

**Notes of Joint Consultative Panel**

**1 February 2016  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

**Present:** Councillor Clinton (Chair)  
Councillor Dehar (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Shackleton, Douglas-Maul, P Singh

**Apologies:**

Cllr Afzal  
CFO Andy Hickmott, Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)  
Ade Robinson, Fire Officers' Association (FOA)

**Employees Side:**

Steve Price Hunt – Fire Brigades Unions (FBU)  
John Routley – Unison

**Officers:**

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Fire Authority  
Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler (People Support Services)  
Wendy Browning Sampson, People Support Manager  
Paul Hinckley, Senior Business Partner (Occupational Health)

**Observer:**

Cllr Tranter – (Chair of Scrutiny Committee)

1/16 The Chair asked everyone attending the meeting to introduce themselves.

2/16 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel held on the 9 November 2016

The notes of the Joint Consultative Panel held on the 9 November 2016 were approved as a correct record.

3/16 Wellbeing Strategy and “Blue Light” Pledge

Sarah Warnes outlined the Wellbeing Strategy, which is a supporting strategy that is currently being embedded within the organisation to provide employees with the correct supporting mechanisms to maintain their wellbeing at a time of uncertainty and change. It had been recognised that illness caused by stress and mental health issues were an essential area for the organisation to focus on through the Wellbeing Strategy. This directly links to the Service Delivery Model.

Wendy Browning Sampson asked the members of the Joint Consultative Panel to note the development and implementation of the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) Wellbeing Strategy and the subsequent signing of the MIND “Blue Light” pledge to raise awareness of mental health issues in the workplace.

A copy of the Employee Wellbeing Strategy was outlined and a copy provided to each member of the Panel. It was explained that a mobile Application would be developed in the future. The wellbeing strategy has been developed throughout 2015 as a collaborative project involving People Support Services (PSS), Occupational Health (OH), Safety Health and Environment (SHE) and diversity Inclusion Cohesion and Equality (DICE) employees and Trade Unions. A number of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) events were held and feedback received on what employees most valued.

At the same time, WMFS has been working with the United Kingdom’s leading mental health charity MIND to promote their “Blue Light” programme, a Government-funded initiative (via the Cabinet Office) package of training, education and

support specifically tailored to members of the emergency services.

Mental Health issues personally affect one in four of the UK general population at some point, however, incidence has been shown to be significantly higher in emergency services.

The Wellbeing Strategy was launched in December 2015 and is supported by online managers toolkits, intranet and social media websites. During 2016, a programme of discussions and sessions will be rolled out to all stations and sections raising awareness and destigmatising mental health issues.

In January 2016, the WMFS Action Plan, submitted through Occupational Health, was approved by MIND and the Service became signatories to the pledge. A National Representative commented that the WMFS plan was one of the most comprehensive and robust plans that they had seen.

The Occupational Health Team would continue to engage with MIND and the workforce.

It was noted that a WMFS employee, Rob Norman, had an article published in the Guardian newspaper about mental health issues, which would help to break down the stigma of mental health issues, within the organisation and nationally. The OH team would be working closely with him and would recruit MIND champions.

Paul Hinckley stated that the Strategy would equip operational workforce with a knowledge of mental health issues.

The Chair welcomed the report.

Councillor Shackleton asked for further data in respect of mental health issues and in response to her question about the costs, Paul Hinckley confirmed that £5m had been provided nationally and the funding had been provided from the Libor rate fixing receipts.

It was noted that mental health issues were the second biggest cause of illness and it was believed that one in four illnesses caused by mental health was the tip of the iceberg and is more widespread than previously realised.

Cllr P Singh welcomed the report and requested a copy of the presentation so that he could share it with his colleagues.

The Fire Brigades Union fully supported the work that had been ongoing and felt it was a great success and would provide positive outcomes in the future.

John Routledge from UNISON echoed this and felt the strategy was long overdue and that the approach had been significant. He felt that the article by Rob Norman sharing his personal experiences was awe inspiring. He felt that the over the next few years members of staff would be affected dramatically by change and this support would be of great benefit.

Sarah Warnes informed the Panel that a video was being produced around disabilities, similar to the recent dyslexia video. Role models were coming forward and the video would be released in the next couple of months.

The members of the Panel felt that the Strategy would also provide support to members of staff in respect of disciplinary matters.

Cllr Dehar welcomed the report and the work on disabilities.

In answer to a question about age profiles from Cllr Shackleton,  
Paul Hinckley stated that mental health conditions were across the board. However, the age range of males having suicidal thoughts had shifted from males aged 16 – 24 towards middle aged men (our own workforce demographic).

Cllr Tranter welcomed the Wellbeing Strategy and “Blue Light” Pledge.

It was noted that an update report would be provided to the Panel meeting scheduled in September 2016.

The Joint Consultative Panel noted the development and implementation of the WMFS wellbeing strategy and agreed to the signing of the MIND “Blue Light” pledge.

(Meeting ended at 12.45 pm)

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