

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

22 April 2022

Present:

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

Apologies:

Councillor Thomas.

* **PC/21/15** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 be signed as a correct record.

* **PC/21/16** **Application for Retirement and Re-employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/22/4) on a request for retirement and re-employment. The Authority's approved Pay Policy Statement 2022-23 required that all such requests from Station Manager to Area Manager (or non-uniformed equivalent) be approved by this Committee.

The Executive Board had already considered and approved the request in principle.

RESOLVED that the request as outlined in report PC/22/4 and summarised below be approved on the basis of a twenty four month fixed-term contract.

| Role | Position | Station/Dept. |
|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Group Manager | National Resilience Manager | Station 60 |

* **PC/21/17** **People Strategy Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC22/5) on development of the next iteration of the Service People Strategy for the period 2022-26.

The new Strategy would align to and build on the revised workplace commitments developed by staff for the previous Strategy and the People Pillar of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

The report identified a number of key themes and workstreams likely to feature in the new Strategy, including:

- Living our ethics and values;
- From communities to communities;
- Safe, happy and healthy at work;
- Future leaders; and

- Working smarter

A final draft of the Strategy would be submitted to a future meeting following staff consultation.

* PC/21/18

Recruitment & Workforce Diversity Annual Report 2021

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/22/6) on the publication for 2021-22 on information relating to the makeup of the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (the Service) in terms of protected characteristics, including gender, disability, ethnic group, religion and sexual orientation. The annual publication of such information, required to demonstrate compliance with the public sector equality duty, was required by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017.

The report identified that, during the last twelve months, the Service had undertaken a significant recruitment effort which included opening the Wholetime process to external applicants for the first time since 2017.

The report identified key findings from the data but more significantly identified specific initiatives to improve recruitment, diversity and inclusion, including:

- fully embedding the National Fire Chiefs' Council Code of Ethics within the Service;
- a Connecting the Community project to increase visibility of the Service as an "Employer of Choice" for under-represented groups;
- instigation of a "Critical Friend" group from senior community leaders of under-represented groups to assist Executive Board in strategic development;
- the provision of long-term mentoring for all new recruits to support development and progression;
- improving the update of exit interviews and the accurate recording of reasons for leaving;
- enabling the better monitoring of leaving trends;
- ensuring the removal of all bias from employee application material; and
- monitoring all recruitment processes for adverse impact in relation to ethnic minority background and people of colour.

The Director of Finance, People & Estates added that the Service was currently developing a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which would be reported to a future meeting.

In debating the report, Members questioned the appropriateness of some of the terms used ("people of colour"; "LGB" instead of "LGBT"). The Director of Finance, People and Estates indicated that this would be explored further and amendments made as necessary to the final version of the report prior to publication.

Members also commented on Devon County Council Race Equality Audit Project Team report on “Understanding and Addressing Structural Racism in Devon County Council”. It was felt that this report could assist the Service in addressing diversity and inclusion issues moving forwards.

Having debated the report, the Committee expressed its encouragement for the work being undertaken by the Service to address diversity and inclusion and indicated its support for any collaborative/partnership efforts by the Service to seek to secure best practice in this area. The Committee would also welcome further progress reports in due course.

* PC/21/19

Performance Monitoring Report 2021-22 - Quarter 4

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/22/7) detailing performance as at Quarter 4 of 2021-22 against those Key Performance Indicators agreed by the Committee for measuring progress against the following three strategic priorities 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 debating the report, the following comments were made:

- the significant improvement in core competence maintenance for water rescue was acknowledged. It was clarified that there were different levels of competence involved with this measure, with all operational staff having basic water safety competence, with some specialist teams having higher water rescue competence;
- that, while there was no requirement for the Service to report on sickness absences due specifically to COVID, it would be beneficial to maintain a general awareness of this. The Service had in place measures to mitigate against any detrimental impacts from COVID on prevention, protection and response activities;
- that a Level 3 (highest level) investigation was in train for the rope “near miss” incident and that, pending the outcome of this investigation, all static ropes had been removed from use to mitigate any further risk;
- that, while there would always be a degree of subjectivity in determining whether the causes of stress were work or non-work related, the Service procedures in place were sufficiently robust to ensure that decisions on this were not made arbitrarily and that the culture enabled staff to express concerns and access appropriate support;
- that, due to timing issues, national average figures for sickness absence were not available for this report but would be included in the next report; and
- that significant progress had been made to address the “cause for concern” on firefighter fitness identified following the 2019 Service inspection by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and that this “cause for concern” would be removed, formally, in the published findings from the 2021 inspection.

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

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.55 am