

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

29 July 2022

Present:

Councillors Hannaford (Chair), Best, Clayton (Vice-Chair), Kendall, Peart, Thomas and Trail BEM

Also in attendance (by video conference) in accordance with Standing Order 39:

Councillors Coles, Partridge and Randall Johnson.

* **PC/22/1**

Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2022 be signed as a correct record.

* **PC/22/2**

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

An item taken in accordance with Section 100(B)4(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

In view of the point that the Inspection report referenced below had been received after publication of the agenda for this meeting, the Chair agreed to take this item as urgent business to ensure the Cause for Concern was addressed at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair reported receipt of the Inspection Report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) on 27 July 2022 and drew attention to the point that the People Pillar had been scored as "requiring improvement". A specific Cause for Concern had also been identified under "promoting the right values and culture". The Director of Resources, People and Estates gave an assurance that Officers were drawing up an Action Plan to address the Cause for Concern and other areas set out in the People Pillar as requiring improvement.

The Committee suggested that the timeframe for the next meeting may not be soon enough and suggested that an additional meeting may be required to consider this matter. Should this be the case, it was indicated that an additional meeting of the Committee could be set up by the Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Committee in accordance with Standing Order 33(2). When Officers had considered the Cause for Concern in depth and prepared the Action Plan, a report would be submitted to the Committee.

* **PC/22/3**

Appointments to the Internal Disputes Resolution Procedure (IDRP) Panel

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (PC/22/8) that sought appointees from the membership the People Committee to serve on the Internal Disputes Resolution Panel (set up to consider and determine complaints made by individuals under stage 2 of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Internal Disputes Resolution Procedure).

RESOLVED that Councillors Clayton, Hannaford and Peart be appointed as Members of the Internal Disputes Resolution Procedure (IDRP) Panel until the first meeting of the People Committee after the Annual Meeting of the Authority in June 2023.

* **PC/22/4**

People Strategy Update

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC22/9) on development of the next iteration of the Service People Strategy for the period 2022-26 together with a summary of current activity under the existing Strategy.

The new Co-Head of People would be reviewing progress against the aspirations set out within the People Strategy alongside the information received in the final report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in the People Pillar

The report identified a summary of key activities under the theme of Diversity and Inclusion, including:

- Safe to Learn;
- Contribution and Challenge interventions;
- Code` of Ethics implementation;
- A new Diversity and Inclusion policy;
- Work undertaken to review processes and improve recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce; and
- People Services transformation.

The Co-Head of People stated that a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan had been drafted already setting out clear priorities for the Service. Reference was made in particular to the interventions made already including Safe To, Psychological Safety and the Just Culture.

The Area Manager (Academy) referred to the position on apprenticeships and reported that it was proposed to include an item in the forward agenda for the Committee to give an update.

The Chair drew attention to the need for an in-depth focus on recruitment and retention issues. He referred in particular to the Service undertaking more positive action to recruit and retain more women into the Service. This was particularly important in light of the Cause for Concern raised on the People Pillar of the recent inspection report and he welcomed the opportunity for a deep dive in this area of work.

NB. Minutes PC/22/2 and PB/22/5 also refer.

* **PC/22/5** **Performance Monitoring Report 2022-23: Quarter 1**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/22/10) detailing performance as at Quarter 1 (April to March) of 2022-23 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.

In terms of operational core competency skills, the Area Manager (Academy) reported that the Service was on target or above (95% or more) in all of the key areas reported upon with the exception of Water Rescue (94.6%) Working at Height (90.4%) and Maritime (94.6%).

He reported that Water Rescue was impacted by access to suitable training facilities hence this tended to fluctuate between a 94% and 96% performance. Working at Heights had been impacted temporary by a reduction in training staff and reduced course attendance but should improve to meet the target in future reports. Maritime competency had also been impacted by a reduction in access to suitable training facilities which was being addressed via the training plan and estates strategy.

In view of these fluctuations, the Area Manager (Academy) was suggesting a change in the performance target to an average over the quarter together with relevant benchmarking information on the national picture. His would be tied in with a review of training delivery across the Service to improve efficiency and would tie in training with risks identified within the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Councillor Thomas welcomed the review to ensure efficiency but questioned the use of an average to measure performance. He suggested that a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating together with in depth explanations may be more suitable. He **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Clayton):

“That a review of the performance measure for operational core competency skills be undertaken and reported back to the Committee at a future meeting”.

Upon a vote, this was **CARRIED** unanimously.

The Chair also **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Peart):

“that appropriate benchmarking information be included alongside the performance measures in key indicators”.

Upon a vote, this was **CARRIED** unanimously.

At this point, the Chair referred to the discussion in respect of apprenticeships during the previous item (Minute PC/22/4 refers) and **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Peart):

“That a full report on the position relating to apprenticeships within the Service be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee”.

In terms of the health and safety measures, reference was made to the point that the provision of benchmarking information such as national comparisons would assist the Committee in judging performance against the key indicators in this area. The Director of Resources, People and Estates advised that Officers would look at the inclusion of such data in future reports. It was noted that the overall trend for accidents was showing a decrease over the 12 months from July 2021 to June 2022 which was a positive step although there had been a slight increase (four events) on near misses in quarter 1 of 2022-23 compared with the previous quarter. Vehicle accidents had increased slightly in quarter 1 of 2022-23 and tended to be as a result of slow speed manoeuvring and clipping hedges. The Service monitored the position on this carefully through mechanisms such as the Occupational Road Risk Group and Strategic Safety Committee.

The Committee noted that sickness had increased slightly to 2.51 days lost per person in quarter 1 of 2022-23 as compared to 1.69 days lost in the same period in 2021-22. There continued to be an overall increase in sickness, predominantly long-term sickness (more than 28 days) due to mental health and musculoskeletal issues primarily although long Covid was a factor. The Service had introduced new measures to assist staff with health and wellbeing issues such as the provision of private health insurance via Benenden Health, access to free Yoga classes and the SAVE project which was a three-day residential course at Firefighter Charity premises for employees suffering with mental health and wellbeing issues.

In terms of fitness testing, it was noted that 98.4% of staff had now passed and that measures were in place to support the 1.52% (24 individuals) who were in the red or amber category. The Cause for Concern in the previous report of HMICFRS had now been withdrawn.

The Chair commented upon the negative impact of the current national fitness standard on female staff, particularly as they grew older, and he drew attention to the need to ensure that changes were introduced at national level to address this. He reiterated his concerns on the negative impact of such measures on the recruitment and retention of female firefighters and **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Peart):

“That an in-depth report on diversity and inclusion and specifically the recruitment and retention of female firefighters be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee together with information on how the Authority could engage more with this area of work”.

Upon a vote, this was **CARRIED** unanimously.

RESOLVED

- (a) That a review of the performance measure for operational core competency skills be undertaken and reported back to the Committee at a future meeting;
- (b) that appropriate benchmarking information be included alongside the performance measures in key indicator
- (c) That a full report on the position relating to apprenticeships within the Service be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (d) That an in-depth report on diversity and inclusion and specifically the recruitment and retention of female firefighters be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee together with information on how the Authority could engage more with this area of work; and
- (e) Subject to (a) to (d) above, the report be noted.

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

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