

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

28 July 2023

Present:

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

In attendance:

Councillors Biederman (via Teams), Cook-Woodman and Randall Johnson (via Teams)

* **PC/23/1** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* **PC/23/2** **Performance Monitoring Report 2023-24: Quarter 1**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance & Corporate Services (Treasurer) (PC/23/8) detailing performance as at Quarter 1 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 (reported elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting at item PC/23/9); and
- an overview of the People Services Systems project.

Attention was drawn at the meeting to the following points:

- There was an error in the competence rating of Red Amber Green (RAG) for Working at Height and in Confined spaces (SHACS) which was showing as green in the report but this should be at amber; There was only one area at amber which was SHACS (92%). The Director of Service Delivery 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;
- Reference was made to fitness and the point that testing had commenced again for revalidation with 1538 staff tested to date. 2% of staff were in the red or amber category as requiring further support of whom 2 staff had failed to meet the required fitness.
- Attention was drawn to paragraphs 2.4 and 2.6 of the report and some of the positive work undertaken particularly on station audits. 93 premises had been audited in 2022-23 looking at the management of Personal Protective Equipment, fire safety, machinery and equipment and breathing apparatus cleaning areas, amongst others. The findings were generally positive and the actions had been fed into specific targeted action plans for locations;
- Accidents - the trend line had reached a plateau over the previous 12 months (2022-23) at 24 per month although quarter 1 of 2023-24 showed an increase of 12 over the previous quarter on 2022-23. The Organisational Road Risk Group was meeting monthly now and looking closely at the statistics to try to work out the reasons behind this increase.

- Near misses – there were 28 near misses in quarter 1 of 2022-23, a 33% increase on reporting in the previous quarter of 2022-23 (7 events) largely due to mirrors folding in on the Medium Rescue Pumps when travelling at speeds beyond 56mph which needed to be addressed;
- Personal injuries – there had been a small increase in quarter 1 of 2023- 24 with 1 injury but a spike in May 2023 although there was no definitive trend to be identified;
- Vehicle accidents – there had been a 38% increase (14 incidents) with a spike in May 2023 to 25 but this did not correlate to incident response.
- RIDDOR – there had been 2 reports this quarter (2023-24).

The Committee debated the position on vehicle incidents which it was thought was largely due to low-speed manoeuvring. The absence of hedge cutting was believed to be a notable contributor to vehicle incidents as hedges were generally only cut twice per year and as the year went by the incidents increased in tight, rural lanes. The Committee suggested there was a need to make the local authorities aware of this as this was a safety issue and local authorities were allowed to cut back the hedges.

The Health and Safety Manager further advised that the Service provided additional training for staff where it was recognised that multiple accidents had occurred or other trends. Appropriate controls were also in place to provide support not punishment to drivers. The Service was also looking at a fair wear and tear policy to determine the correct tolerable and this was being reviewed by the Fleet Manager. There was also a cost implication so the Treasurer suggested they be aligned to identify budget impact.

It was noted that total sickness had decreased marginally in the last quarter of 2022-23 due to the efforts of staff in monitoring sickness and work on getting staff back to work quicker. Total sickness was 2.07 days/shifts lost in the first quarter of 2023-24 as opposed to 2.5 days at the same quarter in 2022-23 so good news. National data showed Devon & Somerset at 10.02 days/shifts lost in 2022-23 as opposed to the average (27 eligible services) of 9.41 days lost. The Service was slightly above the average currently but it was confident that this number would decrease given the work that was being undertaken on health and wellbeing issues.

The Committee made reference to the point that musculoskeletal injuries were still high but not as high as mental health but these were the main causes of absence. The Committee was advised that mental health was not always caused by work related issues but personal matters and there had been spikes in this area although the Service offered support. The Treasurer added that this was a complex area with more than one driver but the staff survey had given an indication that the cost of living crisis was impacting people at all levels. The Service was acutely aware of this and was trying to find the right balance to assist staff; looking at where it could provide guidance on financial support for staff in and signposting.

The Treasurer highlighted the efficiencies being undertaken to address the revenue budget gap in 2024-25 but he emphasised that this did not include redundancy as there were known reductions in 2024-25 which meant the efficiencies could be made as a result of natural attrition.

The Committee was apprised of the excellent work being undertaken to address inclusion issues including (but not limited to) the Speak Up Guardian scheme which was a positive step forward. The Committee asked if there was a way of measuring success in respect of inclusion and wellbeing issues. The Treasurer replied that this was a good point as there was a report on grievances and he could take this away and look at a way of measuring the action/interventions for either positive or negative impact.

Reference was made to the monthly meetings held to monitor workforce planning and the point that this was improving the levels of engagement. The Service was looking closely at P4A and factors influencing recruitment and retention such as training which was a huge commitment for both the individual and the Service due to the time involved and costs incurred when attrition remained high. It was recognised that reduced capacity within the Service was a factor in staff wellbeing and that work may have to be dropped in some areas as a result. The cost of recruitment was around £20k for each On Call firefighter and recruitment and selection processes had been redesigned to address the issues that the Service was aware of. An expressions of interest section was now on the website.

The Treasurer drew attention to the excellent work being undertaken by Zoe Smyth and her team for on the People Services project which was a huge undertaking for the Service and staff involved.

NB. Minute PC/23/3 below also refers.

* **PC/23/3** **2023 People Survey Results Overview**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance & Corporate Services (PC/23/9) setting out the purpose, methodology and high level findings of the people survey undertaken earlier in 2023 together with a presentation on the results at the meeting.

It was noted that the Service had received 813 responses to the survey representing 44% of the workforce which was above the industry recognised confidence level of 95. 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).

It was highlighted that 58% of people felt they were happy in their work and would recommend the Service as an employer. This was the first time this question had been included in this survey and would provide a benchmark against which future responses could be measured. In response to a question, the Treasurer indicated that he was not content with this level of contentment and that the Service recognised there was a lot of work to do to improve in this area.

NB. Minute PC/23/2 above also refers.

* **PC/23/4**

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/23/10) 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.

Two of the actions within the Cause of Concern Action Plan were recorded currently as "In Progress – Off Track" due to:

- 01a.07: Expectations documents (charters). The toolkit for team charters (internal, staff to staff) had now been developed by the Organisational Development Team. This will be reviewed and then distributed across the Service by 31 August 2023. The customer charter had now gone through final testing. Feedback will be incorporated into the final document ahead of sign off from the Senior Leadership Team. The HMI Team were awaiting an update on the trainee/ trainer charter. This action was off track as the target completion date (28 February 2023) had now passed; and
- 01b.09: All recruitment and selection processes will include elements to assess applicants' cultural awareness and how this linked to the Service Values. There was no update on progress against this action.

It was noted that one action within the Areas for Improvement action plan HMI-3.4-202215 (High Potential Staff), had been paused since March 2023 due to dependencies on the Area for Improvement around the selection and promotions process (HMI-3.4-202213).

The Committee sought clarification as to when the Cause of Concern on people and Culture would be removed and it was noted that HMICFRS would look at discharging this at the next inspection.

NB. Minute PC/23/5 below also refers.

* **PC/23/5**

People & Culture Update

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (PC/23/11) 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.

Two recommendations remain 'In Progress' despite the recommendation deadline (01 June 2023) now having passed. This is due to the following factors:

- The Head of Organisational Assurance will speak to the Chief Fire Officer around the expectations and considerations required to determine whether the Service should create a professional standards function. The action will remain marked as 'In Progress' until these conversations had taken place (Recommendation 04).
- Recommendation 32 (Diversity in succession planning) has not been fully addressed by the Service, therefore this recommendation will remain 'In Progress'.

9 recommendations had been closed following review by the HMICFRS Governance Board and the Service's Executive Board with 7 in progress and on track and 2 in progress but the recommendation deadline had not been met.

NB. Minute PC/23/4 above also refers.

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

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at Time Not Specified