

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

27 January 2022

Present:

Councillors Bown (Chair), Best, Clayton (Vice-Chair), Peart, Thomas and Randall-Johnson (vice Brazil).

Apologies:

Councillors Brazil and Hannaford.

* **PC/21/11** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021 be signed as a correct record.

* **PC/21/12** **Performance Monitoring Report 2021-22: Quarter 3**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (PC/22/1) on performance in Quarter 3 of the current (2021-22) financial year against the following Strategic Policy Objectives as approved by the Authority:

- 3(a). Ensure that the workforce is highly trained and has the capability and capacity to deliver services professionally, safely and effectively;
- 3(b). Increase the diversity of the workforce to better reflect the communities we serve, promoting inclusion and developing strong and effective leaders who ensure that we have a fair place to work where our organisational values are a lived experience; and
- 3(c). Recognise and maximise the value of all employees, particularly the commitment of on-call firefighters, improving recruitment and retention.

In particular, the report provided information on performance against each of the following key measures:

- operational core competence skills (beathing apparatus; incident command; water rescue; safety when working at heights or in confined spaces; maritime; driving; and casualty care);
- workforce planning;
- health and safety (accidents [including near misses]; personal injuries; vehicle incidents);
- sickness and absence (including mental health) for wholetime, on-call, support, Control and casual staff, by type of sickness;
- fitness testing;
- diversity;
- promoting inclusion, developing strong leaders, living Service values and being a fair place to work;

- grievance, capability and disciplinary issues;
- recruitment and retention (including Pay for Availability benefits); and
- employee engagement.

The report also identified Service performance when benchmarked against national statistics relating to sickness, annual personal injuries, annual vehicle incidents and RIDDOR (injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences) reportable events.

In terms of operational core competence skills, attention was drawn to the Service's performance on water rescue which had dropped below the 95% target to 91.4%. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained the reason behind this which had emanated from the six-month extension for achieving core competence having expired during the lockdown period in Covid. The extension had been applied to all staff, however, it had only been intended for staff with competence expiring during the lockdown period. The impact of this error had resulted in a drop in competence to 82.8% in October 2021 but the Academy had worked hard to bring this competence level back up to 91.4% by the end of January 2022, by applying additional resources.

A lengthy debate was held on the performance on competence for water rescue during which points including the additional costs incurred to bring performance back up, accreditation, standby arrangements and the policy for training staff in water rescue were covered. It was suggested that the Service might consider a critical level below which performance should not be permitted to drop and at which point consideration could be given to applying additional resources to bring the level back up to target. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer acknowledged this point and agreed to explore the viability of incorporating a critical level for all core competences in future.

It was noted that the performance on health and safety was showing positive signs and reference was made to improvements in the reporting of near misses (50% increase) which was an indication of a good safety culture within the Service. The Committee asked for more detailed information on the costs of overall vehicle accidents to be included within future reports and for the cost of insurance claims and overall cost of insurance to be provided which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to provide.

The Committee sought clarification of the position on the sickness and absence reporting in terms of the impact of the Covid pandemic as this was not identified separately within the performance figures presented. Reference was also made to the point that mental health had moved ahead of musculoskeletal as the main reason for absence for the first time in many years and the Committee sought an explanation of the reasons why this had occurred albeit that it was acknowledged that this could be linked to the Covid pandemic. In this regard, it was requested that a comparison with other fire and rescue services was also reported to the Committee in a future report. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that this information would be included in future reports to the Committee.

In terms of the Forward Plan attached at Appendix A of report PC/22/1, the Committee requested that reporting on strategic workforce planning be moved forward to its next meeting on 12 May 2022.

* **PC/21/13** **People Strategy Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (PC/22/2) on development of the Service People Strategy 2022-26 and progress against the previous (2018-22) Strategy.

The 2022-26 Strategy would align to revised workplace commitments developed by staff as part of the previous Strategy and the People Pillar of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services inspection programme. Key areas of work would be:

- continuation and expansion of the Service 'Safe To' programme to promote values, ethics and an engaged safety culture;
- retaining, attracting and securing the best talent for the future with smart and flexible working models;
- addressing the challenges of an aging workforce;
- developing a robust succession planning process and critical role career pathways; and
- increasing diversity and capability in leadership through direct entry and innovative high potential leadership development.

A closure report on the 2018-22 People Strategy was being developed. Of the 53 initial areas of focus identified in this Strategy, all but six were operating and progressing. Those areas that had not progressed would be reviewed and incorporated as necessary in the new Strategy.

* **PC/21/14** **Gender Pay Gap 2021**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (PC/22/3) to which was appended the latest Gender Pay Gap report for the Service.

The Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 required all local authority employers with 250 or more employees to publish statutory calculations each year on the pay gap between male and female employees, accompanied by a supporting narrative.

The latest iteration of the Service's gender pay gap indicated that the gap was decreasing for the third year in a row. The Service recognised, however, that certain issues need to be addressed regarding recruitment and retention. The Service was committed to taking all appropriate actions to address gender pay gap issues. Additionally, the Service People Strategy made diversity & inclusion issues integral to its business plan.

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

The Meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 3.55 pm