

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

01 November 2021

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Spence (Chair), Councillor Locke (Vice-Chair), and Councillor Barrie.

Virtual: Councillor Barlow, Councillor Dehar, Councillor Young

Officers: Joanne Simmons, Kamla Devi-Ahir, Karen Gowreesunker, Kirsty Tuffin, Michael Wood, Phil Fellows, Sarah Warnes, Satinder Sahota, Stephen Timmington and Wendy Browning-Sampson.

01/21 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received.

02/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

03/21 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24 February 2020**

Resolved: That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record of proceedings.

04/21 **Scrutiny Committee – Terms of Reference 2021-2022**

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, presented the Scrutiny Committee – Terms of Reference 2021-2022 report, that outlined the Committee's Terms of Reference, as per appendix 1 of the report.

The Committee were advised that the Committee's' terms of reference were submitted to Fire Authority on 21 June 2021 whereby, the addition of pre-scrutiny and post-scrutiny was approved. Pre-scrutiny would enable proposed changes to strategic policy decisions to be scrutinised. Post-scrutiny

would enable the Authority to seek assurance on operational decisions already made by the Chief Fire Officer/Officers.

No changes were requested, and it was agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Committee, as per appendix 1, be noted.

05/21

Diversity Inclusion Cohesion & Equality Update

Joanne Simmons, People Support Manager, presented the Diversity Inclusion Cohesion and equality update report that outlined the ongoing progress made by the service in relation to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) since January 2020 to date.

The Committee were advised that as part of the Leadership, Partnership and Organisational commitments of the service, a series of 'Brave Space' talks had periodically taken place and had been open any member of staff voluntarily, with an average attendance of 50 people. Each session covered subjects in relation to DICE such as women's safety, Religion and Belief, Neurodiversity and Positive Action. To ensure the continuation of training opportunities, the following training sessions had been adapted to be delivered virtually:

- Recruitment & Selection (25 virtual training sessions completed within the last 12 months)
- Unconscious Bias Training (scheduled to take place between February - May 2022)
- Neurodevelopmental Disorder workshop (scheduled to take place in February 2022)

A toolkit for Managers had also been in development, with the support of the Staff Engagement Groups, to support managers and their development. The toolkit would provide a 'one-stop shop' for DICE information.

The Committee were advised that the nationally recognised league table for the 'Top 50 UK Inclusive Employers' was published in December 2020 whereby, the service had been

ranked 6th place, up by 28 places from the previous year. In November 2019, the service attended the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Conference, whereby the service employees were among the award winners for, Outstanding Endeavour, Outstanding Charitable Award and Outstanding Charity Innovation. Fire Authority Members were also recognised in the Shining Light Executive Team award. The service was also announced the winners in the Guardian Public Service Awards for the 'Workplace Diversity Category', with a member of staff also being recognised in the category of 'Unsung Hero' in the Excellence Fore Awards.

The Committee were advised that the welfare review, that sought to review the current welfare and training provisions for managers, in line with health safety and wellbeing provisions, had commenced in May 2021. An update would be provided to the Committee at a future meeting. Data on the service's employees, as per the report, were also highlighted.

Following questions around the services employees and their religious commitments, Sarah Warnes, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, confirmed that the national discussion on Fire Fighters and their capacity to wear turbans had been on-going and the service would continue to contribute to this discussion moving forward.

The Chair of the Committee, Members and Sarah Warnes thanked the DICE team for all their hard work and commended them for being at the forefront of change.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the ongoing progress made by the service in relation to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE), be noted.

06/21

Dispute Resolution Report – July 2019 to March 2020

Wendy Browning-Sampson, People Support Manager, presented the Dispute Resolution Report, that outlined the number, type and outcome of disciplines, grievance hearings

and other dispute resolutions for the period July 2019 to March 2020.

The Committee were advised that the dispute resolution report had been taken to the Joint Consultative Panel meeting held on 27 September 2021 and had been submitted to Committee to ensure they were brought up to date with the key data that could not be presented to the Committee as a result of the pandemic preventing meetings taking place.

The Committee were advised that for the period July 2019 to March 2020, the service had a total of 11 grievances that went to a formal hearing. The reason for these grievances were outlined as per the report. For the same period, the service had a total of 14 disciplinary cases, 8 of these being gross misconduct, 6 being misconduct.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the contents of the Dispute Resolution Report for the period 1 July 2019 to 31 March 2020, be noted.

07/21

Dispute Resolution Report – April 2020 to September 2021

Wendy Browning-Sampson, People Support Manager, presented the Dispute Resolution Report, that outlined the number, type and outcome of disciplines, grievance hearings and other dispute resolutions for the periods April 2020 – March 2021 (period 1) and April 2021 - September 2021 (period 2).

The Committee were advised of the key figures for grievances and disciplinaries within the Service, for periods 1 and 2, as per the report. The reason for these grievances were also outlined.

The Committee were advised that significant changes, outlined within the report, had been made to the Disciplinary and Grievance policies, whereby a stakeholder group consisting of managers, trade union representatives, people support services and HR, were consulted and engaged with.

Following feedback from the stakeholder group, the following external training was provided by ASCAS and Achievement by Design Coaching Consulting Training (ABDCCT):

- Disciplinary Investigations
- Disciplinary Commissioning and Appeals
- Crucial Conversations.

It was confirmed that these training sessions had been open to managers and trade union representatives to attend.

The Committee were advised that the Grievance Policy and toolkit had been in draft stages and would be finalised in January 2022. Mediated training would be provided to managers and all new managers joining the service thereafter.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the contents of the Dispute Resolution Report for the following two periods be noted:
 - 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021
 - 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021
2. That it be agreed that the Dispute Resolution Report, noted by the Scrutiny Committee, be submitted to the Joint Consultative Panel.

08/21

Scrutiny Committee Progress Report on Review of Safeguarding in WMFS

Michael Wood, Safeguarding Manager, presented the Scrutiny Committee Progress Report on the Review of Safeguarding in the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS). The report outlined the work to improve safeguarding arrangements and practice in WMFS.

The Committee were advised that Michael Wood had been appointed as the Safeguarding Manager in December 2020, following the safeguarding review conducted by Alan Lotinga, to assist with the implementation of its recommendations for improvement, as outlined within the report.

Since the review, a Safeguarding Oversight and Assurance Group had been established whereby terms of reference and an action plan had been created, as per appendix 1 of the report. Significant changes had been made to the Ecademy safeguarding awareness eLearning as part of the services supervision framework and safeguarding competency.

The Committee were advised that the 7 Safeguarding Adult Boards within the West Midlands Metropolitan region would receive a single self-assessment and annual report from WMFS starting from April 2022. The Committee were reassured that a good level of engagement with staff with the development of the Safeguarding Policy and procedures had taken place, with 3 focus groups taking place throughout March and April 2021. Each focus group covered the following 4 areas:

- Recognising and Responding to Abuse and Neglect
- Reporting, Recording and Referring
- People in a Position of Trust Policy
- Staff Competency and Supervision Framework

The Committee were advised that a safeguarding toolkit would be developed and implemented to assist with the implementation of good practice. A full equality impact assessment had been conducted for these changes, outlined in appendix 2 of the report.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the progress made to date on the implementation of the recommendations made as part of the review of safeguarding, be noted.

09/21

Scrutiny Reviews for Consideration

Karen Gowreesunker presented the Scrutiny Review report that outlined the proposed scrutiny reviews for the Committees consideration.

The Committee were advised that as a result of the pandemic and the service operating under business continuity arrangements, some of the themes from the 24 March 2020 committee meeting had been included within the

proposed work for consideration including the Prevention - Safe and Well. Members were re-assured that, if approved, the review on Safe and Well would consider their involvement throughout/post the pandemic and its future development to ensure that the needs of the vulnerable continued to be met.

It was agreed that virtual workshops for Members of the Committee be arranged to assist with the Prevention – Safe and Well review.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Scrutiny Committee next themes be considered.
2. That it be agreed that the Scrutiny Committee considered and approved prevention – Safe and Well as the next theme for review, in light of discussions and resolutions at previous meetings of the Committee. That it be agreed that the review be added within the Committees work programme.
3. That it be agreed that the Scrutiny Committee considered the approach to engaging with Members to refresh themes for future scrutiny reviews.
4. That it be agreed that virtual workshops for Members of the Committee be arranged to assist with the Prevention – Safe and Well review.

10/21

Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021-2022

Karen Gowreesunker presented the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2021-2022. It was agreed that the Safe and Well Report and the additional workshops be added to the work programme.

The Chair of the Committee commended Officers for the work they had provided within the work programme.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021-2022 be approved.
2. That it be agreed that the Safe and Well Report be added to the work programme.

The meeting finished at 11:30 hours.

Kirsty Tuffin
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