



**AVON FIRE AUTHORITY
PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

4 MARCH 2022

MINUTES OF MEETING

PRESENT: Councillors Bromley, A Brown, Davies, Hopkinson, Massey, Monk, Tucker, Wilcox (Chair).

The meeting started at 10.30am

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jacobs.

43. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES

The emergency evacuation procedures were explained.

44. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

1. With reference to Item 9/ Annual Review of Remuneration of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO/CEO), it was confirmed that all the Service Leadership Board (SLB) Officers and Statutory Officers had a declared interest as their salaries were directly linked to the pay of the CFO.
2. With reference to Item 15, Performance Appraisal of the CFO/CEO, it was confirmed that the item concerned the CFO and would be heard in exempt session.

45. PUBLIC ACCESS

No public access items had been received.

46. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Members and Officers introduced themselves.

1. The Chair confirmed that the meeting would take place as a face-to-face meeting. Due to the continuing need for COVID-19 restrictions no press or public were able to attend in person, the meeting would be recorded and uploaded to the AFA website.
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.

47. MINUTES

Cllr Bromley moved, and Cllr Brown seconded that the Minutes be approved.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the People & Culture Committee 10 December 2021 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

48. HUMAN RESOURCES AND RECRUITMENT UPDATE

The Committee received a report from the Head of HR updating on recruitment, establishment, and succession planning.

The key points emphasised were –

1. After initial disappointment that the Control Operator recruitment process generated only 22 applications for the 6 vacancies, officers had generated further publicity which had increased the applications to 60 with 40 deemed of quality to move forward to the next stage of the selection process.
2. The difficulty recruiting to Corporate Staff (including technical/specialist staff) was a local, regional and national issue and not unique to Avon Fire and Rescue Services (AF&RS). It was in part due to the general level of public sector pay which may be helped by the recent announcement of a national 1.75% pay increase (to be backdated to the 1 April 2021). Market rate supplements and other creative solutions were also explored, where appropriate.
3. The vacancies held had not affected statutory responsibilities, however, there had been some impact on improvement plans where teams had not been resourced as planned.
4. 24 Wholetime Firefighter trainees had started in January 2022 with another 24 due to commence on 25 April 2022. These had been 'on hold' applications. The next campaign was planned to launch at the start of May 2022.
5. Officers continued to work with community stakeholders to publicise vacancies, utilise key recruitment events and maximise online presence. Focus continued to be placed on the identification and removal of barriers for underrepresented groups.
6. Recruitment to 'on call' roles was constantly ongoing with the next training school in August 2022. Staff within stations were excellent at hosting successful events to act as engagement opportunities within the local communities.

7. Succession planning had indicated that 23 operational staff were predicted to retire between 1 January and 31 March 2022. Officers continued to work to ensure resilience including through internal recruitment and promotion opportunities.
8. At the next meeting of the People and Culture Committee (P&C), Officers planned to present an annual update of employment cases over the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. There would also be an update on work around welfare and wellbeing.

Arising from Members questions the following points were clarified:

1. Information derived from exit interviews and processes would be brought to P&C Committee in December 2022 and thereafter, an annual basis. It was important that staff knew how highly the 'exit process' was valued by AF&RS and that valuable information was gathered through the questionnaires and interviews.
2. It was suggested that Avon Fire Authority (AFA) Elected Members could help promote recruitment campaigns and events through their own social media and publicity channels in order to reach more people. Members were asked to confirm which channel of communication would be most appropriate to hear from Officers.
3. With reference to flexible working, Officers confirmed that although the Firefighter and Control Officer roles were geared to a standard shift system and working pattern, the Fire Service continued to work flexibility and use creative solutions to potentially alter the way they operate and continually assess ideas to reduce barriers to roles. The majority of Corporate Staff roles were offered for part time and flexible work patterns.
4. The development of remote working over the last two years had been one positive outcome of the pandemic which had widened the labour market and created different opportunities to fill roles in a more flexible way.
5. With reference to the vacancies among technical roles such as mechanics and electricians, Officers continued to benchmark salaries and look at creative opportunities such as market supplements.
6. The reintroduction of apprenticeship schemes was being considered to help grow talent from the ground up.
7. Requirements of roles were being evaluated to ascertain if any mandatory requirements for roles could be achieved whilst in post.
8. It was ultimately important to ensure the working environment was exemplary to help showcase the benefits of employment within AF&RS.

RESOLVED –

That the update on recruitment, establishment, and succession planning be noted.

49. CULTURAL CHANGE UPDATE 2022

The Committee received a report from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery Support) (ACFO(SDS)) which updated Members on the focus groups to be held from February and March 2022 aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of behaviours, attitudes and motivations in order to assist the targeted improvement process.

Key points highlighted were –

1. The Parliamentary Select Committee ‘State of the Fire and Rescue Services’ recently had mentioned the cultural change and improvement of AF&RS and Sir Tom Windsor paid credit to the “virtually unprecedented” jump of two gradings.
2. Following the quantitative cultural staff survey in summer 2021, key themes had been identified which had been developed into the qualitative use of focus groups. The focus groups would explore key themes to identify where to focus attention to make improvements for the workforce.
3. Quarterly snap surveys would reach out to the organisation for live feedback from staff.
4. Officers were investigating why some staff did not respond to the survey and consider those reasons. It was important to promote the opportunities to engage and give views.
5. An additional element of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) had been embedded from the beginning of training for new Firefighters and the Service continued to work with SARI (Stand Against Racism & Equality) to help engage with new entrants about the cultural journey.
6. Programmes such as Stepping Up and Strive Internship were work experience opportunities with the organisation for people within the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.
7. The online e-learning EDI package was being refreshed and was now mandatory for all new or newly promoted staff.

Arising from Members questions the following points were clarified:

1. Further work would take place to ascertain why the 35% response rate was lower than previous surveys in order to understand if there was a reluctance to engage. Officers reported that some emails had not even been opened but confirmed that reminders had been sent and messages disseminated through line management. Ideas such as incentives for completed responses had not yet been explored.
2. It would be helpful to engage with those who had previously voiced negative experiences to capture their current views and see if they see improvement. It was hoped that this would be captured through the focus groups. For example, those 10 years or more into their employment were an important cohort to engage with.
3. Members of the Committee requested sight of a copy of a blank questionnaire.

4. The CFO highlighted that although the Service would like a higher response rate, the response rate of 70% in the first round had been exceptional and the company engaged to run the survey had indicated that 30% was still a good response compared with the rest of the public sector and the market. The focus groups and programme of work to pulse test the organisation with key issues would capture further information and opinions.

RESOLVED –

That the Cultural Change Update be 2021 be noted.

50. ANNUAL REVIEW OF REMUNERATION OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/ CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Committee received a report of the Clerk which invited the Committee to review the pay of the CFO/CEO and make a recommendation to the Avon Fire Authority (AFA) for approval.

The report, which was presented annually, invited the Committee to make a recommendation to AFA that the CFO/CEO salary for 2022/3 include the National Joint Council (NJC) 2021 1.5% pay increase announced on 24 June 2021. The pay award announcement for January 2022 had not yet been announced.

As outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report, the CFO salary followed conditions of service set out in the Gold Book with one part of two-tiered system being the pay award set nationally by the NJC and the second part which could be awarded locally. The CFO/CEO and Service Leadership Board (SLB) had not requested that a local pay award be pursued.

All Members of the SLB and Statutory Officers were paid a set percentage of the CFO/CEO salary. ACFO Simon Shilton had recently been appointed CFO/CEO for AF&RS from 1 April 2022 following the retirement of the current CFO/CEO.

Under the Localism Act 2011 the AF&RS were required to publish a Pay Policy Statement by 31 March each year which would include the information in the report if agreed.

Arising from Members questions the following points were clarified:

1. Deviation from the NJC award was not in the gift of the Committee. The Committee were specifically being asked to agree not to pursue a local increase to the award at this time.
2. To provide context, Members were advised that the salary had originally been set at an average of all UK CFOs and it had been historically considered appropriate to track the average salary of UK CFOs.
3. Although Officers did not have the figures to hand for how many F&RS had sought a local uplift, an example of local circumstances was given as where

there were differences in the role and responsibilities, such as a CFO who is also a director of the local council.

4. Officers confirmed that AF&RS had 1 x Chief Officer, 2 x Assistant Chief Officers, 1 x Director of Corporate Services and 2 x Statutory Officers supporting the Fire Authority which were the Treasurer and the Clerk/Monitoring Officer.

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Monk.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority that there be no local pay increase in the CFO/CEO's salary

51. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022/23

The Committee received a report which presented the Committee with the proposed Pay Policy Statement for the financial year beginning 1 April 2022 and recommended its approval to the Fire Authority.

The key points highlighted were:

1. The Gender Pay Gap statement would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting in June 2022 following the snapshot date of 31 March 2022.
2. The Pay Policy Statement stated the Fire Authority's policy with regards to a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce and in particular the ratio between the highest and lowest paid employees.
3. The Pay Policy Statement (Appendix A) outlined how the salaries were structured for Chief Officers as per the NJC award (outlined in the previous item on the agenda), the uniformed/operational staff (known as 'Grey Book') and the Corporate Services Staff (known as 'Green Book'). The negotiations for each pay award were considered separately by NJC and announced separately at different times of the year.
4. With reference to page 25 of the pack, the Committee were advised that the remuneration of Corporate Services Staff would be updated as those negotiations had reached agreement on 1 March 2022. The AF&RS had received notification that an agreement had now been reached for a 1.75% pay award backdated to the 1 April 2021. The document would be updated prior to the presentation of the report to the AFA meeting on 30 March 2022 to reflect the updated position.
5. The current ratios between the CFO/CEO and basic pay, competent fire-fighter pay and the lowest paid employee, were outlined on page 30 of the pack

In answer to Members questions the following points were clarified –

1. It was confirmed that although not a statutory requirement under this process, a comparison of BAME pay comparisons and ratios was presented annually to the PRSC.
2. Officers confirmed AF&RS commitment to the Real Living Wage and Voluntary Living Wage and that salaries were not at risk of falling below the latest levels. The report and Pay Policy Statement would be updated to show the current ratios when presented to the AFA on 30 March 2022.
3. The Real Living Wage was currently embedded into the procurement process criteria within AF&RS which meant that the supply chain also met the Real Living Wage obligations.
4. Officers agreed to ensure the website was up to date with regards to the current Gender Pay Gap information.
5. In response to a question, the CFO clarified that a past recommendation within the National Framework from the Secretary of State was that a Fire Authority should fully consider whether they re-appoint or re-engage past employees who had retired. There could be unintended inequities as well as operational implications of this policy, and AF&RS were in the process of re-evaluating their position. It was possible that the current Secretary of State and Home Office may hold a different view now compared to in 2018 and a new framework document and an expected White Paper on Reform of the Fire and Rescue Service may provide more guidance. Members would be kept informed of any relevant information about the White Paper and a report could be brought to the PRSC as appropriate.
6. AF&RS did not have a separate specific target for the ratio between the highest and lowest employed but if there was any concern in the future that could be reviewed.
7. The Chair requested additional information about the number of people on the lowest pay grade and what percentage of employees that was compared to the wider AF&RS.

The report was proposed by Cllr Brown and seconded by Cllr Monk.

RESOLVED –

- a) **Recommend to the Fire Authority approval of the proposed Pay Policy Statement 2022-23 subject to the amendment to reflect the Green Book Pay award and also the additional ratio requested by the Chair.**
- b) **Noted that Gender Pay Gap reporting for 2022 would be reported to the next People and Culture Committee meeting after the ‘snapshot date’ of 31 March 2022.**

52. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING ANNUAL REPORT 2021

The Committee received a report which presented the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021 covering the reporting period between January and December 2021.

Key points emphasised were –

1. There had been a lot of change since 2018 including the departmental structure for Health, Safety and Wellbeing department structure which now included mental health, wellbeing and fitness elements. The team worked closely with HR to ensure that incidents were entered onto the OSHENS/ Wellworker System so that data can be collected and analysed.
2. Figures showed that the total number of incidents reported in 2017 was 301 compared to 364 in 2021. Officers considered that the reason for the increase could be due to an increase of the number of workplace incidents or alternatively, an increase in reporting.
3. Looking at more of a breakdown of data, the number of 'Near Miss Incidents' (incidents which had the potential to have injury and harm) had increased from 64 in 2020 to 108 in 2021. Staff awareness in terms of reporting could have increased which was encouraging from a health and safety perspective and the role of a proactive and preventative reporting structure. Alternatively, it could be surmised that the number of near misses had increased.
4. 'Lost Time Incidents' (LTI) were where staff had incurred illness or injury resulting in at least one day absence from work. From 2017 to 2021 LTI's had decreased from 32 to 24. Less LTI's could be the result of the increase in preventative reporting as root causes have been identified with actions put in place to prevent actual incidents.
5. With reference to stress and mental wellbeing, there had been a 50% decrease in work related stress since 2019 compared to 2021. The 'Start the Conversation, Ask Twice' campaign had been launched to help staff get the right support at the right time.
6. Operational staff were required to complete a fitness test to evaluate aerobic capacity at least once every 12 months. In July 2019 there were 236 members of staff reported as overdue for their test and this had been significantly reduced to 108 at the end of 2021. These tests were recorded on a separate system (Firewatch) which did have administrative limitations and was open to duplication. Officers continued to mitigate those difficulties in order to facilitate accurate reporting.
7. When considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decrease in the total number of incidents in work could be attributed to more people working from home. Welfare referrals had increased during the timeframe.

In answer to Members questions the following points were clarified –

1. Officers and the team were thanked for their hard work in the development of the HR function including Health, Safety and Wellbeing and the improvement in how AF&RS looked after their staff.

2. With regards to the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on staff, it was important to remember that there was likely be a longer term impact of the pandemic on mental health. Members indicated that they would be interested in the report when it returned the following year.
3. The 'Security/Theft' bracket of type of incidents reported related in the main to where equipment had been left at an incident or had gone missing – which meant it may be picked up by another emergency service or by a member of the public.
4. It was difficult to disentangle the triggers and reasons for stress and staff worked to identify potential stressors both inside and outside of the workplace. It was important to ensure that those not feeling 100% were assisted as once in the workplace stress can affect people in different ways.
5. It was confirmed that all figures were reflective of the whole organisation (both operational staff and corporate staff). Operational staff were more likely to feature in 'Near Miss' reporting which was reflective of their work environment and risk environment.

RESOLVED –

That the findings of the report and specifically the incident data and trend analysis detailed within the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021 contained within Appendix 1 be noted.

53. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT QUARTERLEY REPORT

The Committee received a report which provided an update on Operational Training and Organisational Development within AF&RS. The Training Manager outlined the work of the Learning and Development Team to deliver 1700 training events every year.

The following key points were highlighted:

1. Operational training was delivered at two main locations; Hicks Gate Fire Station and Severn Park. Severn Park was in its 20th year of operation and continued to deliver high quality fire and rescue training with partner organisations in controlled environments ensuring regional excellence. Each year financial contribution was converted into training points to be spent at the centre.
2. These courses now followed the apprenticeship model and planning ensured that the recruitment and training strategies were fully aligned.
3. From April 2022, the team at Hicks Gate would deliver the Breathing Apparatus (BA) re-qualifier. The venue provided greater flexibility to arrange short notice courses based on service needs.
4. The Hicks Gate team also provided training for new and emerging themes such as the current course in response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry outcomes.
5. In line with National Operational Guidance, all new drivers would attend a 2-week course, extended from the 1 week. The course would have 80 contact

hours including night driving and there was an aspiration for 100% of firefighters to become qualified drivers.

6. The Organisational Development department provided development opportunities for all Green and Grey Book staff including leadership and management qualifications. Further leadership courses existed through partnerships with the Police and Bristol City Council.
7. Maintenance of Skills and Training (MOST) monitored the competencies whole-time and on-call firefighters must maintain in order to remain competent in role.

In answer to Members questions the following points were clarified –

1. The training venue at Hicks Gate predominantly reacted to new and emerging themes. This did not necessarily mean that other training ceased to make way, but that learning needs and practices evolved as different knowledge and practices were shown to have been embedded in the Service. The requirement to maintain a vast array of skillsets was complicated. Watch based trainers were also utilised to provide training and create capacity within the centralised team.
2. The Navigator and Springboard leadership courses had essentially the same content, however they were focused separately for men and women. It had been found that the segregation often enabled shared learning, challenges and experiences from a perspective of gender.
3. The Fleur Lombard Bursary Trust invested in junior members of staff who had an idea and research area to pursue and bring back to the Service.
4. Currently the aim was for 60% coverage of firefighters to have driver training which usually ensured a driver on any watch at any time. A lesson from experiences during COVID-19 pandemic had led to an increased aspiration of 100%.

RESOLVED –

That the quarterly Learning and Development report be noted.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would take place on 9 June 2022 at 10.30am, venue to be confirmed.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair moved, Cllr Davies seconded and it was:

RESOLVED - that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items of business on the grounds that they contain 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.

Cllr Davies left the meeting before the exempt session.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm

Chair