

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

5 June 2019 at 10:00 a.m.
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham
B7 4HW

Present: Councillor Spence (Vice Chair)
Councillors Barlow, Brackenridge and Young

Apologies: Councillors Barrie, Jenkins and Tranter
S Middleton

Observer: Councillor Iqbal

14/19 Declarations of Interest in contracts or other matters

There were no declarations of interest.

15/19 Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27 March 2019

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on the 27 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

16/19 Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality Update

Jo Simmonds, People Support Manager, presented the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) Update.

The Service had published its gender pay gap (snapshot date 31 March 2018). When considering all employees, the mean gender pay gap was 10.4% or £1.57 per hour. This was narrower than the previous gender pay gap (31 March 2017) which was 14.2%.

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When compared to the snapshot date of 2017, the gap for operational employees had increased slightly from 2.8% to 4.7% due to the number of female recruits employed during the reporting period.

The gap for support staff employees was 18.6% which was narrower than the 34% gap reported last year. The average hourly rate for female support staff had increased due to 23 female staff increasing their grade, compared to nine male staff.

Whilst reporting an ethnicity pay gap was not a statutory requirement, understanding the ethnicity pay gap would assist in improving the ethnic diversity of the workforce and contribute to the effective targeting of positive action. When considering all employees, the mean ethnicity pay gap was 5.2%.

Employees attended the annual national Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) conference on November 2018. The Service, in conjunction with the Fire Service College, facilitated a workshop at the event, sharing experiences and best practice with colleagues across the sector. Additionally, employees won a number of AFSA awards including 'Outstanding Contribution to Charitable Activity', 'Charity Challenge Endeavour', and 'Charity Challenge Innovation'.

The Equality Stakeholder Strategy had now been agreed and published. The strategy outlined the terms of reference for the stakeholder groups. Intranet sites for each of the stakeholder groups was being developed and a development day was scheduled to take place.

The Stonewall Index score for 2019 had been announced and the Service was ranked 325 out of 445 organisations. This was an increase of 27 places compared to 2018.

The Service had been ranked second in the top 50 Inclusive Employers. It was the highest ranked public sector organisation in the list.

The Service had attended Birmingham 2019 Pride in partnership with the Ambulance and Police.

A variety of examples of activities undertaken across the Service was provided including food banks at the four Coventry fire stations, the continuation of the Christmas coat appeal at Ladywood Fire Station, and crews from Smethwick fire station working in partnership with the Sikh Council.

A breakdown of the workforce profile was provided. As at 1 January 2019, the Service employed 1889 employees:

- 1,395 (74%) are uniformed, 431 (23%) non-uniformed, and 63 (3%) Fire Control.
- 8% of uniformed staff are female compared to more than half of non-uniformed staff and 87% of Fire Control staff.
- 11% of all employees are from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.
- Declaration rates remain high with 95% of all employees having made a declaration regarding disability. 4% have stated that they have a disability.
- 85% of all employees have made a declaration regarding sexual orientation, however 13% have stated they 'prefer not to say'.

Further information was provided within Appendix 2 of the report.

Nine grievances had been lodged during the reporting period and there had been 21 discipline cases. There had been no trends identified relating to equality strands.

The Service had employed 91 new entrant firefighters during 2018/19. 38 (42%) were women (the target was 40%) and 21 (24%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (the target was 35%). The Service continued to work with the Fire Service College and attraction rates for women were currently 28% and 25% for BME.

The pre-recruitment activities that had been undertaken to support female applicants had proven to be very positive. The same approach would be introduced for BME applicants.

Staff progression of under-represented groups was a focus of the Service and female staff development sessions were planned to be held in due course.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- It was acknowledged that it could take a significant length of time for the gender pay gap to decrease completely, due to the gender profile of the workforce. However, the direction of travel was positive, and the pay gap was positive compared to the average pay gap across the private and public sectors.
- The Service monitored progression through the organisation. There was a focus on the progression of under-represented groups in the organisation. Staff were also supported to help them understand positive action.
- The gender pay gap did not reflect equal pay, an issue which was not present within the Service.
- The ability to provide timescales for the reduction of the gender pay gap was difficult due to the complex calculations involved in determining the gender pay gap and in forecasting future figures. It was agreed that predictive timescales would be developed to provide targets and assumptions.
- It was confirmed that unconscious bias awareness training would be delivered to all staff as the training was rolled out across the Service.
- In relation to a question asking how the Service collected data on the protected characteristics of the workforce, it was confirmed that members of staff entered information directly into the HRMIS system. It was confirmed that it was not possible to determine what an individual had declared, for example, reports extracted from the system detailed if an individual had declared or not declared, not what they had declared.

- It was noted that the workplace adjustment passport was not purely to record disability related issues, but adjustments in general. It was a good tool enabling the conversation and support between staff and managers.
- Crews were encouraged to carry out school visits and People Support Services supported from the centre. The location of schools and the local population / demographics were factored in. Crews also attended careers days and other events.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to change perceptions and to break down the barriers for under-represented groups becoming firefighters. Evidence showed that many women ruled themselves out of the job and that people from BME backgrounds did not have role models.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress made by the Service in relation to DICE during the last six months.

17/19 Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance against The Plan – quarter four 2018/19

Sarah Warnes, Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided an overview of the report:

PI 1 The risk based attendance standard: the median attendance time to category one incidents during quarter four was four minutes and 38 seconds. The median attendance times for the year was four minutes 42 seconds.

PI 2 The number of accidental dwelling fires: there had been 1658 incidents, above the target of 1625, and just one incident above the upper tolerance level.

PI 3 Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (taken to hospital for treatment): there had been 54 injuries during 2018/19. This was six injuries below the target but represented a slight increase compared to the number recorded in 2017/18.

PI 4 The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires: four fatalities had been recorded during 2018/19. This was a

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low number especially considering the population that the Service served, however it was noted that one fatality was one too many.

PI 5 The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners: at 45.6%, performance was below the target of 55%. The reduction in referral pathways had impacted upon the number of referrals.

PI 6 The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Service: 302,214 points had been achieved during 2018/19, above the target of 300,000 and above the upper tolerance level.

PI 7 The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions: 785 had been recorded year to date, (although the figures were not up to date due to ongoing delays in receiving data).

PI 8 The number of deliberate fires in dwellings: 216 incidents were recorded during 2018/19, above the target of 205 although just one incident above the upper tolerance level.

PI 9 The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises: 121 incidents had been recorded during 2018/19, below the target of 181 and below the lower tolerance level. The number of incidents at HMP Birmingham had reduced significantly.

PI 10 The number of deliberate vehicle fires: 806 incidents had been recorded during the year, below the target of 882 and within the tolerance levels. The year on year decrease in incidents which had been observed since 2016/17 had contained.

PI 11 The number of deliberate rubbish fires: 1601 incidents had been recorded during 2018/19, below the target of 1991 and below the lower tolerance level.

PI 12 The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings: 103 incidents had been recorded during the year, below the target of 142 and below the lower tolerance level.

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PI 13 The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises: 434 incidents were recorded during the year, above the target of 421 but within the tolerance levels.

PI 14 The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises: 5837 incidents had been recorded during 2018/19, above the target of 5317. Performance was above the upper tolerance level.

PI 15 The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disability status: 95% of staff had disclosed their disability status. The number of disclosures recording 'not stated' had dropped significantly. It was noted that in addition to the launch of the workplace adjustment passport, a wellbeing action plan and stress risk assessments would be introduced.

PI 16 The number of female uniformed staff: there were 129 female uniformed staff as of quarter four, four above target. The Service had employed 91 new entrant firefighters during 2018/19, 38 (42%) of whom were female. This was higher than the recruitment target of 40%.

PI 17 The percentage of all staff from BME communities: 11.7% of all staff were from BME communities, compared to a target of 12.3%. Performance was within the tolerance levels.

PI 17a The percentage of uniformed staff from BME communities: 10.1% of uniformed staff were from BME communities, compared to a target of 10.9%. Performance was within the tolerance levels. 21 (23%) of the new entrant firefighters employed during 2018/19 were from BME communities. This was lower than the recruitment target of 35%.

PI 19 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed and Fire Control staff: an average of 1.94 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during quarter four. This was above the target and

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the upper tolerance level. 7.7 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during 2018/19, which was higher than the target for the year of 6.2. The figure represented a 19% increase compared to the same period in 2017/18.

Gaps continued in the recording of reasons for absence and return to work information.

PI 20 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed staff: an average of 2.20 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during quarter four. This was above the target but just within the upper tolerance level. 9.1 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during 2018/19, which was higher than the target for the year of 6.5. The figure represented a 33% increase compared to the same period in 2017/18.

Missing data for absence reason and return to work information had increased during the quarter.

PI 21 The total number of injuries: there were 37 injuries during quarter four. There had been 128 injuries during the year, matching the yearly target and eight above the number of injuries recorded in 2017/18. It was noted that the number of injuries were low considering the type of activities undertaken across the Service.

PI 22 The total number of RIDDOR injuries: there were two RIDDOR reports during quarter four, with both injuries occurring at incidents. There were 13 RIDDOR reports during 2018/19, two below target.

PI 23 To reduce the Fire Authority's carbon emissions: performance was below target and below the lower tolerance level. A 12% reduction in carbon emissions had been observed compared to 2017/18. 92% of emissions were due to electricity, gas and diesel for appliances. There had been a 26% reduction in the amount of electricity used, and a 22% reduction in gas usage. There had been a 22% increase in the amount of diesel used.

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PI 24 To reduce gas use of Fire Authority premises: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels.

PI 25 To reduce electricity use of Fire Authority premises: performance was below target and below the lower tolerance level.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The number of injuries that were a result of individuals fighting a fire indicated the importance of ongoing messaging in relation to Safe and Well checks and the reinforcement of prevention and also what to do in the event of a fire.
- The definition of vulnerable used by the Service was related to vulnerability to fire and linked to the fire statistics. Partners provided a wider understanding of vulnerability which fed into activities such as Safe and Well checks. The Safe and Well points reflected that the Service was targeting the most vulnerable people in our communities.
- In reference to deliberate fire setting, it was confirmed that the Service would always work with the Police and other agencies to identify the individual(s) and to take the appropriate enforcement action.
- Members were thanked for their offer of support to act as points of contact within their areas, providing contacts for the Service, in the event of a spike in incidents. For example, a Member had highlighted the joint work undertaken between Walsall MBC, the Police and the Service which had resulted in interventions being put in place to counter a spike in deliberate fires (actions had included notifying residents and the securing of bins).
- A Member asked if the increase in sickness absences was a result of the workforce being over-stretched. In response, it was advised that it was not believed the Service had the evidence base at the moment to suggest this. It was noted that there was a need to

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better understand mental health in the organisation. There were a variety of elements that contributed to mental health. It was important that the stress risk assessments were implemented across the Service.

- It was agreed that the reporting and recording (or, rather the lack of) information relating to sickness including reasons for absence and return to work information needed to be focussed on. It was important that such information was recorded to ensure support was in place for individuals.
- The sickness PIs for uniformed and Fire Control staff, and non-uniformed staff had different targets as they were based upon previous performance i.e. a three year average. However, the percentage reduction was the same for both staff groups, as was the sickness policy including the triggers.
- It was agreed that further information regarding injuries would be provided in future reports. Additionally, a further breakdown of violence reports was to be provided to include the number of incidents that were reported to the Police.

Resolved that the Committee noted:

- the status of the Service's key performance indicators in the second quarter of 2018/2019
- the progress made in delivering the three strategic priorities contained in The Plan 2018-2021
- the update on the performance information system.

18/19 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee**

Resolved that the Committee consider and approved the Annual Report 2018/19 for submission to the Annual General Meeting of the Fire Authority.

20/19 **Review of Safeguarding – verbal update**

It was agreed that an update on the review of safeguarding would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

21/19 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018-19**

The Committee noted the Work Programme for 2018/19.

The meeting finished at 12:10pm.

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