efficiency of the apprenticeship levy together with ensuring Safe Professional and High performing operational teams through a focus on competence, discipline and performance, underpinned by an engaged safety culture.

Inclusion:

- The intervention programme “Safe To” provided the tools to make inclusion a reality through deliberate behaviours including the development of a toolkit to promote Fairness and Respect;
- To improve workforce diversity the Service had instigated a clear focus on positive action in Firefighter recruitment and development through paying attention to how communities view us as an employer, a new ‘always open’ approach to recruitment and accessible practical assessment facilities; and implemented the ‘Our Time’ sponsorship programme;
- The Service continued to consider “People by Design” through planning and implementing involvement and engagement in change and improvement, assessing impacts on people and working towards a ‘value for people’ approach to complement ‘value for money’

Ways of Working:

- Smarter Working – developing a people led approach to a more agile and flexible workplace, with collaborative virtual working, easier access to information, and an emphasis on collaborative workspace rather than desk space, and less commuting miles;
- Work on governance processes to support more visible planning and performance to give people more effective tools for greater collaboration and alignment; and
- Transforming people services to ensure the delivery of expertise and support in the most effective and efficient way.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing:

- As part of the “Safe To” initiative to learn, contribute and challenge intervention, developing an engaged safety culture based on best practice from military aviation and a learning teams approach to incident debrief;
- Working with partners, developing a Wellbeing Strategy and Charter which will set out levels of new and existing proactive and reactive wellbeing interventions; and
- Immediate support provided through the Covid19 Welfare Cell.

The Committee made reference to bullying in the Service and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report which had mentioned this matter. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that a lot of work had been undertaken on this and the Service including the "Safe To" approach referenced above. In Covid-19, an audit had been undertaken by the HMICFRS which had demonstrated a noticeable reduction in the level of staff who felt they had been bullied. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer indicated that he would bring a report to the next meeting to update on specifically on the 'Safe To' intervention.

Reference was also made to the Service's position on fitness testing. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that a meeting was scheduled with HMICFRS on 3 March 2021 to close the cause for concern hopefully that the Service received in 2019. Fitness testing had improved by 13% in 2020-21 so this was very positive. The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted as a range of fitness tests had been offered previously but this had to be limited to 2 in Covid. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to report the result of the HMICFRS cause for concern at the next meeting of the Committee and to the Fire & Rescue Authority.

* **HRMDC/22 Applications for Retirement and Re-employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (HRMDC/21/3) that set out two applications for retirement and re-employment made in accordance with the Authority's Pay Policy Statement for 2020-21.

RESOLVED that the applications for retirement and re-employment as identified in paragraph 2.4 of report HRMDC/21/3 be approved.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**