

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

21 October 2020

Present:

Councillors Clayton, Hannaford (Chair), Peart, Thomas, Wheeler and Vijeh (Vice-Chair)

Apologies:

Councillor Best

In attendance:

Councillor Randall Johnson – Authority Chair (in accordance with Standing Order 38(1))

* **HRMDC/12** Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2019 be approved.

* **HRMDC/13** Health, Safety and Wellbeing Progress Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (HRMDC/20/1) that set out the Service's performance in relation to health, safety and wellbeing issues for the period April to September 2020.

In respect of health and safety issues, the reporting was split into two key areas, namely:

- Proactive monitoring – this involved the use of a safety management system audit together with workplace inspections and assessment. For the period April to September 2020, the Service had 496 compliant areas with 140 areas it was working towards and 4 non-compliant. In addition, the Service had 45% of workplace inspection and assessments overdue against a target of 0%, due largely to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Reactive monitoring – the Service undertook monitoring via the Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) which required the reporting of certain types of work related safety event outcomes such as, amongst others, the death of a worker/non-worker from a work related accident and specific injuries to workers. In 2020/21 to September 2020, the Service reported 1 over 7 day injury (a decrease largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic), 3 dangerous occurrences (an increase due to breathing apparatus changes which was being monitored carefully) and 0 specified injuries. The Service also monitored the number of personal injuries together with vehicle incidents. To September 2020, the Service recorded 19 personal injuries compared with 48 in 2019/20 which was a decrease to date. On vehicle incidents, the Service recorded 60 to September 2020 as compared with 105 in 2019/20 which showed an upward trend to date.

The Health and Safety Manager reported that a temporary Health & Safety Audit Officer had been appointed in March 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and had made great progress with the audits in difficult circumstances. A gap analysis against ISO45001 had also been completed in order to assess the implications of moving across to this standard. It was anticipated that the cost of moving to ISO45001 would be in the region of £35k which included training and external verification fees. Adoption of this standard would bring the Service into line with other fire and rescue services in this region and enable benchmarking to be undertaken.

The Committee questioned the use of a 0% target for monitoring the completion of workplace assessments and suggested that a target of 100% may be more appropriate. The Health and Safety Manager replied that this target was for overdue assessments but he indicated that this could be adjusted in future to completed assessments which would make the target 100%.

The question was also raised as to whether the introduction into the Service of smaller vehicles such as the Rapid Intervention Vehicles and the Light Rescue Pumps would impact on the number of vehicle accidents being reported. The Health and Safety Manager responded that vehicle accidents were a large proportion of the safety events reported but this was still low as a proportion of all of the movements undertaken by Service vehicles. It was envisaged that this may drop as these included minor collisions in country lanes which could decrease with the introduction of smaller vehicles. Reference was also made to the Driving for Better Business initiative and it was confirmed that the Service was working towards this but it may be delayed due to the pandemic.

The Head of Human Resources advised that, in terms of wellbeing, Service performance on sickness absence for wholetime, fire control and support staff was 23.2% below target (8 days per person per year) at 2.56 days lost per person to September 2020 and 17% down as compared with the same period in 2019/20. This may be due to the high level of work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic on ensuring that staff were safe and mental wellbeing was monitored with in depth vulnerability assessments and return to work assessments undertaken.

The level of On Call sickness was higher at 4.74 days lost per person but this was measured over 7 days rather than 5 days or 4 shifts as with the other categories of staff. It was noted that consideration had been given to a target for On Call sickness absence and it was recommended in the report that this be set at 12 days lost per person per year following endorsement by the Service's strategic analysts.

It was also noted that, as at 13 October 2020, 93 staff had been tested for Covid-19 and only 12 staff had received a positive test for the virus which was a very good position for the Service.

The Committee enquired as to whether the introduction of the Pay for Availability system would impact on sickness absence for On Call staff. The Head of Human Resources advised that sickness absence would be calculated over a 7 day period still and thus, he did not anticipate any adverse impact under the new system. The Committee further enquired as to whether sickness would be matched to the number of days actually worked rather than a 7 day period as the number of contracted hours would vary. The Head of Human resources indicated that he would need to discuss this matter with colleagues to ascertain if it was a feasible option.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the sickness absence target for On Call of an average of 12 days per person per year be implemented as the performance measure; and
- (b) That subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

* **HRMDC/14** **People Strategy Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (HRMDC/20/2) that set out the progress being made on implementation of the People Strategy. The report also referred to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the progress made and the response to supporting the workforce during this difficult period.

The Committee was advised upon the progress made under each strand of the People Strategy which included:

- Leadership;
- Inclusion;
- Ways of working;
- Learning and development; and
- Wellbeing.

Reference was made in particular to the following areas of work undertaken in implementation of the Strategy:

- A Leadership Strategy had been prepared, aligned to the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) Leadership Framework;
- A staff Task to Finish Group had been established to look at empowerment and decision making;
- The key findings in the annual Recruitment & Diversity report for 2019/20 were that there had been the biggest number of female On Call new starters at 21 together with 3 new wholetime female employees resulting in the highest ever female representation within operational roles the Service at 100. Additionally, the number of applicants with a different ethnic background was, on average, close to reflecting the Service's community at 5.3% and applications from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community had also increased to higher than the community average of 2.2%;

- The Service had achieved the Silver Award under the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (ENEI) following a TIDE assessment that benchmarked an organisation's approach and progress on diversity and inclusion in areas of strategy, leadership, recruitment, training, communications and procurement which was a big step forward and a good achievement;
- The response in the Covid-19 pandemic had meant that the Service had been able to accelerate its aspirations for more flexible ways of working under smart working principles with changes to core hours alongside working from home and many teams had reported that this provided a greater degree of work/life balance and was more family friendly although it was felt generally that a blended approach to flexible working was preferable; and
- People impact assessments had been utilised to gauge the effect of the pandemic on staff with action plans implemented to support the health and welling of staff.

The Committee expressed its thanks to the officers and all staff for all of the work undertaken in the Covid-19 pandemic and in achieving this very positive progress against the People Strategy.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the progress towards achieving the aims set out in the People Strategy be considered as a standing item at the Human Resources Management & Development Committee and that the progress be updated at each meeting; and
- (b) Subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

* **HRMDC/15 Requests for Retirement/Re-employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (HRMDC/20/3) setting out a request for retirement and re-employment in accordance with the approved Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21.

RESOLVED that the request for retirement and re-employment as set out within report HRMDC/20/3 be approved.

* **HRMDC/16 Consultation Response to Reforming Local Government Exit Payments**

The Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (HRMDC/20/4) that set out a proposed response to a government consultation on Reforming Local Government Exit Payments.

RESLOVED that the consultation response contained within report HRMDC/20/4 be submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on behalf of the Authority.

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

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