



AVON FIRE AUTHORITY PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE MINUTES

3 MARCH 2023

MINUTES OF MEETING

PRESENT: Cllrs Bromley, Hopkinson, Massey, Monk (joined at 10.35hrs), Tucker, Varney and Wilcox (Chair).

The meeting started at 10.30am

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Davies and Jacobs.

49. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES

The emergency evacuation procedures were explained.

50. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

51. PUBLIC ACCESS

None received.

52. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Members and Officers introduced themselves.

1. The Chair confirmed that the meeting would take place at Police & Fire Headquarters. 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.
3. The Clerk advised that the report for the Annual Review of Remuneration for the Chief Fire Officer (CFO/CE) was not on the agenda. The reason for this was that there had been no national settlement for gold book pay for January 2022

or January 2023 and therefore it was felt appropriate to delay this paper until the national pay award was belatedly announced.

4. The Chair advised that this would be the last People & Culture meeting for Cllrs Davies, Bromley and Jacobs. They were thanked for their time and commitment and were wished well for the future.

53. MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2022

It was moved by Cllr Wilcox 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 9 December 2022 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

54. 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 training school commenced on 6 February 2023 with 24 Trainee Firefighters. The induction phase was completed with Trainee Firefighters receiving input from Human Resources, Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE), Health Safety Welfare & Wellbeing, Prevention & Protection and other key departments across the Service to provide them with support and an awareness of important Service priorities. Members were advised that it was important that employees understood the aspects of Health & Safety and how to report any incidents. The role of a firefighter also included prevention and protection and the recruits had been trained on the importance of this part of the role and when going out into our communities.

The trainees had now commenced the theoretical and physical aspects of the course and would have regular assessments throughout. Elected Members would be invited to attend the passing out ceremony.

Planning was underway for the 2023 recruitment campaign which would launch on 10 March 2023. Candidates who were unsuccessful in the last campaign would be invited to re-apply and additional advice and support given to help with their preparation and application. The selection process would take place over the spring and summer with the training course starting later in the year. Members were advised that it was difficult to advise how many vacancies would be available, due to the uncertainty over how many current staff would retire but a second training school would be considered. Update to follow in a later meeting along with diversity and inclusion.

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, which closed on 30 January 2023.

Pay negotiations remained ongoing during this period at a national level. On 8 February a revised pay offer of 7% effective from 1 July 2022 and a further 5% effective from 1 July 2023 was offered. The FBU Executive Council recommended to their members on 10 February that this offer should be accepted. A consultative ballot would take place from 20 February to 6 March to determine if the pay deal will be accepted. The industrial action planning would continue during this period.

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. If the pay offer was accepted, the reserves would be a valuable resource to call upon and the training would not have been wasted as there was a duty to maintain a statutory response to members of the public.

Review of employment cases

Action had been taken to assess the recommendations made following the London Fire Brigade cultural review to educate our cultural improvement actions and objectives. In addition, the Service had provided information on current and recent cases to HMICFRS as part of a national review. The work undertaken would also be supplemented by recent media reports detailing cultural issues within other Fire & Rescue Services

As part of our ongoing cultural improvement activity, the Service was undertaking a review of employment investigations and disciplinary cases over the past 18 months. This review would be supported by externally appointed experts to assess the decisions taken, lessons to be learned and identify any changes required to our policies and practices. The findings would be fed back to the Service Leadership Board (SLB) and Members would be updated at a future meeting.

SLB and the Service Leadership Team (SLT) were conducting a regular programme of Station and workplace visits. Culture would be a topic of discussion at every meeting to ensure everyone is clear on expectations and appropriate action was taken at every level within the Service to identify and address issues. The CFO had recently written to all female employees, confirming the need to make sure people had contacts across the Service, could speak to people and that action would be taken. The Head of HR added that it was important that all employees understood zero tolerance and had supportive colleagues and managers which enabled the Service to deal with any incidents at the earliest opportunity. A full update would be provided at the next People & Culture meeting.

The Dignity and Respect policy was launched in December 2022 and the Service was also looking at providing a toolkit for employees and line managers along with a confidential reporting tool into HR.

Implementing an external reporting tool had been considered, as for various reasons, staff don't feel able to raise an issue within the organisation. Colleagues may not feel comfortable to speak to the Head of HR or her team. The Service is reaching out to other organisations to see if they have had success with this system.

The Head of HR advised that she had produced her report prior to listening to the recent interviews on Radio 4. The Service was concerned, as incidents in the national press could have an impact on upcoming recruitment. Case studies from female staff were on the Service website to encourage recruitment and which also included positive experiences.

Employee Wellbeing

A revised attendance management policy was issued in December 2022, based upon national best practice supported by the National Fire Chief Council. A toolkit had been provided and training undertaken with junior managers which outlined the importance of contacting staff when off sick.

A new Occupational Health provider was introduced in November 2022. The initial indications were that this service had provided invaluable medical support and advice for employees and managers. The new counselling provider was also introduced in December and to date eight staff have been supported for a range of issues including trauma, anxiety, loss of confidence and family/personal issues. This was a confidential service which employees can access directly. The sessions were funded by Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS). A new physiotherapy contract would be introduced in February 2023 and would be publicised to staff to ensure they are aware of the support available.

The Head of HR advised that the Service offered proactive health and preventative options such as flu vaccinations – reimbursement for the cost of the vaccination was offered to staff under the age of 50. It was confirmed that sickness targets were being reviewed for next year, and which currently stood slightly above average. This review would include how HR could help and support staff and managers and to ensure that they were having appropriate early conversations.

In response to Member's questions:

1. It was noted that the Service was taking proactive steps to address any damage caused by the press articles and it was asked that a confidential anonymous service could be explored for staff. The Assistant Fire Chief, Service Delivery Support (ACFO (SDS)) explained that the culture in the fire sector was of importance to SLB. The CFO had recently written to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlighting the good work the Service has completed (a copy was passed to Members). It was confirmed that the ACFO and SLB shared the Member's concerns and were looking into sourcing a suitable system and the costs involved. The Head of HR confirmed that in the absence of a recognised procedure, HR did receive anonymous reports. These sometimes did not contain enough detail, but HR

worked hard to go back to the individual for further information, to support the individual and then address the issues.

2. A Member advised that they were impressed that, although the process is still ongoing, there is a genuine commitment to change the culture at AF&RS and praised the CFO and all involved. It was recognised that there were problems, but they believed that the culture was changing. The ACFO SDS agreed that there was no place for such behaviour in the organisation and fire sector. It should be remembered that the vast majority within the organisation were excellent, really cared and were working hard to address the issues.
3. In respect of flu vaccinations, a Member commended the Service and asked whether onsite vaccinations could be arranged. The Head of HR advised that for those firefighters who worked in water, we did offer Hepatitis vaccinations where a nurse or mobile unit would go out onsite. However, it was found that some of the workforce do not live in the Service area, and it was preferential to visit a local pharmacy which was more convenient. However, this idea was open for review and our Occupation Health supplier did have a mobile unit which we could possibly make use of.
4. It was confirmed that there is a low level of drop out from the training school - 1 recruit last year. The trainers work with the trainees to ensure that they graduated but also the selection process was so rigorous, that all candidates selected had the ability to complete the training school.
5. The ACFO SDS added that over the past few weeks, he had been reassured and pleased that staff from underrepresented groups were feeling more confident to voice their concerns to him. He felt that there may still be a gap for those who did not want to come forward, and it was important that the Service bridged that gap. The Head of HR mentioned the important work that AF&RS and HR had completed in respect of allyship e.g., an only female in a workforce might feel reluctant to come forward as did not want to jeopardise her role. It was added that a colleague should not be solely reliant on identifying an issue themselves but having colleagues around them that supported others.

**It was RESOLVED –
That the HR & Recruitment Update be noted.**

55. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24

The Clerk presented the report to Members which outlined that the Fire Authority was required under the Localism Act 2011 to prepare an annual Pay Policy Statement. This stated the Fire Authority's policy towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce and in particular the senior staff and the lowest paid employees.

Under the Localism Act 2011, Pay Policy Statements must be prepared for each financial year, approved by the full Fire Authority, and published before 31 March, immediately preceding the financial year to which it related. No substantive changes were proposed from last year's Statement.

As an employer of 250 or more staff, the Fire Authority is also obliged to comply with gender pay gap reporting in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017. As a public authority, the Fire Authority must publish its pay gap information after the 'snapshot date' of 31 March each year (and within 12 months of that snapshot date). It is intended to present the Gender Pay Gap Information, combined with a voluntary Ethnicity Pay Gap Report, to the People and Culture Committee meeting in June 2023.

It was noted that Avon Fire Authority was a 'real living wage' employer which paid more than the Government's national living wage.

It was confirmed that the starting salary of new recruit firefighter was approx. £24k raising to £32k (not taking into account the current pay offer). When asked whether the salary was part of the reason why some candidates did not apply for the role, the Head of HR confirmed that 800 applications were received in 2022 and felt that the salary offered was not an issue. The CFO added that a lot of candidates apply for the role not for the salary (some take a salary decrease) but because they want to be a firefighter and serve their communities.

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

It was RESOLVED –

That the Committee

a) Recommended to the Fire Authority approval of the proposed Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 (at Appendix 1).

b) Noted that the Gender Pay Gap report for 2023 would be combined with the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and reported to the next People & Culture Committee meeting after the 'snapshot date' of 31 March 2023.

56. ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

This paper was moved to the first item of the agenda.

The Health, Safety, Welfare, Wellbeing & Fitness (HSWWF) Manager presented the report to Members which covered the reporting period between January & December 2022.

At the time of writing the report, there had been changes within the Health, Safety, Welfare, Wellbeing & Fitness (HSWWF) Department. A new Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) was appointed in autumn 2022 and a new HSWWF Manager started in February 2023. The report also included information on various changes that would be implemented from March 2023 going forward.

The total number of incident reports made via the OSHENS/Wellworker system (all incident types) has increased from 364 in 2021 to 400 in 2022. An increased number of incident reports could indicate an increase in proactive incident reporting among staff e.g., staff were ensuring to report workplace incidents in accordance with the incident reporting procedures.

Near miss and Lost Time Incidents (LTI) reporting

There has been an increase in near miss incidents reported in 2022 with 121 near miss reports compared to 108 in 2021. However, there has been a reduction in LTIs in 2022 in comparison. It was noted that this was encouraging and indicated that our culture showed proactive reporting rather than reactive.

Stress and Mental Health & Wellbeing

An increase in the number of work-related stress incidents was observed between 2021 and 2022. This was a very personal experience and personal factors played a large influence as well.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Training had been delivered to numerous managers and staff across the Service. It had been agreed that this training would now form part of the promotional pathways and business as usual training. Further MHFA courses had been booked in March 2023 with Bath Mind. The Service wanted to invest in its staff by offering the MHFA training and more would be offered going forward.

Plan for 2023

The report listed a brief outline of HSWWF team's plan going forward from March 2023. Priorities for the year and years ahead would be set out in the new HSWWF Strategy by the end of May 2023.

It was noticed that the number of incidents had increased since last year, which explained staff were better aware of reporting procedures. The HSWWF Manager agreed and hoped this was because staff were more aware of how important it was to report incidents on OSHENS/Wellworker.

Due to quality issues with the online connection, it was agreed that Members would submit any further questions to the HSWWF Manager via email to the Clerk.

It was RESOLVED –

That the Committee noted the Annual Health and Safety Report 2022.

57. QUARTERLY TRAINING UPDATE

The Area Manager (AM), Service Delivery Support provided an update on Operational Training and Organisational Development.

The key points highlighted were:

Operational Assurance Update - Guidance

The Service was now aligned to National Operational Guidance and all Standard Operational Procedures (SOP's) had been archived. However, there were currently 32 outstanding Operational Information Notes (OINs) awaiting review and sign off. The deadline for this was originally 31 March but would not be met mainly

due to the Industrial Action project. A new timeline would be provided for the next Committee meeting.

A new Learning Management System (LMS) had been purchased and followed an upgrade to FireWatch which would result in full integration to include the Personal Development Review (PDR) system.

Learning

The new Station Manager for Incident Command had been posted to the Industrial Action team since appointment and therefore had made limited impact. There were a further 3 vacancies across the learning department. The recruitment process has begun but currently had no end date.

Training Delivery

1. The operational training team had been fully engaged in delivering reserve firefighter courses throughout November, December and January.
2. Breathing Apparatus (BA) - Some BA qualifications were still out of date. The Operational Training Team had been working very hard with RPU to schedule additional courses following the disruption caused by reserve firefighter courses. The backlog was being addressed and by the end of March there would only be 7 who had not been offered course dates, which was down from 68 in February. Those staff who are unsuccessful at assessment would be reassessed following a period of development.
3. The 2nd group of 2022 apprentice recruits had just completed their Firefighter in Development (FFiD) module in BA. All 23 passed the weeklong course and had returned to their stations. The team had also continued to run a full development program for the on-call FFiD.
4. Severn Park - The latest apprentice recruits course commenced on the 6 February at Severn Park. The course was due to finish on the 5 May, the graduation is scheduled for Wednesday 3 May. Another course was planned for September which would end in December.
5. Driver Training - A mixture of fire appliance, flexi officer car and reserve firefighter driving courses had been taking place over the last 3 months. Through the microphone system implemented by the team, vicarious learning could take place and instructions could be heard over the engine noise, even when not driving. For a trainee driver, the course has increased from one to two weeks. Feedback continued to be very good.
6. Hazardous and Malicious Threats (HMMT)
 - A series of exercises had taken place throughout January and February with Southwest Ambulance Service Foundation Trust (SWASFT) to test the Marauding Terrorist Attack (MTA) response. The exercises were set up to primarily test the response of SWASFT, AF&RS and MTA teams from Hicks Gate and Clevedon attended the exercises and were integrated into the Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) for the duration of the exercise. Initial feedback had been very good and future exercises were being planned.
 - Working with 2 neighbouring fire and rescue services, SWASFT and Avon and Somerset Police, a series of Chemical Biological Radiological and

Nuclear (CBRN) exercises would take place in Avonmouth during March and April. This would be the first time all 3 services had committed to joint training in this way.

7. Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) - In March, the Service would host 5 USAR teams from the East of England for an annual assurance exercise, taking place at Kemble airfield. The exercise would last for 36 hours and would be continuous. Our team had been fully involved in the planning of the exercise and would assist in assuring the skills of the visiting teams. A return exercise would take place in London during April for our team to attend and have their skills assured.
8. Leadership - The Service would be piloting the new leadership academy this year, to enable it to find and manage our future leaders. A paper went to Service Leadership Board (SLB) on 16 February and a briefing to senior managers would take place on 8 March. This would be an 18-month development programme starting in September. We would introduce a "Developing High Performance Teams" workshops in May and June, for middle managers.

In response to Member's questions:

1. A demonstration of the new PDR software was requested. The AM pointed out that what was most important is the conversation between the Line manager and their staff. Development sessions would be arranged for line managers.
2. It was confirmed that the Service participated in tri-service training at lower levels such as watch and station. Moving forward, it was hoped to increase the training on a regional level, but this could be difficult to co-ordinate.
3. The AM advised that he would contact the co-ordinator to enquire whether a Member could observe a future CPRN exercise.

It was RESOLVED –

That the Learning & Development Quarterly Report was noted.

58. DICE STRATEGY (2022/2025) UPDATE

The Culture and Inclusion Manager outlined that the revised DICE (Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) Strategy 2023/2026 was presented to the People and Culture Committee on 9 December 2022 and was approved pending consultation. Following a short consultation period with a number of heads of departments, revision of the strategy was completed, and had now been published on the Service website and Intranet.

The DICE Strategy would be reviewed annually, and the People and Culture Committee would receive a 6-monthly update report.

A People Services Forum had been recently formed and had a key role in supporting the strategy. This was a real step forward for the Service as it was everybody's concern to ensure those key stakeholders across the organisation would be able to contribute to the successful delivery of our objectives.

The strategy featured in the revised e-learning programme which re-reiterated the need for everyone in the Service to take their part in the strategy. The deadline to complete the learning was 1 March.

The Clerk mentioned that the Committee Chair had agreed to test the e learning on behalf of the Fire Authority, before it was rolled out to all Members. She advised that she had completed the learning and was impressed.

It was advised that DICE training in collaboration with Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI) recently took place at Radstock Fire Station, with good participation and feedback received. The training would be evaluated before the next session take place.

It was noted that a new member of staff had joined the team on 1 March and a Community Engagement DICE Officer would join on 1 April.

In response to Member's questions:

1. Asking for feedback on the training delivered at Radstock fire station, it was advised that the training had been customised to fit on-call stations. There could be a different culture in an on-call station which could be dependent on the area the stations were located in, which could be rural. It was noticed that it could take some time for the culture changes to percolate through to the on-call stations, but changes were taking place.
2. It was confirmed that the final completion figure for the e-learning was not yet known. Learning & Development had provided a weekly report, which was up to 70% completion when last notified.

The Chair of the Fire Authority added that she was pleased with the ongoing work and effort that has been put into the DICE Strategy and Culture as this was an important issue which needed to be resolved.

It was RESOLVED –

That the Committee noted the content of the report and the published DICE strategy for 2023/2026.

59. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was RESOLVED – that the date of the next meeting be held on 30 June 2023 at 10.30am.

60. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

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.”

61. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF THE CFO/CE

The Clerk introduced the paper and explained that the CFO/CEO had prepared Appendix 1, which is his summary of his performance and progress against the objectives set out in his Job Description and also the personal objectives set by Members at their meeting on 18 May 2022.

Chair

The meeting ended at 13.00hrs.