



**AVON FIRE AUTHORITY  
PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**9 DECEMBER 2022**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Bromley, Davies, Hopkinson, Jacobs, Monk (arrived at 10.55hrs), Tucker and Wilcox (Chair).

The meeting started at 10.40am

**33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Massey and Varney.

**34. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

The emergency evacuation procedures were explained.

**35. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

**36. PUBLIC ACCESS**

None received.

**37. CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

Members and Officers introduced themselves.

1. The Chair confirmed that the meeting would take place as a face-to-face meeting. The meeting was being recorded and would be available for members of the public to view.
2. The Chair explained the voting system for the meeting, i.e., votes against a motion would be recorded first, followed by abstentions, then votes for.

### **38. MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022**

It was moved by Cllr Bromley and seconded by Cllr Tucker that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

**It was RESOLVED -**

**That the ordinary minutes of the People & Culture Committee held on 5 October 2022 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.**

### **39. HR AND RECRUITMENT UPDATE**

The Committee received a report from the Head of HR who updated on recruitment, trends and significant issues since the last meeting.

#### **Wholetime recruitment**

The Wholetime recruitment campaign for 2022 was complete and pre-appointment checks were now concluded. The training school would commence on 6 February 2023 with 24 Trainee Firefighters. It is anticipated there would be 22 male and 2 female candidates and 5 new recruits from under-represented ethnicity groups, including Asian, Chinese, Cantonese and Eastern European backgrounds.

Planning is underway for the 2023 recruitment campaign which would launch in February/March (date to be confirmed). A review of the selection process was underway to assess any changes required. The Head of HR is working with HR and Corporate Communications to push back the next round of recruitment to allow sufficient time in January/February to carry out community activity with groups that the Service worked closely with.

#### **Industrial action (IA) planning**

Following the result of the consultation ballot, undertaken nationally by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), to unanimously reject the 5% pay offer, a formal ballot was launched on 5 December, closing on 30 January 2023. In preparation for the potential of industrial action the Service had instigated the recruitment, selection and training of Reserve Firefighters, Control Operators, Drivers and Team Leaders. These staff would be supported by existing trained staff to ensure the Service could meet the statutory obligations to protect the community and respond to emergency incidents. If IA takes place, it is anticipated that this would be in mid/end February.

The Head of HR confirmed that there was a duty to maintain a statutory response to members of the public, and the Service had been working on IA action planning over the last few months involving reserve staff, who were currently being trained and recruited. An update would be provided at the next meeting in March.

#### **Corporate staff recruitment**

There were 10 vacancies currently being advertised and HR were working with recruitment agencies and other organisations to fill them. A competitive salary

review is in progress to establish how the Service performed against other public sector organisations. However, this had to be balanced with budget and potential increased salaries. When advertising roles, HR also promoted the non-cash benefits of working at Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) such as flexible working, cycle to work scheme, etc.

### **Staff welfare**

It was confirmed that, following a competitive tender process with other Southwest and Kent Fire & Rescue Services, the HR team had implemented a new occupational health contract with Health Partners from 1 November 2022. Benefits would include an increased provision of nurses and doctors along with a mobile unit on station. This would mean that if an on-call employee was attending a medical check, there would no longer be a need to book as 'unavailable'. The new provision would also enable a Line Manager to make referrals for their staff and allow them to provide further support when their staff were off sick.

The Head of HR also advised Members that the counselling contract would be provided by Work Out Solutions from 1 January 2023. Support would be available for staff 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, which would allow shift workers flexibility to make contact. Specialist counsellors would also be available.

It was advised that the Service Physiotherapy contract had now transferred to Rehab Plus, who have 22 clinics around Bristol. AF&RS would pay for an initial consultation and six treatment sessions as standard, to enable staff to get back to work sooner, manage injuries or physical health conditions or to provide preventative interventions as appropriate.

### **Cultural improvement**

The Dignity & Respect Policy will be launched shortly. This work was part of our cultural improvement plan and linked to the Service Values, Behaviour Framework and National Fire Chief Council Core Code of Ethics.

A zero-tolerance statement would also be issued this week following consultation with Trade Unions and staff groups. This complements the Discipline and Dignity & Respect Policies which would be launched before the end of December. The Statement linked to the Service Values and Behavioural Framework (which would be refreshed shortly). The statement also linked into the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics to ensure it was understood and embedded amongst the workforce. The Service Leadership Team (SLT) and the Service Leadership Board (SLB) would visit all Service locations in upcoming months to discuss and promote the launch.

Further work would be undertaken in January to revisit the Discipline and Grievance policies.

Cllr Monk arrived at 10.55hrs.

In response to Member's questions:

1. A Member was keen that there should be AF&RS Fire Cadets in the area. It was hoped that might help with recruitment and diversity in the future and also help develop young people. He had tried to get funding from his own council but also suggested other avenues to explore for funding such as the South Gloucestershire Youth Club. It was agreed that the ACFO and Head of HR would discuss with the CFO and would then discuss these potential funding opportunities with the Member offline.
2. A Member asked, in view of the difficulties recruiting into the Service to cover Industrial Action, how would our statutory obligations be met. The Head of HR confirmed that training was going well to provide defensive firefighters and that all control training was in place. However, there was a shortage of drivers and she was working with recruitment agencies to fill these roles. It was also difficult to recruit team leaders and adverts had been placed. The Service was also working with the Military and other organisation to fill these positions. Members would be kept informed.
3. The ACFO SDS confirmed that the Service would review the recent report on the London Fire Brigade and whether there were any lessons to be learnt at AF&RS. Members would be updated at their next meeting.
4. A Member requested that the Zero Tolerance statement be circulated to Members.

**It was RESOLVED –**

That the HR & Recruitment Update be noted.

#### **40. AF&RS ETHNICITY PAY GAP 2022**

The Committee received a report from the Culture & Inclusion Manager (CIM) in respect of the AF&RS Ethnicity Pay Gap 2022.

The 2018 'Ethnicity pay gaps in Great Britain' report by the Office for National Statistics presented analysis of ethnicity pay gaps for the first time using a new earnings weight on the Annual Population Survey, that allowed for more detailed analysis of ethnicity and pay than was previously possible.

The Ethnicity Pay Gap is calculated as the difference between the average hourly earnings of White British ethnicity group and other ethnic groups as a proportion of average hourly earnings of White British earnings.

In February, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (WEC) published a report calling on the Government to make ethnicity pay gap reporting mandatory by April 2023 as a first step to addressing pay disparities between employees from different ethnic backgrounds.

Our data analysis shows a negative pay gap of 5.65% between White British and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff compared to a negative pay gap 4.28% from 2021.

The CIM advised that there was a number of reasons for the increase. There were a very small number of minority staff in the Service and any changes especially, at senior levels, would cause a spike in figures. He advised that the Service continued to monitor the pay gap and work within communities to present AF&RS as an employer of choice and to promote and increase minority staff within the organisation. In addition, the numbers of staff were so small, an individual could easily be identified. The CIM advised that for future reports, factors such as age and gender would be considered.

A Member pointed out the paucity of national data (mentioned in paragraph 5.10 of the report) and the issues surrounding the sample size being so small, that there were concerns that individuals could be identified. They queried in the circumstances; how helpful these statistics are. The Clerk confirmed that this was a Service decision to print the data as this was likely to become a statutory requirement. The CIM added that it was more important to increase the number of BAME employees first and then the pay gap analysis would mean more.

The Head of HR reassured Elected Members that corporate employees who joined AF&RS, are placed within the Hay job evaluation system which reviewed factors such as relevant skills, qualifications and knowledge. It is a respected analytical system used internationally by employers. Impact assessments have been undertaken by Hay to ensure that any potential for bias are eliminated (including equal assessment of traditional male/female job roles, for example). On occasion, employees don't put themselves forward for promotion opportunities and AF&RS need to make sure that Line Managers are trained to actively encourage minority groups to compete for such processes and recognise the different skills and experiences they may bring.

A Member referred to low confidence when applying for promotion, adding that Line Managers should actively encourage staff to put themselves forward.

Another Member added that the Service needed to keep pace with the changing demographics within the country and also our own local data within Avon. They added that there was always a changing picture and we needed to make changes and show that we are doing this.

**It was RESOLVED –  
That the Committee noted the contents of this report.**

#### **41. QUARTERLY TRAINING UPDATE**

The Group Manager, Learning & Development (L&D), provided an update on Operational Training and Organisational Development.

The key points highlighted were:

### **Training Delivery**

1. Breathing Apparatus (BA) - The previous qualification shortfalls and the remedial work to close the report presented at the last PCC meeting had been completed by 30 November. However, this was now on hold due to IA training. An agreed plan to clear the BA backlog by 1 March 2023, subject to changes relating to the impact of IA work, had been set.
  - 7 Breathing apparatus courses had been cancelled.
  - The total loss of delivery had affected 70-84 staff.
  - It was projected that by 31 December, there would be 41 out of date BA wearers across the Service.
  - By 28 February, it was projected that there would be 68 out of date BA wearers.

However, an additional 2 training courses had been planned which should limit the number of out-of-date BA wearers to 48 by the end of February.
2. Industrial Action/Reserve Firefighter Training - Training Delivery had developed and provided ongoing work to train and assure resilience staff and had stopped all planned business as usual training until 1 January 2023. This was to facilitate and release staff and to also provide capacity to deliver courses for Reserve Firefighters.
3. Tall Buildings Training - Phase 2 tall building training from Training Delivery was now completed.
4. Severn Park - The latest On-Call (OC) training school had completed, with five new staff now on the run at their respective stations. A second OC training school was underway which would complete in December and a further training school was planned to be delivered from November/January (seven delegates).
5. Hazardous Detection, Identification and Monitoring (HDIM) - The Driver Training Unit had been asked to prioritise driver conversions for the HDIM vehicle for operators, as due to promotions and retirements the Service currently had a limited number of drivers, although the shortfall gap was decreasing. A number of multi-agency exercises were planned for 2023 which would test the organisation's assets and skillset.
6. Joint Decontamination Exercises - A series of six Chemical, Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) exercises were being planned for February/March 2023, which would test the Service's joint response to a hazardous material release scenario. This would involve fire appliances, Incident Response Unit, CBRN tactical advisors, National Interservice Liaison Officers (NILO) and Hazardous Materials Advisors, along with a multi-agency response.
7. Marauding Terrorist Action (MTA) and Malicious Threats - Priorities in this field revolved around training, competence and personal protective equipment (PPE). Most of the four watches at Hicks Gate had completed refresher training for MTA, along with members of station 17 Clevedon. There were some remaining staff who will require MTA training along with new NILO members. It was noted that the phase 2 findings from the Manchester bombings had been released.

8. Rescue Boat - Tidal rescue boat training commenced in mid-August and would ensure that AF&RS complied with the NFCC recent release of the Rescue Boat Code. As at 31 October, the Service had thirty-one trained Rescue Boat Operators (SFRBO) and it was projected that by the end of November this number would have risen to fifty-three. Training continued to bolster resilience with commencement of initial acquisition courses for new operators.
9. Technical Rope Rescue - Training would commence in January to upskill Station 11 Hicks Gate Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) personnel in Technical Rope Rescue. Training as 'team members' would enable them to set up and operate systems to back up Station 09 Temple providing resilience within the organisation by March 2023.
10. Apprenticeships – The Service currently had 47 Firefighter apprentices, all from the last 2 Wholetime Recruit Schools, who were now on station and had an assessor appointed from Weston College. The Service had begun to recruit more corporate apprentices into the service as it was increasingly difficult to fill vacancies with experienced/skilled staff.
11. Personal Development Reviews (PDR) – The Service was in the process of purchasing a new PDR system, which would enable us to centrally quality assure PDRs. Funding had been agreed by SLT, and the system would be from the same provider but with increased functionality.
12. Promotions - The promotion policy had been recently revised to include a process for Control Staff, which mirrored the process for operational staff.
13. Leadership Academy Plans were in place to launch AF&RS' Leadership Academy in April 2023. The Academy would enable the Service to identify talented staff, develop their leadership skills and encourage them to further their career into a leadership role.
14. Members were advised that Operational Assurance (OA) was a new area of the report which was recently agreed by the SLB. A £300k one time investment (until April 2024) in Operational Assurance (OA) had been provided to enhance the team staffing by six staff to take the team to an establishment of sixteen. This would ensure that the following four responsibilities could be delivered:
  - Operational Guidance
  - Operational Learning
  - Incident Command Training
  - Fast Operational Learning.

**Operational Guidance** – The team were undertaking recruitment for two additional staff to deliver full alignment with the National Operational Guidance (NOG). There were 49 Operational Information Notes still awaiting review and publication, with eleven being processed this month. Prior to 31 December, the team would be reviewing all operational policies to ensure that they were fully aligned to NOG. For example, working with Learning & Development to focus and radically change our behaviour to incident contaminants, to create a better response and reduce impact of contaminants to our staff. In addition, the team would introduce a 'clean cab' policy, invest heavily to clean Breathing Apparatus sets post incident and updated our frontline appliances so that dirty equipment was not kept in cabs.

**Operational Learning** – Currently operating with no staff, with a recruitment process underway. However, the Service was still able to respond to key risks and provide operational debriefs.

15. Incident Command Training - Currently 11 AF&RS commanders were out of date for command competence. These would be re-assessed as part of ongoing 'business as usual'. The team had delivered a Station Managers 'Managing Incident' course and would run promotion assessments for the five candidates in this process.

A Member enquired about Heavy Rescue. The Group Manager advised that AF&RS were leaders in this sector, to rescue entrapment from casualties from vehicles larger than a domestic car. To rescue from this size of vehicle, technical and equipment knowledge was increased, and skillsets becomes more complex specially to ensure that conditions are safe. The Service had rescue pumps at four key stations. Avonmouth was a specialist heavy rescue station and had a dedicated standalone 'tender' which carried large equipment.

Dave Roberts, Regional Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Health & Safety Representative then spoke to Members and provided an update on contaminates and a working group that AF&RS had set up. He added that it was good to see a forward motion in this area.

He advised that for the last 3 years the FBU been working with the University of Central Lancashire to understand the link between fire contaminates and cancer, and how to protect firefighters and their families. In Canada and Australia, the link between contaminates and cancer had been researched and proven and firefighters were now offered a greater degree of protection.

The FBU had commissioned the University to carry out the first UK study into cancer and fire contaminates to ensure firefighters receive better protection. The study tried to understand long-term health effects and propose recommendations.

It was advised that when the research had been concluded, it was debated in the House of Commons who gave explicit direction that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was to monitor progress of the FBU's research and provide assistance in implementing the recommendations.

It was quoted that firefighters were 4 times more likely to get cancer, which has been linked directly to contaminates released during fires. Contaminates could be inhaled/absorbed through skin and risk is increased when body temperature increases. Helmets and dirty kit could be overlooked on station and can on occasion not be cleaned thoroughly. Evidence showed that skin, head and neck cancer was more common in firefighters.

In June 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, finalised their evaluation of Carcinogenicity of Occupational Exposure as a firefighter, which was classed as Carcinogenic Group 1 based on sufficient evidence.



AF&RS were commended for their pro-active approach, which would contribute to a change in culture to a healthier workforce. The HSE are taking a keen eye on this through the NFCC.

In response to Member's questions, it was clarified that:

1. In respect of fire retardants used in the 1970s, any manmade coating applied to provide fire retardancy in its latent state is fine, but when its molecular structure was changed by fire, organic compounds could be released.
2. AF&RS could do more to improve the situation but are doing considerably more than some other Fire & Rescue Services (FRS). More could be done going forward, whilst the FBU appreciated the financial restraints, evidence seen from the working groups, showed the approach was moving in the right direction. The Head of HR added that firefighters had an occupational health provision and part of the process is 'health surveillance' which included looking at lung function and skin tests. This is undertaken every 3 years but for those that have a greater risk this would be undertaken annually.
3. In respect of testing retired employees', the Head of HR confirmed that this care would default to the NHS. Often firefighters who leave remain members of the Retired Firefighters Association and FBU.
4. The FBU added that the piece of research commissioned, looked to protect firefighters in the 'here and now' but were looking to get presumptive legislation within the sector. Therefore, if a firefighter contracted a cancer which is linked to firefighting, it would be presumed that there was a direct employment occupation link.
5. That the Service does not provide help for retired staff. It was asked given the potential link, whether the AFA should contact retired firefighters GPs to advise them of the potential link to cancer and provide NHS screening prior to the development of symptoms. The Clerk advised that this issue should be taken offline as the Service is considering more awareness work for retired firefighters.
6. That a lot of research has been done into the level of risk that a firefighter is exposed to. The FBU advised that research had shown that wearing of BA protected respiratory tracts, but many cancers are through dermal absorption. Laundering of PPE and stopping cross contamination is key and involved a huge cultural shift. Firefighters are now becoming more aware and increasing the frequency of laundering PPE.
7. Avon FRS were performing better than other FRSs. The FBU advised that there was limited recommendation or guidance received from NFCC. Many FRSs had financial constraints and in view of collaboration, would wait to see the action taken by neighbouring FRS, and then implement suitable actions themselves. The GM Learning and Development advised that Avon was willing to adopt tactics and procedures to protect ourselves. Culture was a major factor to ensure firefighters frequently washed equipment and showered. The Service had invested heavily in equipment and the way we operated on the fireground.

**It was RESOLVED –**

**That the Learning & Development Quarterly Report was noted.**

## 42. DICE STRATEGY (2022/2025) UPDATE

The Committee received a report of the CIM to provide a progress update on the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) strategy for 2019/22.

The key points highlighted included:

1. The DICE unit was in the process of recruiting new staff members to the team. The impact of being under-resourced over the past 11 months had significantly impacted on the ability for the CIM to consistently deliver against the existing DICE Strategy objectives and actions. However, the Service was now engaged with 40 key organisations and was continuing to network with others.
2. The DICE Strategy review was complete but had not been through a consultation process with key stakeholders.
3. DICE had worked proactively with the Transformation team and HR to review the Dignity and Respect Policy and Zero Tolerance statement, both which were now complete and ready for final approval and sign off. The Equality Policy was next in line for review in early 2023.
4. The CIM was working in partnership with Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) to produce face to face DICE awareness training. This training was due to be rolled out in early 2023. This pilot DICE training package will also be used for the next phase of face-to-face DICE training for Watch Managers and Crew Managers.
5. The DICE e-learning would be launched shortly and would be mandatory.
6. The DICE strategy going forward would focus on the results of the Cultural Survey, Industrial Action and actions from the HMICFRS inspections. Bullying, harassment and prejudice were key issues which needed to be addressed and were not issues that could be quickly resolved. The CIM added that the Service needed to identify multiple behaviours and work on key interventions on station and to raise importance of embedding the DICE culture. The CIM had also completed training with new recruits including control and for those promoted from firefighter role to crew managers.

The Clerk clarified the recommendation and pointed out that the Strategy was still in draft form and Members were not being asked to approve it for publication today, as it had not yet gone through a consultation process.

The Chair advised that he had consulted with the Chair of the Fire Authority and Clerk and would like Members of AFA to also complete the e learning in 2023.

A Member asked about building links with organisations outside of Bristol. He appreciated that the CIM was building the team but asked about progress made. The CIM advised that he had created a Community Engagement DICE Officer role who will be based out in the community and the role would cover working with key community leaders over the 4 Unitary Areas. The role would also help drive improvements within stations and use census data to help identify key areas such as age, refugees etc.

Elected Members were keen that community engagement should include areas outside of Bristol (such as Bradley Stoke). The Head of HR explained that the Service had a register of approximately 70 community groups who we regularly engaged with. Members were asked to inform us of their local community groups so that we can be sure that they are included within the register.

**It was RESOLVED –**

**That the report and the draft DICE Strategy (2022/2025) were noted.**

#### **43. RECRUITMENT OF STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER**

The Committee received a report from the Clerk which outlined that the AFA needed to recruit and appoint a Statutory Finance Officer to be AFA's principal financial adviser and chief financial officer as required under Section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The People and Culture Committee had considered a restricted paper at their meeting on 5 October 2022 regarding the appointment of an interim Treasurer support to cover sickness absence. The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO/CE) had appointed an interim Treasurer under his Scheme of Delegation for a period of six months up to 21 March 2023. That appointment was ratified by the People & Culture Committee, who had also delegated authority to the CFO/CE to extend the 6-month arrangements beyond March 2023, should that be necessary.

At the same meeting, Committee Members were informed that the Treasurer had resigned with effect from 31 December 2022. In the light of this development, the Committee decided to recommend to the Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting taking place later that same day, that it should 'determine' under the Officer Employment Procedure Rules to undertake a recruitment process for a new Statutory Officer.

The Clerk drew Members attention to the selection process and timeline set out in paragraph 5.3.

The recommendation was moved by Cllr Wilcox and seconded by Cllr Davies.

**It was RESOLVED that the Committee–**

- a) Endorsed the advertisement and Job Description for the role of Statutory Finance Officer which, following approval of those documents by Members of this Committee by email, were publicised on 5 December 2022.
- b) Noted and approved the proposed recruitment process and timeline.

#### **44. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**It was RESOLVED – that the date of the next meeting be held on 3 March 2023 at 10.30am.**

#### **45. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The recommendation was moved by Cllr Wilcox and seconded by Cllr Davies.

**It was RESOLVED –**

**“That the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items of business on the grounds that they contained exempt information pursuant to Schedule 12A, Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972, and that in accordance with Schedule 12A, Part 2, paragraph 10 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.”**

#### **46. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022**

It was moved by Cllr Wilcox and seconded by Cllr Jacobs that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

**It was RESOLVED -**

**That the confidential ordinary minutes of the People & Culture Meeting held on 5 October 2022 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.**

#### **47. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE PANEL HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2022**

It was moved by Cllr Wilcox and seconded by Cllr Bromley that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

**It was RESOLVED -**

**That the confidential ordinary minutes of the People & Culture Meeting Panel held on 5 October 2022 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.**

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Chair

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm.