

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

30 October 2023

Present:

Councillors Clayton (Chair), Trail BEM (Vice-Chair), Coles (vice Biederman), Kendall, Peart and Tolchard

In attendance (via Teams):

Councillors Biederman and Cook-Woodman

Apologies:

Councillor Atkinson

* **PC/23/6** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that, subject to an amendment to include the apology for non-attendance received from Councillor Atkinson, the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* **PC/23/7** **Performance Monitoring Report 2023-24: Quarter 2**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance & Corporate Services (Treasurer) (PC/23/12) detailing performance as at Quarter 2 of 2023-24 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);

- health and safety (a general overview of the work undertaken on station audits and the risk from contaminants, accidents [including near misses]; personal injuries; vehicle incidents (together with the correlation to appliance mobilisation) and reporting against the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR));
- sickness and absence (including mental health) for wholetime, on-call, support, Control and casual staff, types of sickness absence, details of the health and wellbeing support offered by the Service. The report also provided comparisons with national fire service data and featured benchmarking for sickness absence against comparable, neighbouring fire and rescue services;
- fitness testing (including support offered for red and amber groups);
- diversity, with a particular emphasis on the work being undertaken on promoting inclusion and developing strong leaders within the organisation;
- strategic workforce planning including details of staff turnover in all categories of the workforce;
- employee engagement (also reported elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting at item PC/23/13); and
- an overview of the People Services Systems project.

Attention was drawn at the meeting to the following points:

- Working at Height and in Confined spaces (SHACS) was showing as amber in the report but this was the only one area at amber which was at 92.6%. There had been a slight increase on quarter 1 of 2022-23 but attendance at courses continued to be monitored. The Director of Service Delivery Service - Support stated that she had asked for further information as to why this was still at 92% but initial indications were that this was due largely to competencies going out of date and being unable to catch up although she was happy with the tolerance on this matter;
- On fitness, 1520 staff were required to test with 98.2 % (1493 staff) passing and 27 in the red zone (1.8%);
- Work had commenced on the Control of Substances hazardous to Health (COSHH) audits which would be undertaken over the next 12 months at a proportion of service locations and work continued on reducing the risk for contaminants
- Accidents – there had been a slight increase in in the overall trend over the past 12 months but in quarter 2 of 2023-24, these were down by 28 on quarter 1 at 51. The Organisational Road Risk Group was meeting monthly now to monitor the position more closely;

- Near misses – there were 14 near misses in quarter 2 of 2023-24, a 50% reduction on reporting in the previous quarter of 2023-24 (14 events). The Service’s wider culture on “safe to” would help to make improvements in this area;
- Personal injuries – the rolling 12 month statistics showed a decrease with a reduction of 7 injuries in quarter 2 of 2023-24 - a 37% decrease;
- Vehicle accidents – there had been a 33% reduction (17 incidents) in quarter 2 of 2023-24, most of which were due to non-blue light activity. This represented just 0.4% of mobilisations during quarter 2;
- RIDDOR – there had been 3 reports in quarter 2 of 2023-24.
- total sickness had increased marginally to 10.2 days/shifts lost in quarter 2 of 2023-24 due largely to the time of year but the Service continued to work on getting staff back to work quickly. Total sickness was 4.80 days/shifts lost to quarter 2 of 2023-24 as compared to 5.06 days at the same quarter in 2022-23 so positive news. Mental health issues (41% of days/shifts lost) continued to be the prevalent cause of sickness absence above musculoskeletal injuries (24% of days/shifts lost). Mental health absences were not always caused by work related issues but more personal matters such as the current financial crisis although the Service continued to offer support wherever possible and to signpost staff where appropriate.
- The Committee was apprised of the work being undertaken to address diversity and inclusion issues including (but not limited to) the training that had been implemented in October and November 2023 for middle managers on managing difficult conversations and conflict.
- Strategic workforce planning - reference was made to the monthly meetings held to monitor workforce planning and the point that this was improving the levels of engagement. A new On call recruitment process had been introduced which had achieved 100% attendance at practical assessment centres and 90% of candidates progressing to the next stage; and
- the People Services project was going live on 31 October 2023 which had been a huge undertaking for the Service and staff involved.

NB. Minute PC/23/8 below also refers.

* **PC/23/8**

People Survey Actions

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Director – Service Delivery (PC/23/13) which provided an overview of the action being taken by the Service in response to the Staff Survey undertaken earlier in 2023.

It was noted that the Service had received 813 responses to the survey representing 44% of the workforce. From the survey findings, five key focus areas had emerged which were:

- Inclusion of thought;

- Bullying and harassment and the reporting of this;
- Trust in leadership;
- Support staff – differences in responses between operational opportunities and those available for support staff; and
- Working together well (high negative).

The report set out the action being taken by the Service to address the points raised in each of the above areas. Reference was made in particular to areas such as a uniform and non-uniform divide which was being addressed through equalisation of promotion processes. Work was also being undertaken on:

- Introducing channels for staff to report concerns such as the confidential reporting line;
- continuing work on the cultural journey;
- improving communication channels;
- standardising recruitment processes; and
- providing consistent guidance across departments.

The Committee expressed concern at the marked drop in trust in leadership from 56% in the previous survey to 43% in 2023. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services (Treasurer) concurred that this was disappointing but there had been a lot of senior management changes together with budget cuts and associated freezes to Professional and Technical staff recruitment, all of which would impact inevitably on such indicators. The solution was in recognising the need for improvements and it was hoped that the changes made since the survey had been undertaken would be borne out in future survey results.

* PC/23/9

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement Action Plan

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (PC/23/14) outlining progress to date against the Action Plans developed to address both the Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement identified following the most recent Service inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

In terms of the Cause of Concern and 14 Areas for Improvement identified by HMICFRS, 8 had been linked to the People Committee for tracking.

Three of the actions within the Cause of Concern Action Plan were recorded currently as "Off Track" which were:

- 01a.07 - Expectations documents (charters).;
- 01b.03 – performance/conflict training for managers; and
- 01b.15 – 01 evidence and assurance.

The reasons behind this were:

- Information to support departments creating team charters had been published on the intranet and the customer charter had also been published (both internally and externally). These elements of the action will be marked as completed.
- The training charter has been submitted to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Commission for final review, after which it will be published to the wider organisation. This is expected to be completed by 31/10/2023 (01a.07).
- Performance management training will be delivered to managers over three sessions on 13/10/2023, 24/10/2023, 03/11/2023. Action 01b.03 will remain as 'off-track' until these have taken place.
- The evidence and assurance for the Cause of Concern will be started once all actions have been completed (01b.15).

Two actions were recorded as "In Progress – Off Track" which were:

- HMI-3.2-202210 – temporary promotions; and
- HMI-3.4-202213 – selection and promotion processes.

One Area for Improvement, HMI-3.4-202215 (High Potential Staff), remained 'paused' due to dependencies on the Area for Improvement around the selection and promotions process (HMI-3.4-202213).

It was noted that the selection and recruitment process had been rewritten and aligned to the national Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) framework but this was off track still as it was linked to the overall recruitment process. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services (Treasurer) advised the Committee that this was a good piece of work which required staff to self-endorse to move forward with the promotions process now.

NB. Minute PC/23/10 below also refers.

* **PC/23/10**

People and Culture Update

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (PC/23/15 setting out the progress made against the 35 recommendations in His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published report into values and culture in the fire and rescue service. 19 of these recommendations were specific to the fire and rescue service and 15 required action at national level.

A further three recommendations had been closed following review by the HMICFRS Governance Board and the Service's Executive Board with a total of 12 of the 19 recommendations closed to date. 5 were "in progress" (as below), two "not started" and one "in progress - on track".

The five recommendations which remained 'In Progress' were:

- REC04 – handling of raised concerns;
- REC32 – diversity in succession planning;

- REC33 – progress of non-operational staff;
- REC024 – monitor and evaluate feedback; and
- REC26 – management and leadership training.

This was due to the following factors:

- The Head of Organisational Assurance had produced a paper for the Executive Board (EB) to outline a proposed structure for a professional standards function. The action will remain marked as 'In Progress' until EB have considered the options presented (REC04);
- Recommendations 24 (Monitoring and Evaluating Feedback), 32 (Diversity in succession planning) and 33 (Progression of non-operational staff) had not been fully addressed by the Service and therefore will remain 'In Progress' until further action has been taken; and
- The decision was made at HMICFRS Governance Board (04/10/2023) to re-open the evidence and assurance against this recommendation 26 (Management and Leadership Training) to ensure the expected outcome has been fully achieved.

NB. Minutes PC/23/8 and PC/23/9 above also refer.

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

The Meeting started at 10.12 am and finished at 12.04 pm