

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

15th June, 2015 at 12.30pm

at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Tranter (Chair);
Councillors Hogarth, Skinner and Young.

Apology: Councillor Spence.

Observer: Councillor P Singh.

8/15 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March, 2015 be approved as a correct record.

9/15 **Progress Report on Public Consultation Strategy through Community Membership Scheme**

Further to Minute No. 26/14 (13th October, 2014) the Committee noted the progress on the development of a Community Membership Scheme.

The development of the Scheme sought to deliver the recommendations of this Committee following its review in 2014 of the Service's approach to public consultation. The aim was to establish a database of members of the public, reflective of the communities served by West Midlands Fire Service, who could be contacted with a view to qualitative and quantitative engagement on future consultation exercises.

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The Scheme had engaged 421 members, which were mainly from the 25-44 age group, but equally male and female, and representative of the West Midlands' community in terms of diversity. It was noted that the membership also included people from outside the West Midlands. Social media had been found to be particularly successful in recruiting members, as well as station open days.

Internal awareness raising of the scheme had taken place with staff through a variety of channels. Feedback had been optimistic, however, it was recognised that there was still work to be done in terms of enabling employees to engage further with communities to increase membership of the scheme. It was hoped that, over the next six months, membership would increase to the thousands.

10/15 **Diversity Inclusion Cohesion Equality (DICE) Quarterly Update**

The Committee noted the progress made on developing awareness through the official launch of the former Equality and Diversity team, now re-branded as Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) Team; along with progress against the existing Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Equality and Diversity Framework.

In light of the continued austerity measures, the Service continued to align and review its resources and functions to achieve the objectives set out in 'The Plan' and improve its performance to meet the needs of its communities. The DICE strategy provided clarity through an integrated approach to doing this across the Service.

The Committee noted detailed updates in relation to each of the headings in the FRS Equality and Diversity Framework – Knowing Your Communities; Leadership, Partnership and Service Commitment; Community Engagement and Satisfaction; Responsive and Accessible Services and a Skilled and Committed Workforce.

It was noted in particular that the Service was preparing for a reduction in its budget between 2016 and 2019 that exceeded the £14m previously considered as a worst-case scenario. Consequently,

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firefighter recruitment had been suspended again and work was taking place to develop positive action strategies to look at the representation of female and minority communities within the workforce and actions around any future recruitment based on workforce planning.

Further detail on the Authority's financial position would be known after the Summer Budget, which was expected in July, 2015.

11/15 Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Committee received its draft annual report for 2014/2015, which detailed the work of the Committee throughout the year.

Members welcomed the report and felt that it was an accurate representation of the Committee's achievements in the last year.

Resolved that, subject to its amendment by the attendances of members at today's meeting, the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee for 2014/2015 be approved and submitted to the Authority at its annual meeting on 29th June, 2015.

12/15 An Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance against 'The Plan' – Quarter Four 2014/2015

The Committee received the status of the Service's key Performance Indicators (PIs) in the fourth quarter of 2014/2015, along with the progress made in delivering the three strategic objectives contained in 'The Plan' 2014-2017.

In relation to the 'Prevention' indicators the Committee noted in particular that performance in relation to PI 17 (the number of arson vehicle fires) had deteriorated. It was reported that the number of abandoned vehicles had increased and so the Service was looking at social factors around this PI. Overall though progress was positive in relation to the 'Prevention' indicators.

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In terms of the 'Protection' indicators, particular reference was made to the deterioration in performance in relation to the number of false alarm calls (PI 11 and PI 12). It was reported that fire safety officers and protection teams were working with repeat offenders to reduce incidences and more rigorous call challenge would be applied where appropriate to the level of risk. It was hoped that this PI would be back on target by 2016.

Overall performance had improved in relation to 'Response' indicators. However it was noted that the target for PI 16 (Risk Based Attendance Standard) had not been met. The Committee was informed that a series of interventions had been put in place to address this and average attendance times to Category 1 incidents had reduced by 11 seconds in quarter 4.

In relation to 'People Support Services Performance' indicators, all targets had been missed, with the exception of PI 22 (percentage of non-uniformed and Fire Control staff from ethnic minority communities). It was noted that the recent suspension of the firefighter recruitment campaign would make it difficult to hit this target going forwards and the success of positive action strategies would therefore be critical. It was suggested that the Committee could seek to support progress in this area by carrying out a piece of work to look at the effectiveness of the Service's human resource policies.

The Committee noted that there had been an increase in sickness levels amongst uniformed staff. It was reported that there were no apparent themes to account for the increase therefore a working party had been established to look into this further.

Members were reminded of the open invitation to attend quarterly performance meetings.

Resolved that an item be placed on the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2015/2016 to review the effectiveness of the Service's human resource policies.

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13/15 Changes to Scrutiny Committee Meeting Dates and Confirmation of Performance Indicators 2015/2016

The Committee noted its proposed programme of meetings for 2015/2016. Meetings dates had been adjusted, where necessary, to ensure that reports on corporate performance were presented to the Committee at the most appropriate time to enable members to contribute to performance discussions and influence and shape interventions that supported the delivery of 'The Plan'.

The Committee also noted the corporate performance indicators and targets for 2015/2016, which had been amended following the end of year outturn data for 2014/2015.

(Meeting ended at 1.52pm.)

Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock
Democratic Services Unit

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3189