

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

14 November 2018 at 10:00 a.m.
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham
B7 4HW

Present: Councillor Tranter (Chair).
Councillors Barlow, Barrie, Brackenridge, and
Spence.

Apologies: Councillors Jenkins and Young
S Middleton

Observer: Nil

30/18 Declarations of Interest in contracts or other matters

There were no declarations of interest.

31/18 Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 October 2018

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on the 10 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.

32/18 Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against The Plan Quarter Two 2018/19

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided an overview of the report:

PI 1 The risk based attendance standard: performance was below target and below the lower tolerance (rated blue) with a quarterly figure of 4 minutes 43 seconds.

Attendance times for category two, three and four incident types remained well within the respective targets:

- Category 2 incident types: 5 minutes 22 seconds (target is under 7 minutes)
- Category 3 incident types: 4 minutes 55 seconds (target is under 10 minutes)
- Category 4 incident types: 6 minutes 53 seconds (target is under 20 minutes)

The Service was over performing against the performance indicator, particularly in relation to category two, three and four incident types. This was relevant to the revised strategy options.

PI 2 The number of accidental dwelling fires: there had been 831 incidents year to date, close to the upper tolerance level. However, the number of incidents had reduced since October, and the Service was generally bucking the national trend of an increase in the number of accidental dwelling fires.

PI 3 Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (taken to hospital for treatment): there had been 18 injuries compared to a target of 30, and therefore performance was below target and the lower tolerance level (rated blue).

PI 4 The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires: there had been three fatalities experienced year to date, which was the lowest amount for a number of years (it was acknowledged that one fatality, was one too many). Serious incident reviews were being undertaken to identify underlying causes for such incidents.

PI 5 The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners: performance was below target and below the lower tolerance level (rated red). Referrals had dipped over the last six months. There was a need to understand the underlying causes and findings would be reported back to the Committee.

PI 6 The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Service: 167,381 Safe and Well points had been achieved, above the target and the upper tolerance level (rated blue).

The number of points reflected the quality of the Safe and Well visits.

PI 7 The number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) in road traffic collisions: delays with the data continued. The number of incidents had started to plateau and decline, however the Service was not aware of the full picture. The Service was tying in with the West Midlands Combined Authority Road Safety Strategy and focussing on black spots and where drivers came from.

PI 8 The number of deliberate fires in dwellings: there had been 127 incidents experienced year to date, above target and above the upper tolerance level (rated red). It was the highest number of incidents since quarter two 2013/14. Although it was a significant spike, no trends had been identified. The reasons for the increase was being explored.

PI 9 The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises: performance was below the target and below the lower tolerance level (rated blue). This classification of premises included care homes so a life risk could be present. It was noted that if arson / deliberate fire setting was an issue (as highlighted in PI 8), there would be an expectation to observe similar increases within this area as well.

PI 10 The number of deliberate vehicle fires: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels. There had previously been an issue with these types of incidents, however work with the Local Authorities was having an effect (such as target hardening hot spots).

PI 11 The number of deliberate rubbish fires: performance was below the target and below the lower tolerance level.

PI 12 The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings: performance was below the target and below the lower tolerance level.

It was noted that both deliberate rubbish fires and deliberate fires in derelict buildings had been proactively managed via the arson plan and continued to be monitored. The decrease in the number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings reflected

the work the Service had carried out with Local Authorities with the support of the Fire Authority.

PI 13 The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises: performance was above target but within the tolerance levels (rated green). A reduction in the number of incidents had been observed.

PI 14 The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises: performance was above target and above the upper tolerance level. Such incidents were often a waste of resources or very small fires. It was noted that the tolerance levels may need to be reassessed, particularly as a result of an increase in the number of alarms and an increasing consciousness of infrastructure by premises owners / managers.

Helen Sherlock, Senior Business Partner, People Support Services provided an overview of the people related performance indicators:

PI 15 The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status: performance remained relatively constant with a disclosure rate of 93.9%. Performance was with the tolerance levels (rated green).

PI 16 The number of female uniformed staff: performance was just one below target and within the tolerance levels (rated green).

PI 17 The percentage of all staff from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities: performance was just 0.1% below the target and within the tolerance levels (rated green).

PI 18 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – all staff: performance was above the target and the upper tolerance level (rated red). The recording of sickness data had improved since the previous quarter. A concentrated piece of work was being carried out by the Business Partners to support managers and address this area of concern.

PI 19 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed and Fire Control staff: performance was above the target but within the tolerance levels (rated green). The recording of sickness data had improved compared to the previous quarter.

Work was ongoing with the ICT department to generate an automated email to notify managers of sickness alerts.

It was noted that it was important to record sickness data to allow trends and patterns to be identified.

PI 20 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed staff: performance was above the target and the upper tolerance level (rated red). A 31.6% increase had been observed compared to the same period during 2017/18. Business Partners had been tasked with identifying and understanding the increase in sickness.

PI 21 The total number of injuries: performance was above the target and above the upper tolerance level (rated red). Work was being carried out to explore the reasons in more detail and to identify solutions to enable the performance indicator to be brought back to within the target / tolerance levels. It was noted that the Service encouraged staff to report injuries and near hits and that there was a good health and safety culture across the organisation.

PI 22 The total number of RIDDOR injuries: performance was slightly below target and within the tolerance levels (rated green).

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

- A partnership referral could be defined as any referral from a charity, health organisation, hospital, etc.
- Referral pathways were set up and would be monitored. The Service realised that partnership referrals comprised referrals related to the most vulnerable people.
- Councillors could assist with increasing the number of partnership referrals. The success of the work with

Councillors regarding derelict buildings showed what could be achieved. Officers would like to examine the underlying causes that have led to the decrease in partnership referrals in more detail and then to identify ways in which Councillors could assist.

- All Members were encouraged to attend the Command area briefings.
- In reference to PI 14 The number of false alarms due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises, it was noted that hospitals were allowed an agreed amount of alarms due to the complexities of such buildings. In general, such incidents were called challenged by Fire Control (such as asking people to check premises, etc), and attended by Business Support Officers, protecting the Pump Rescue Ladder (PRL) appliances.
- ACFO Gary Taylor agreed to provide a breakdown and profile of call challenge to Members.
- Mental health was the top cause of sickness for uniformed and Fire Control staff. The Service did not know if mental health was necessarily work related as there could be a complex range of reasons, and sometimes there could be a cross over between work and home related issues. The Service was working with Occupational Health to understand this area in more detail.
- The Wellbeing Strategy had been developed and the Service had committed resources to mental health first aiders, as well as the Blue Light Programme. It was noted that this was an issue not confined simply in terms of sickness, but also support for those who remained at work.
- It was important to educate staff so that they were aware of the reasons why sickness recording was important, why the Service had to monitor sickness (duty of care), and that it allowed the Service to tailor support for individuals.
- In relation to PI 21 The total number of injuries: it had been noted that 5 near hit reports had been raised regarding Breathing Apparatus communications. Further information was requested around this.

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.

It was agreed that:

- a breakdown and profile of call challenge would be provided to Members
- in relation to PI 21 The total number of injuries, further information regarding breathing apparatus communications would be provided to Members.

33/18 Scrutiny of Positive Action and Firefighter Recruitment

Tristan Dugdale-Pointon, Business Partner, Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, and Equality (DICE) team, provided an overview of the report:

In support of the Service's vision in having a workforce that was reflective of the working population, the Service had set the following ambitions:

- 2017/18:
 - 20% of new starters will be women
 - 35% of new starters will be from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds
- 2018/19:
 - 40% of new starters will be women
 - 35% of new starters will be from BME backgrounds
- 2019/20:
 - 50% of new starters will be women
 - 35% of new starters will be from BME backgrounds

- 2020/21 onwards:
 - 60% of new starters will be women
 - 35% of new starters will be from BME backgrounds

Outcomes of the review had observed the change in approach by the Service to firefighter recruitment, from a campaign based approach, to one that was continual and sustained. This meant that the Service's positive action now drove its recruitment activity.

The Service had developed and implemented a suite of pre-recruitment activities that were available to prospective and current candidates. The activities were aimed to remove some of the traditional barriers experienced by under-represented groups.

Additionally, there were pre-recruitment 'light' activities targeted to those under-represented groups in preparation for assessment. These included fitness sessions, interview skills input, confidence building and team work activities.

The approach to the assessment of firefighters had evolved, with a focus on the measurement of behaviours, attitude and a candidate's ability to interact with a diverse group of people. The assessment days included behavioural based interviews, role play exercises and group discussions. Additionally, staff who were part of the interview panels had been trained in unconscious bias.

Since April 2018, the Service had employed 54 new entrant firefighters, 25 of whom were women (representing 46%), and 15 people from BME backgrounds (representing 28%). This represented a significant increase compared to previous recruitment activity.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress made in relation to the review of positive action and firefighter recruitment.

Resolved that the Committee approved the completion of the review.

Members welcomed the progress that had been made and thanked all who had been involved.

34/18 Diversity Inclusion Cohesion Equality Update

Tristan Dugdale-Pointon, Business Partner, Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, and Equality (DICE) team, provided an overview of the report:

The Service had been engaging with the Home Office and in particular the Fire Reform Unit since mid-2017. As a result, the Service had been highlighted for best practice in the launch of the Fitness Guide which formed part of the national awareness campaign.

The Service was actively engaging with a number of Fire and Rescue Services, sharing its approach and best practice with regard to attraction and selection activities.

Work continued on updating Diversity Inclusion Cohesion Equality (DICE) policies. The Dignity at Work policy had been updated in line with feedback from Stonewall to ensure it was fully Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) inclusive. Additionally, the Transgender policy had been published.

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process was being modernised to allow greater analysis around EIAs and accountability. The introduction of the revised EIA system would be supported by the delivery of workshops and an e-learning package.

The Service joined the NHS Partners' Programme in July 2018 which brings organisations together to share best practice around diversity and inclusion. The Service was the only non-NHS organisation on the programme.

The DICE team had developed an unconscious bias workshop which had been delivered to over 100 employees from a variety of stations and departments.

The four stakeholder groups; Affinity, the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA), Fire Out and Inspire continued to gather momentum and terms of reference and deliverable objectives were under development.

The Service hosted the AFSA spring conference in May 2018. The best practice and progress in the recruitment of a diverse workforce by the Service was highlighted with the DICE team presenting one of the key breakout sessions.

The Service was continually examining ways to overcome barriers for individuals wishing to join and continued to monitor progress in areas such as issues faced by the Sikh community.

The Service had been involved a number of events held across the county including Birmingham Pride in May, and the Windrush Public Services Community Day held at Tally Ho in June.

Stations across the Service continued to carry out a range of activities such as Ward End Fire Station hosting dyslexia support groups, Highgate Fire Station attending Eid celebrations in June, and members of the deaf signing team supporting the sign2sing project in local schools.

Declaration rates of staff remained high with 93% of all employees having declared their disability status (3.8% of whom had declared that they had a disability).

83% of all employees had declared their sexual orientation although 17% had declared 'prefer not to say'.

In terms of internal progression, 40% of all uniformed posts were Crew Commander or above, 27% of female uniformed staff held a position of Crew Commander or above, compared to 41% of male uniformed staff.

58% of all non-uniformed posts were above at grade eight or above. 44% of female non-uniformed staff were in positions above a grade eight, compared to 74% of male non-uniformed staff.

The Service was developing an internal positive action plan.

Members applauded the work undertaken by the Service.

Resolved that the Members noted the progress made by the Service in relation to DICE during the last 6 months.

35/18 Operational Assessment Improvement Register

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Strategic Enabler, Strategic Hub, provided an overview of the report:

Of the 36 areas for consideration (38 including sub-areas 14a, b and c) within the Improvement Register and noted by the Committee at its March 2018 meeting:

- Five areas for consideration had been completed in addition to the 18 areas for consideration already classed as completed, having required no further action prior to the October 2017 meeting of the Committee.
- Seven areas for consideration had been addressed since the Committee meeting in March and had been classed as completed, requiring no further action for the purposes of the Improvement Register.
- 30 areas for consideration had now been classed as completed.
- Work was ongoing against eight areas for consideration. Progress made in those areas was as expected and on target.

The next update of the Improvement Register was scheduled to be submitted to the Committee at its March 2019 meeting.

36/18 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018-19

It was noted that the Work Programme had been amended to reflect the change in submission of the Operational Assessment Improvement Register (as noted at the October 2018 meeting of the Committee).

The Committee noted the Work Programme for 2018/19.

The meeting finished at 11:29am.

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