

## **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**

**4 February, 2013, at 12.45 pm  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

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

**Apology:** Councillor Wright.

### **1/13 Minutes of 10 December, 2012**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December, 2012 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to adding Councillor Delaney to the list of those present.

### **2/13 Positive Action Strategy for Recruitment, Progression and Retention**

The Committee noted a detailed report on the current and future proposals for positive action initiatives in West Midlands Fire Service.

The Service's Equality and Diversity Report and Equality Objectives 2011-2015 provided a detailed overview with regard to the journey the Service had taken and its achievements. The Equality Objectives identified key areas of work to continue moving forward; one of which was Positive Action in recruitment and employment.

The Committee noted the current profile of the Service's workforce. The Service currently had the highest numbers of both woman and black and minority ethnic employees of any metropolitan Fire and Rescue Service outside of London. The Committee also noted that in all protected characteristic groups there was a number of employees that preferred not to declare. The Director Human Resources reported that work was being undertaken to try to establish reasons for this.

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The range of positive action initiatives that had been implemented during previous recruitment campaigns was reported and members noted the success of those initiatives.

The Committee also noted the range of employee engagement activities that the Service had carried out focusing on learning and development and inspiring people from minority groups to progress.

The aims and objectives of the positive action strategy were to support the Service in achieving equality outcomes for its diverse communities and workforce. A number of targets had been identified to seek to address the issues identified within the report:-

- to increase representation of women within uniform roles from 4%; therefore targeting activities at women and girls;
- to increase the representation of 17-24 year old young people within the Service from 1%;
- to increase the profile of disabled employees from 3% to the labour force survey national average figures of 18%;
- to increase BME representation within the service from 14% towards the 30.5% of the regional average.

Members noted the medium and long-term strategies in place to meet those targets. In particular it was noted that the Service's work experience programme was particularly successful with good feedback being received from participants. In view of the current recruitment freeze the programme was more focussed at instilling a positive image of the Service in young people and promoting access schemes to those interested in becoming firefighters in the future.

Members welcomed the report and agreed that updates be provided to the Committee on a six monthly basis, with the exception of any particular good news stories, which would be reported at the time they arose.

**Resolved** that a further report on the implementation of the Service's Positive Action Strategy be submitted in August, 2013.

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**3/13 Home Safety Checks**

The Committee received a report which detailed the revised approach to the Service's Home Safety Check (HSC) policy and the methodology used in identifying the level of vulnerability of members of the community to determine their eligibility for a HSC.

In 2011 central government funding for smoke detectors had ceased and so the Authority had been forced to prioritise its approach to HSCs and the issuing of free smoke detectors. A review of the HSC process had therefore been undertaken to ensure that resources were targeted in the right way. In November, 2011 a points based system had therefore been introduced based on an individual's level of risk as apposed to the property's level of risk. Those considered to be at low risk and thus receiving no points were sent a Home Safety Information Pack, whilst those considered to be of a higher risk were be offered a full HSC and referred to a vulnerable persons officer if deemed necessary. The new approach encouraged more effective engagement with partner organisations working with the most vulnerable people within the community.

A task and finish group had been established to carry out a review of the new points system, as required in the Service's Level 2 Vulnerable Persons Plan. The group had also reviewed the points allocated against specific risk and determined that some of the risk criteria points should be adjusted to give greater weighting against specific risk. In addition to the points scoring refresh, serious incident reviews would continue to identify and shape how points were allocated in the future as part of the ongoing targeting of vulnerable persons.

Further evaluation of the HSC points system had been undertaken by the WMFS Data Team. It was recognised that the point scoring system was a critical tool kit in the development of a robust system to deliver home safety messages to individuals. Ongoing collaboration involving the Data Team was an example of how HSCs would be further targeting high risk groups and individuals. The Committee noted the following successes as a result of this collaboration:-

- to date during 2012/13 the number of preventable fire deaths was 1, which compared very favourably with the figure of 14 for the same period in 2011/12;

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- accidental dwelling fires were below the long term three year average with a 6% decrease for years 2010/11 and 2011/12.

The Committee also noted that feedback from the Contact Centre indicated an almost 100% satisfaction rate for HSCs.

A recent review of partnerships had also encouraged station commanders to work more effectively with local partners to assist in the identification of high risk individuals within their community and develop a sustainable HSC referral scheme.

The Committee noted the report and requested that further reports be submitted on any significant developments.

**4/13      Analysis of Progress of Corporate Performance Against ‘The Plan’ – Quarter Two 2012/2013**

The Committee noted details of performance against targets set out in ‘The Plan’ for the second quarter of 2012/13 in the following areas:-

- Performance indicators;
- Strategic objectives as outlined in ‘The Plan’;
- Progress against Programmes and Projects; and
- Corporate Risk.

Members noted in particular that there had been approximately a 40% reduction in the number of arson fires. It was also noted however that the number of accidental fires in shops and medical related premises (e.g. GP surgeries, dentists) had increased by 30% and 40% respectively. The Committee was advised that analysis of these figures would attempt to identify any trends.

It was reported that the recent major incidents at Atherstone-on-Stour and Shirley Towers had resulted in a number of priority training needs which the Service was currently addressing.

Members again referred to the excellent achievement of the Service in reducing sickness across the organisation.

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**5/13      Feedback from the Safeside Review Working Group**

The Chair reported that the Working Group had met on 10 January, 2013 and received a presentation from the Safeside Manager. Members had been surprised to learn about the full range of users that Safeside catered for and it had been suggested that a report be presented to the Policy Planning Forum to enable members to promote the facility and its good work.

Some initial thoughts that the Group had had so far included establishing a member champion for Safeside.

The Group was due to meet again to continue its evidence gathering on 15 February, 2013 at Handsworth Community Fire Station's Red Hot Education Centre.

(Meeting ended at 1.58 pm)

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