

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

14 November 2016 at 10.30pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Tranter (Chair);
Councillors Barrie, Brackenridge, Dad,
Skinner, and Spence

Apologies:

Councillors Hogarth and Young

Observer:

Nil

29/16 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

30/16 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2016, be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

It was noted that Councillor Spence, and not Councillor Young, had noted that 24% of management roles were held by female and black and minority ethnic (BME) staff and had enquired how many members of staff the 24% equated to.

31/16 Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality Update

Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler People Support Services, provided an overview of the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) update:

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) had become members of Stonewall for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), and were awaiting the results and outcomes of the Stonewall Index. Initial feedback had indicated that the Service's policies and framework were very strong regarding the subject of LGBT. However, it had been recognised that the Service did not currently have a network of LGBT representatives. As a result, the Service was looking to set up such a network and had a number of key role models within the organisation.

'Inspire', the recently renamed race equality forum, continued to develop its approach. A number of representatives from WMFS would be attending the forthcoming Asian Fire Service Association conference.

Work continued within the subject of unconscious bias; the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) had received input, developing their understanding. A training and awareness package was being developed which would be rolled out across the organisation. Training was also being provided to members of staff involved in the selection process to ensure any individuals carrying out interviews were trained in unconscious bias.

Workforce profiling indicated that the Service would have an ageing workforce going forward. A fitness policy for all uniformed staff would be launched in January 2017. A roll-out programme would ensure that all members of staff would be aware and be able to test their fitness levels and gauge where they were in terms of meeting the required standards. Following the launch of the policy in January, there would be a six month period for staff to test before the new standards would be applied. The fitness test itself would be comprised of a Chester treadmill test. All members of staff had access to fitness equipment including treadmills at stations and headquarters.

Work continued with West Midlands Police with regard to menopause awareness which had proven to be very successful to date.

The Community Safety Strategy assisted with an understanding of the communities the Service served,

including the provision of a level of analysis. The Service would shortly be launching a public consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan. The Service's Equality Framework would drive how the Service communicated with its communities. Additionally, the Community Membership Model would enable two way engagement and aim to reflect the communities of the West Midlands, via the composition of the Community Members (49% female, 45% male, 50% white, 23% BME).

In the recent Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge, the peer team had noted that DICE was embedded within the organisation. The number of female uniformed staff within managerial roles was 18 out of a total of 75 female uniformed staff, with an increase observed following the promotion of two females into Station Commander roles. Of the 120 BME uniformed members of staff, 29 were in managerial roles.

A number of initiatives featuring positive action had been piloted as part of the current recruitment process. These included working in close liaison with Birmingham Metropolitan College and the Jobcentre to target job seekers, assisting individuals in gaining the required GCSEs in Maths and English, and the holding of a number of taster days allowing individuals to gain an understanding of the role of a firefighter. Additionally, WMFS had received and participated in coverage from the Sikh Channel for a week.

The Equality Framework demonstrated that the Service was good at making contact with individuals and communities, and communicating. However, going forward it was important that the Service knew what it communicated.

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

- A further breakdown in the composition of the BME staff was to be provided by Sarah Warnes
- The fitness standards were applied to all operational members of staff. There was an expectation for all

uniformed staff to attain the required fitness level due to the expectation for staff to provide resilience.

- With regard to assessing fitness, there would be three levels: green, amber and failure. In situations where an individual fails the fitness test, the individual would be removed from operational duties and provided a development plan via Occupational Health.
- In cases where a member of staff was to develop a disability, the Service would make any reasonable adjustments required wherever possible and practicable.
- The Service did anticipate potential issues as a result of having an ageing workforce (the average age of the workforce was currently 41). The new fitness policy would be timely in supporting members of staff going forward.
- It was noted that the Service should be congratulated in its recognition by Stonewall, particularly considering the number of large organisations who engage with the charity.
- It was raised that there was a need for more information to be collated on LGBT issues; analysis had been provided on females and BME, but nothing regarding LGBT. It was confirmed that such information was collated by the Service, but it was acknowledged that it should be reported more broadly, as well as disability.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress made by the Service in relation to DICE.

Resolved that a breakdown of the percentage of staff who have disclosed sexual orientation is to be distributed to Members.

32/16 **Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against the Plan - quarter two 2016/17**

ACFO Taylor and Sarah Warnes provided an overview of the Quarterly Performance against The Plan:

PI 1 'The risk based attendance standard'; performance continued to be very positive, with a slight increase of two seconds observed during quarter two. Over performance continued to be observed for category two, three and four incident types, although this could be due to the introduction of a more flexible fleet resulting in quicker response times to such incidents.

PI 2 'The number of accidental dwelling fires', good performance continued with figures remaining below the tolerance levels for the quarter, and the year to date.

PI 3 'Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (taken to hospital for treatment)', had increased due to a number of incidents involving multiple injuries.

PI 4 'The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires', two fatalities had occurred during quarter two.

PI 5 'The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners', was on target with performance within the tolerance levels. This was the first year that the target of 40% had been reached, and it was considered that this was a direct consequence of how the Service had changed its ways of working.

PI 6 'The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Brigade', performance had been very good with the figure above the tolerance levels.

PI 7 'The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions', the delay in data continued. However, figures illustrated that numbers had been slowly increasing since early 2015. It was noted that the number of category 1 incidents was increasing due to the number of road traffic collisions. The increase in road traffic collisions was resulting in less fatalities due to modern vehicle safety, but more significant injuries were being experienced.

PI 8 'The number of arson fires in dwellings', performance was within the tolerance levels and rated green, however, the number of incidents was just one incident below the upper tolerance level.

PI 9 ‘The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises’, PI 10 ‘The number of arson vehicle fires’, and PI 12 ‘The number of arson fires in derelict buildings’; all three performance indicators had experienced under performance against the tolerance levels and were rated as red.

PI 11 ‘The number of arson rubbish fires’, had observed over performance against the tolerance levels and therefore rated as blue.

It was noted that the Service’s arson plan was being reviewed. Although the number of incidents remained relatively small, the Service was conscious of the impact of anti-social behaviour, and the blight on communities.

PI 13 ‘The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises’ and PI 14 ‘The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment’, performance remained positive for both performance indicators. The role of Fire Safety Officers in local commands and Business Support Vehicles continued to reduce the number of incidents.

PI 15 ‘The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status’, a very small increase had been observed and it was noted that the target was ambitious. Work continued with managers and individuals within this area.

PI 16 ‘The number of female uniformed staff’ and PI 17 ‘The percentage of all staff from ethnic minority communities’, both performance indicators remained on target. The current recruitment process had seen the conclusion of the online assessment stage. The recruitment process had featured a postcode requirement (individuals to reside within the service delivery area), and the proactive targeting of underrepresented groups. Approximately 1800 applications had been received by the Service. 312 applicants had passed the first stage, of which 45 were female (representing 14.5%) and 52 applicants came from BME backgrounds (nearly 17%).

It was acknowledged that it was important to keep those individuals within the recruitment process. An amber

banding had been introduced into the process for practical sessions, allowing individuals who narrowly missed the required standard the opportunity to be re-assessed following the interview stage.

PI 18 'The average number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed staff', was over target and rated as red. There was a focus on long term sickness and restricted duties. The top five reasons for sickness were mental health (anxiety / depression), post-operative, joint problems, gastrointestinal, and hospital inpatient / treatment. Work was ongoing to understand the work undertaken by Occupational Health. Additionally, weight screening of employees had been introduced.

It was noted that positive attendance management continued across the Service.

PI 19 'The average number of days/shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed and Fire Control staff', was over target and rated as red. This was an area that Business Partners continued to focus on.

PI 20 'The average number of days/shifts lost due to sickness – all staff', reflected PI 18 and PI 19 and as a result, was rated as red.

PI 21 'The total number of injuries', continued to show very good performance and was rated as green. The Safety, Health and Environment team were promoting personal responsibility and a focus continued on slips, trips and falls, which remained one of the most common causes of injury.

PI 22 'The total number of RIDDOR injuries', demonstrated over performance against the tolerance, with a blue rating.

PI 24 'To reduce gas use of Fire Authority premises' and PI 25 'To reduce electricity use of Fire Authority premises'; both performance indicators demonstrated over performance against the tolerance levels and were rated blue. The performance in both areas reflected the culture within the Service, and station upgrades and improvements.

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

- With regard to increasing the percentage of all staff from BME communities, a number of initiatives had been undertaken including:
 - ‘Inspire’, previously the Race Equality Forum, proactively engaging with local communities.
 - The development of a school package to increase engagement with children and young people, to highlight that the Fire Service was a potential career choice.
 - Work with Job Centre Plus engaging with job seekers.
 - Taster days, allowing individuals to learn more about the work and role of a firefighter.
- It was acknowledged that the workforce remained under-representative of the Asian community.
- Issues regarding codes of dress, certain personal protective equipment and the standards for facial hair conflicting with some cultural and religious practices remained an issue and a potential barrier for applicants, and this was an area where a lot of work was still required, not just locally but for the Fire Service nationally. However, it was important that WMFS challenged itself on how to overcome such barriers.
- It was noted that the Asian Fire Service Association had stated that the current rules surrounding codes of dress, personal protective equipment, and facial hair, should not be relaxed.
- Members offered their support, in particular by assisting with local avenues that the Service had not tapped into yet.
- The Service’s positive action statement would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

- A further breakdown of the figures for PI 17 ‘The percentage of all staff from ethnic minority communities’ would be provided to Members, in terms of actual numbers and different groups.
- The provision of solar panels at stations was included within the Estates Strategy. New builds included solar panels, otherwise retrofitted where possible / practicable.
- All budgets had been devolved to stations who were accountable for any overspend or underspend. Anomalies in the use of gas or electricity was often due to the scale of the building.
- With regard to arson fires in derelict buildings, it was noted that it was often difficult to determine who was responsible for the premises, for example private owners. Pump priming funding used to be available which allowed the boarding up and securing of such premises but this funding is no longer available as budgets continue to shrink. However, this does not alleviate the problem that the Fire Service often keep visiting the same premises and other issues such as homelessness and drug abuse can compound the problem.
- As part of the new arson action plan, the Arson Task Force was being regenerated which would bring all of the stakeholders together.

Cllr Skinner informed the Committee that in his role of Shadow of Cabinet Services for Adult Services, he had met with the Chief Executive of the Carer’s Trust at a meeting. During the meeting, it had become apparent that there was a lack of knowledge about the role of WMFS and the activities it carried out. ACFO Taylor acknowledged that each authority operated differently and asked if Members could advise the Service if and when they came into contact with any organisations where the Service could raise awareness of its activities and the services it provides.

Resolved that the Committee noted:-

- the status of the Service's key performance indicators in the second quarter of 2016/17
- the progress made in delivering the three strategic objectives contained in The Plan 2016/19
- the update on the performance information system detailed in section five of the report.

Resolved that the following actions be undertaken and submitted to the next meeting of the Committee:

- The WMFS Positive Action statement to be submitted to the Committee
- A breakdown of the figures for PI 17 'The percentage of all staff from ethnic minority communities' to be collated.

33/16 **Scrutiny Committee Update – Safeside Transport Funding**

Carol Morgan, Children and Young Peoples Manager, was welcomed by the Committee:

The provision of funding for transport to and from Safeside for schools had clearly made a difference, with a substantial increase in the number of pupils visiting the facility. However, the funding had proven to not be sustainable.

Staff at Safeside have spoken with schools during visits to obtain feedback from teachers and the cost and congestion in travelling to and from the Safeside facility had proven to be clear barriers.

To help alleviate concerns, and in an attempt to remove such barriers, Safeside were in the transition of changing funding and changing the programme which would allow schools to arrive later and leave earlier but the key messages would continue to be communicated.

The current funding arrangements would continue until March 2018 which would allow the Service to review them.

It had proven difficult to obtain voluntary funding. The Service had joined the West Midlands Funders Forum which included the Big Lottery; this was a new group set up to discuss how to access funding following concerns raised that organisations within the West Midlands were not necessarily drawing on the appropriate amount of funding when compared to other areas.

The Safeside facility now welcomed a lot of groups such as brownies and scouts, and the Service was exploring how to engage further with vulnerable groups and children who received home schooling and increase non-school visits by up to 100%.

Feedback received had also raised the fact that it was not always clear to people that Safeside was an educational facility. As a result, work was being carried out on publicity materials. However, it was proving difficult with the move to Academies to often get the information to the right person.

Overall, transport was a key factor but not the only one, external sponsorship would also be a key factor.

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

- All Members had been charged with publicising Safeside within their local authorities.
- A booklet and brochure on Safeside would be circulated to all Members to assist them.
- A short piece on Safeside would be drawn up and circulated to Members for circulation to the press.
- The Safeside logo would be circulated to Members for use with Twitter and other social media.
- It would be useful for Members to be provided with a breakdown of areas and the schools which had attended.
- Workshops had been introduced as part of the change to the Safeside programme which enabled

120 children and young people within the facility (60 in the village, and 60 in the workshop).

- Schools within deprived areas and schools which had not visited Safeside for three years would be targeted this year.

Resolved that the following actions be undertaken and submitted to the next meeting of the Committee:

- The Safeside booklet and brochure to be circulated to all Members.
- A short piece on Safeside would be drawn up and circulated to Members for circulation to the press.
- The Safeside logo would be circulated to Members for use with Twitter and other social media.
- Members to be provided with a breakdown of areas and the schools which had attended Safeside.

Resolved that the item plus an update on progress would be brought back to the Committee in March 2018.

34/16 **Update on Progress of the Data Sharing Review**

Michele Pym, Strategic Hub, provided an update on the Scrutiny Committee review of data sharing:

Initial findings included:

- The Service lacked a strategy or clear policy for data sharing.
- Data was being shared but there was no evidence of what procedures staff were following
- Data sharing agreements had been shared by Data Management but the agreements were very long.
- ICT systems did not assist data sharing.
- A number of examples of best practice which WMFS could learn from including best practice carried out

by Merseyside FRS and Cheshire FRS, plus the Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing.

The following outcomes were required:

- Establishing a clear policy and guidance.
- Identifying what data was being shared by the Service.
- Developing data sharing agreements.
- Examining how ICT can support data sharing.

It was noted that it was expected that the review would be completed by March 2017.

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

- West Midlands Police had received funding from the Government to examine data sharing. West Midlands Police were investigating the possibilities of creating a single portal for all organisations to share data. As well as examining security and a single place of storage. WMFS may wish to discuss with West Midlands Police in more detail.
- In terms of security, users could be an issue, not just hackers.
- A large element of data collected by Fire Services may be location based, rather than person based, and therefore could present a subtle difference compared to data collected by some other organisations.
- Some people and organisations might hide behind regulations and legislation such as the Data Protection Act, presenting barriers to data sharing.

35/16 **Consideration of Scoping Document for Review of
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ACFO Gary Taylor advised the Committee that the Service had been reviewing and revising organisational policies

and procedures, in particular People Support Services policies, particularly surrounding the subject of positive action.

Based on the focus of the Thomas Review, the Police and Fire Minister, and Fire Reform, it was suggested that the next Scrutiny Committee review focussed on positive action and recruitment including outcomes.

This would allow the opportunity to look at other organisations and the approaches taken by them in this area, including organisations from both the public and private sectors.

External support would be considered to provide a fresh perspective.

Resolved that Members are to consider if the next Scrutiny Committee review is to be focused on positive action and recruitment.

Resolved that terms of reference to be circulated to the Committee.

36/16 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2016/17**

The Committee noted the progress of the work programme for 2016/17.

(Meeting ended at 12:26 pm)

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