

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

5 November, 2012, at 1.15pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

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

13/12 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September, 2012, be approved as a correct record.

14/12 **Analysis of Progress of Corporate Performance against ‘The Plan’ – Quarter 1 2012/13**

The Committee received details of performance against targets set out in ‘The Plan’ for the first quarter of 2012/13 in a number of areas:

- Performance indicators for corporate objectives relating to operational functions, health and safety, and human resources;
- Strategic objectives as outlined in ‘The Plan’;
- Progress against Programmes and Projects; and
- Corporate Risk.

Most of the targets were being met or exceeded. A commentary was provided on areas where targets had not been met and on various questions raised by members on the detail of the report.

The Committee noted that the target with regard to the number of home safety checks carried out had not been met and emphasised the importance of prevention work. Members were informed that fire prevention continued to be a key part of the service. A points system had been introduced to target the checks to vulnerable people but the system was generating lower numbers than had been expected. An officer task and finish group was evaluating the points system so that it

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better reflected risk. The Committee also noted that expenditure to date on the fitting of fire alarms appeared to indicate less activity in this area.

With regard to the objective that the make-up of the organisation reflected its local communities, members noted that the overall assessment should indicate that targets were not being met in relation to increasing the percentages of employees with a disability, women fire-fighters, and employees from ethnic minority communities. Members were aware that there was currently a freeze on recruitment, and asked what plans were being put in place to be ready for when recruitment resumed in order to improve performance on these indicators. The Committee was informed that the aim was to work with young people who would be coming into the job market in five years' time. Positive action was also being taken to develop the current workforce to enable progression.

The Committee was satisfied that the level of information contained in the report was appropriate to allow them to scrutinise performance but asked for assistance with acronyms.

Resolved:

- (1) that a report be submitted to the next meeting on work to be undertaken to improve performance against targets for the number of employees with a disability and from ethnic minority communities and the number of women firefighters in readiness for when recruitment resumed;
- (2) that a breakdown of the gender and ethnicity of members of the Young Firefighters' Association to be sent to all members of the Committee for information;
- (3) that a report be submitted to the next meeting on the evaluation of the home fire safety check points system together with information on activity against spend on the fitting of fire alarms;
- (4) that acronyms in future reports be expanded for the assistance of members.

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15/12 The Bradford Factor – Managing Sickness Absence

Further to Minute No 9/12 (Analysis of Progress against Corporate Performance), the Committee received a report with regard to the Bradford Factor, which was a means of measuring the level of sickness absence of individual employees and indicating the impact of short term absence on an organisation. Use of the technique could, however, lead to staff disaffection and grievances. The majority of sickness within the Service was long term in nature which did not lend itself to use of the Bradford Factor. This measure did not take into account the nature of the work carried out, and it could impact more on low paid/female employees and those with disabilities which increased the incidence of short term sickness.

Current arrangements for the management of attendance within the Service were outlined. They were based on good line management with appropriate intervention and working with an employee to facilitate their return to work through the management of attendance policy. The report set out a number of recommended actions to improve employee attendance including health promotion and health and safety activity; flexible working to support work-life balance; encouraging good and open relationships between managers and their staff; and use of management information systems to manage and monitor sickness levels.

The Committee was satisfied that the current level of sickness absence met performance targets and that the measures being employed by the Service were appropriate and sufficient. The Committee was reassured that appropriate training, advice and information were available to managers to enable them to carry out their role in the process.

Resolved:

- (1) that the information about the Bradford Factor be noted;
- (2) that the use of the measures outlined in the report to improve employee attendance be endorsed.

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16/12 Operational Assessment Improvement Register

Further to Minute No 85/12 of the Authority [24 September 2012], the Committee noted the content of the Operational Assessment Improvement Register. The Improvement Register set out progress in addressing areas for consideration outlined in the Peer Challenge Report produced following the Operational Assessment of the Service carried out between May and July 2012. Areas for consideration would be integrated into the Service's existing planning and performance management frameworks. Regular updates would be given to the Scrutiny Committee.

17/12 Equality and Diversity Quarterly Update

Further to Minute No 80/12 of the Authority [24 September 2012], the Committee noted an update on progress against the equality objectives. The Equality Objectives had been communicated to employees and had been publicised on the Service website. An awareness campaign was also underway that would focus on each of the protected characteristics in turn. The report also outlined how the Equality Objectives would be progressed through a number of themes: accountability, leadership and inclusion, prevention protection and response, employment and training, evaluation and good practice.

18/12 Scrutiny Work Programme 2012/2013

The Committee considered its work programme for 2012/2013.

It was suggested that the operation of Safeside could be considered by the Committee as part of its work programme. Consideration could be given to current usage and how to get the maximum benefit from the initiative. It was suggested that when this matter was considered, the Committee could meet at Safeside. The Committee was informed that there was already data available to assist its consideration which could be appropriately refreshed.

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Resolved:

- (1) that the following items be considered at the next meeting:
 - the Safeside initiative;
 - quarterly update on equality and diversity;
 - information about positive action being taken in relation to recruitment;
 - evaluation of the home fire safety check points system; and
 - analysis of organisation performance – quarter 2.
- (2) that the progress report on the operational assessment improvement register be deferred to the meeting to be held on 25 March 2013.

(Meeting ended at 3.00 pm)

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