

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

21st October, 2013, at 10.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Chambers (Chair);
Councillor Spence (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Eustace, Tranter, Wright and Young.

Apology: Councillor Hogarth.

26/13 **Suky Suthi-Nagra**

Members requested that their good wishes be conveyed to Suky on her absence due to maternity leave.

27/13 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th September, 2013 be approved as a correct record.

28/13 **Equality and Diversity Quarterly Update**

Further to Minute No. 22/13 (16th September, 2013), the Committee received a quarterly Equality and Diversity update. The report outlined the key differences between the new and old Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Equality and Diversity Framework of which the Authority was at the Achieving level; the three levels being Developing, Achieving and Excellence.

The report made recommendations on actions that would align the Equality and Diversity work to The Plan, whilst responding to the changes under the revised Excellence level of the FRS Equality Framework. It outlined the plans to meet the annual reporting requirements under the Specific Duties of the Equality Act 2010.

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The report also gave an overview of the Service's current progress with regard to the published WMFS Equality Objectives 2012-2015.

It was noted that under the revised Framework:-

- There was specific reference to community needs reflected in the Integrated Risk Management Plan;
- The language and style of the revised Framework areas reflected current approaches such as referring to 'what is the Equality story';
- The performance indicators related to clear equality outcomes;
- There was less repetition between equality indicators throughout the document.

Overall the revised FRS Equality and Diversity Framework had shifted emphasis to become more outcome focused around the needs of local communities. This was particularly reflected in the changes in the key policy themes. In view of the changes proposed under the revised Equality Framework, the Service would be required to review its current Equality Objectives.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Equality and Diversity Manager on how Equality Objectives were being progressed through a number of themes, particularly: accountability, leadership and inclusion, prevention protection and response, employment and training, evaluation and good practice.

Members were informed of the work around the outcomes of the Marmot Review and what evidence was needed to be considered for Marmot status, which would officially recognise the contribution the Service made within the health and wellbeing agenda in local communities, alongside the broader community safety agenda.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Equality and Diversity Manager for her presentation.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that the changes to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Framework led by the Local Government Association and Chief Fire Officers' Association be supported;
- (2) that a review be undertaken of the Equality Objectives in view of the changes to the Equality and Diversity (E&D) Framework and gap analysis against the Excellence level of the revised Framework;
- (3) that the overview of the Service's current progress against the existing West Midlands Fire Service Equality Objectives be endorsed.

29/13

Interim Findings of the Public Consultation Review of the Community Safety Strategy 2013-2016

The Chair presented the interim findings of the Public Consultation Review of the Community Safety Strategy 2013-2016.

The Committee had established a working group to take forward and gather evidence for the review, supported by officers and various witnesses in order to ensure that the group received relevant information. The group had met on 24th June, 15th July and 9th September, 2013.

The group had concluded that there were gaps in targeting vulnerable groups. The Service was not required to undertake public consultation on the Community Safety Strategy until 2016. In order to do justice to the work of the group, it was felt that more time was needed to enable the working group, the Community Fire Safety Team (once its restructure was implemented) and Corporate Communications to continue to analyse stakeholder findings to identify any further gaps in targeting the Service's key audience, in conjunction with local Command areas. It was envisaged that this work would be completed in the spring of 2014.

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The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the members of the working group for their valuable contributions on the Public Consultation Review of the Community Safety Strategy 2013-2016 and for the good working relationships that had been developed as the Review had progressed.

The Committee also made the following comments:-

- that whilst members had felt there had been a poor public participation response, this was not as bad as they first thought;
- that the implementation of the findings would be the best indicator of what progress was being made;
- that a further update be made to the Committee in three months' time.

The recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee would be considered for approval by the Executive Committee at its meeting to be held on 4th November, 2013.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the interim findings of the Public Consultation Review of the Community Safety Strategy 2013-2016, and the interim recommendations arising from the review, as set out in the Appendix, be approved;
- (2) that the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair and/or Vice-Chair, amend the report to include the recommendations and comments now made by the Scrutiny Committee to ensure accuracy and clarity;
- (3) that on the completion of Resolution (2) above, the Monitoring Officer make the necessary arrangements and submit the interim findings and recommendations of the Public Consultation Review for consideration by the Executive Committee at its meeting to be held on 4th November, 2013.

30/13

Scrutiny Review of Firefighter Recruitment Processes Used at West Midlands Fire Service

The Committee considered a draft scoping document for the proposed review of the Firefighter Recruitment Processes used at West Midlands Fire Service.

A recruitment exercise had recently been undertaken by the Fire Service to appoint 55 Firefighters. The Committee would receive a report on the processes used by the Service to recruit Firefighters from all backgrounds and would investigate where any improvements could be made to the process for future firefighter recruitment campaigns.

The scoping document outlined the rationale, aims, objectives and methodology of the proposed review and the support that would be provided to the Working Group set up to review the Firefighter Recruitment Processes used at West Midlands Fire Service.

It was thought that the new recruits should be asked for their perceptions of the process. The Director HR reported that structured questionnaires had been supplied to all new candidates involved with the recent recruitment exercise, whether successful or not.

The Committee felt that definitive information was required concerning each stage of the recruitment process, but realised that logistically not everyone who applied for a position (there were approximately 5000 initial applications for the recent recruitment exercise) could progress to the stages involving testing.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a review of the Firefighter Recruitment Processes used at West Midlands Fire Service, as set out in the scoping document, be approved;
- (2) that the Firefighter Recruitment Processes used at West Midlands Fire Service Working Group comprise of Councillors Chambers, Spence, Tranter, Wright and Young;

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- (3) that this and all future scrutiny reviews be allocated a nominated lead officer from the Fire Service and that for this Review this would be Joanne Simmonds, HR Manager.

31/13 **Work Programme 2013/14**

The Committee noted its work programme for 2013/2014. The Clerk would incorporate any actions from today's meeting into the programme. Members noted that the work programme needed to be flexible and led by common sense.

32/13 **John Robb**

The Committee noted that after 13 years with the Fire Service, this was the last meeting that John Robb, Performance Improvement Manager, would attend. Members thanked John for his work on behalf of the Committee and wished him well for the future.

(Meeting ended at 11.10 am)

Contact Officer: Rosemary Jones Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3896

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Appendix

**Interim Public Consultation Review of the Community Safety Strategy
2013-2016 Recommendations**

Recommendation		Responsible Officer/Member
1.	To create awareness of the stakeholder analysis project and desired outcomes with key internal stakeholders such as Operations Commanders, the Community Safety Team and key frontline personnel.	Community Safety, Corporate Communications
2.	To identify the existing stakeholder engagement with community groups and third sector organisations throughout the Command areas and to map against the demographic profile and vulnerable people profile.	Community Safety, Equality and Diversity
3.	To ascertain the quality of stakeholder engagement and to consider if this is proportionately appropriate with regards to the demographic profile and needs of that community group.	Equality and Diversity, Corporate Communications
4.	That where there is a gap in intelligence in relation to stakeholder engagement, to establish contact and ascertain the needs of the community and determine whether these needs align with West Midlands Fire Service's objectives set out in 'The Plan'.	Community Safety, Equality and Diversity, Corporate Communications
5.	To identify any gaps that the Service needs to consider with regard to their community engagement and to provide recommendations for Area Commanders to consider.	Community Safety, Corporate Communications
6.	That Area Commanders work with the Equality and Diversity and Corporate Communications Teams in order to determine the priorities within the public consultation work and to agree an action plan to close the gaps, to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for approval.	Operations, Equality and Diversity, Corporate Communications

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Recommendation		Responsible Officer/Member
7.	That a delivery programme of local actions to address any gaps in stakeholder engagement for future public consultation processes is implemented with periodic reviews and measures against desired outcomes.	Equality and Diversity, Corporate Communications
8.	That the format of future consultation questions be reviewed so that they are more open, do not lead the respondent and are not repetitive in nature.	Corporate Communications
9.	That a focus group/user group be established to receive customer feedback on potential questions, to reframe questions used in the 2012/13 consultation and to identify key people for future public consultation exercises, for e.g. community group leaders.	Corporate Communications
10.	That Section 41 members liaise with elected members from their respective councils and that Section 41 members be involved in future consultation exercises as they have a key network of contacts and can promote local events.	Section 41 members
11.	To undertake comparative exercises on how consultation is carried out in other fire authorities and local authorities, including performance and methodology.	Corporate Communications
12.	To continue to build “warm” relationships with the media, senior officers and Section 41 members.	All
13.	To analyse who regularly Tweets on the Fire website in order to target them on future consultation exercises.	Corporate Communications

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Recommendation		Responsible Officer/Member
14.	To use various promotional events at local fire stations to engage with the community and use station personnel to promote the public consultation process and build upon their local community links.	All
15.	To build a database of contact details of members of the public who are interested in being consulted in future public consultation exercises providing the Service gives respondents clear reasons for collecting their contact details.	Corporate Communications
16.	To undertake any further work to ascertain why there was a low online response rate to public consultation, in particular, analysing whether the use of more closed questions would be more effective.	Corporate Communications