

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Service Headquarters
On Wednesday, 22 March 2023**

Present

Members

Councillors Carter, Hartin (Vice Chair), Jhawar and Offland (Chair)

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Guy Williams	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Natalie Parkinson	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer	EDIO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Aldcroft.

Councillors Pardy and Wynn did not attend the meeting and subsequently gave their apologies.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Non-Exempt Minutes

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2023, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Committee Work Plan 2023/24

This report reviewed progress against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2022/23 Work Plan and put forward a 2023/24 Work Plan for consideration and approval by Members.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note progress made against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2022/23 Work Plan; and
- b) Approve the Work Plan for 2023/24, as attached at the Appendix, to the report, without amendment.

6 Committee Terms of Reference

This report asked Members to consider the Terms of Reference of the Strategy and Resources Committee, following the annual review conducted by officers.

The Committee commented that they believed that the Terms of Reference are thorough enough and that no amendments were needed to them.

Resolved that, having reviewed its Terms of Reference, as attached at the Appendix to the report, the Committee recommends them to the Fire Authority for agreement, without amendment.

7 Review of Member Role Descriptions

This report asked Members to review the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Resolved that the Committee agree the Role Descriptions for Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report.

8 Review of Corporate Performance Indicators and Proposed Tolerances for 2023/24

This report provided information and recommendations for consideration by the Strategy and Resources Committee, in relation to work currently being undertaken by the Service to set Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs) for 2023/24

The ACFO (SD) presented this report and highlighted the following in relation to it.

The Service introduced its set of nine CPIs in 2020/21. The CPIs have now been in place for 24 months and the tolerances are still finding their natural level, although none seem to be too far out of range at present. It is therefore proposed that the tolerances remain the same for all CPIs, with the exception of CPI 8. There may be more scope to amend the CPI tolerances in the future.

CPI 1 – All Fires

It is predicted that the overall performance for this CPI will be 1068 fires for 2022/23 which is a predicted increase of 2.4% on performance in 2021/22. It is therefore recommended that a 5% tolerance level be maintained for this indicator. It also needs to be remembered that performance against the All Fires CPI is reflective of the very hot summer that occurred in 2022/23.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs)

It is predicted that the annual cumulative performance for 2022/23 will be 175 ADFs. As this is within the set tolerances for this CPI, it is recommended that the 10% tolerance level for this CPI is maintained for 2023/24.

The direction of travel for this CPI over the last 5 years, is beginning to plateau and the Service needs to look for more innovative ways of reducing ADF numbers further. It is worth noting, that as of yet, a rise in the number of heating/wood burner fires etc that was anticipated, has not been seen.

CPI 3 - Deliberate Fires

Predicted cumulative performance against this indicator is 268 incidents during 2022/23. Again, this remains within the set tolerances for this CPI, and it therefore recommended that the 7% tolerance level for this CPI be maintained.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

There is no set tolerance for this CPI as the Service's ambition is to achieve zero fire related deaths and serious injuries. The number of fires is not increasing but fire deaths are even though the Service's prevention activity seems to be correctly targeted. Elderly people in extremely rural areas appear to be the most at risk group and this is something that the Service will need to target in future.

Members commented that it is always saddening to see an increase in the number of fire deaths. The ACFO (SD) explained that each death is subject to a serious event investigation. Exploring the vulnerability matrix leads to a risk assessment that can be shared with wider service and partner agencies. The challenge remains with ensuring professional partners are signposting to 'make every contact count'. The Service's ambition is to develop this approach and bring it to the forefront of people's minds.

The ACFO (SS) explained that this issue is related to the challenge of independent living and highlighted the role of Member involvement with community engagement. Members advised that parish councils are an important way of communicating to communities.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

Performance against this CPI has remained relatively static over the last 5 years, and it is predicted that there may possibly be a 1% drop from 88% to 87% for 2022/23. It is therefore recommended that the current tolerance level of 2% be maintained for this CPI.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff through Operational Activity.

There is no set tolerance for this CPI as the Service's ambition is to achieve zero injuries to staff. Performance against this CPI will continue to be monitored by officers with narrative reporting on occurrences being provided to the Fire Authority and Committees as appropriate.

CPI 7 – Response Standard – Monitored against 3 Categories of Urban, Town & Fringe and Rural

There is no tolerance level for this CPI as it is a performance measure. It is predicted that there will be a 1% end of year drop in the overall response standard from 95% to 94% in 2022/23.

CPI 8 – Fire in Regulated Buildings

This CPI was introduced in April 2021 and does not currently have a tolerance applied to it. Now that comparative data has been collected for the CPI, it is proposed that a 5% tolerance be implemented for it to allow more comprehensive performance monitoring to be carried out.

CPI 9 – Diversity, Establishment and Firefighter Competence

There is no tolerance level applied to this CPI, but it is proposed that the attainment rate of 90% continues to be applied to each of the skill sets that are monitored as part of firefighter competence.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the report and acknowledge the work undertaken to determine the proposed Corporate Performance Indicators for 2023/24; and
- b) Approve the proposed Corporate Performance Indicators for 2023/24, as set out in the report.

9 People Strategy End of Year Report

This report provided an update on the achievements that have been made to date against the People Strategy 2021-2025.

The HHRA presented this report and highlighted the following achievements that are set out within the report.

Developing Leadership Capacity

- On call buddying scheme – There have been 234 applications to On Call Buddying Scheme and 125 people have requested a buddy.
- Promotion processes have been delivered during 2022 for Crew, Watch, Station, Group and Area Managers and Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Chief Fire Officer

Organisational Development and Engagement

- The national insurance savings achieved through the Cycle to Work Scheme are being invested back into the Service's health and wellbeing activities.
- Viv-Up, an employee reward and benefits site, was launched in October 2022. This offers lifestyle savings and local discounts to all employees.

Resourcing the Service

- Seven Talent Management sessions have been delivered to 45+ managers from across the Service.
- The recent On Call campaign, which used new marketing strategies, doubled the number of applicants in the six weeks, during, and after, the campaign.
- Eight On Call employees have been employed on fixed term contracts to cover fixed periods of absences and/or a specific piece of work.
- 21 Support Staff roles have been reviewed under the Job Evaluation Scheme; with 15 additional roles being reviewed under the SFIA Framework as part of the ICT and Performance and Planning Review.

Health, Wellbeing and Fitness

- 56 employees have received training from The Fire Fighters Charity on a range of topics including Introduction to Mindfulness, Developing Resilience and Nutrition and Healthy Eating
- 31 employees are now saving with the Serve and Protect Credit Union, and over £15,000 has already been saved.
- 42 employees have attended Suicide Prevention Training, 16 employees have attended Suicide Safety Training and 5 employees have completed Suicide First Aid Training. In addition, 42 operational staff have attended Suicide First Aid Lite Training which provides them with the initial skills required when first on scene to a potential suicide incident.
- 390 fitness tests were completed during 2022 with 92% of employees passing the test. The remaining 8% have been provided with a supportive trainer journey which aims to improve both physical fitness and mental wellbeing.

New Ways of Working

- The 12-month pilot of the new shift system concluded in January 2023. The shift system now offers flexibility within the staffing model and enables pre-planning to build resilience into the shift system.
- There has been a successful transition of Pension provider for firefighter pensions from Shropshire County Pension Fund to West Yorkshire Pension Fund
- All support staff are working in line with the Service's new ways of working which enables agile working.

Critical success factors that will inform the Service of how well it is doing in achieving the objectives set out in the People Strategy and its four underpinning Plans have been identified and RAG rated. These are set out in the Appendix to the report and the HHRA advised that as the People Strategy is a four-year plan, it would not be expected that all the factors would be rated green at this stage.

Four of the Critical Success Factors are currently rated as red and the HHRA gave the following updates on these items.

- **Improved percentage of staff feeling valued and recognised for the work they do as outlined through the staff survey.**

Based on the results of the Staff Survey, the percentage of staff feeling valued and recognised is down and this will be addressed through the Staff Survey Action Plan

- **Reduction in turnover rates across all groups**

Work has been done on turnover rates but there has been a large number of recent retirements including ill-health. Resignations are quite frequent across On Call stations which can be related to employees moving out of the responding area or On Call employment not being compatible with their primary employment.

Members asked if the issue of compatibility with primary employment relates to changes in employer attitude. The HHRA responded that it appears to relate more to employees attempting to achieve a better work/life balance. The Service recognises that it potentially needs to do more to address this issue at the recruitment stage of employment. The ACFO (SD) added that the Service needs to do more to embrace and value employees.

- **Improved training facilities available to staff and instructors**

The Service recognises that its training facilities need to be upgraded and is looking to do a refresh of them as an interim arrangement until the construction industry stabilises.

- **Percentage increase in the number of staff showing an understanding for within the Service given the challenges faced by the Service as outlined in the staff survey.**

There has been a slight decrease in the number of staff that show an understanding of the need for change. It is thought that this may be due to communications issues, and this will be addressed in the Staff Survey Action Plan.

Members asked if the responses to the staff survey were perhaps related to the Covid pandemic. The CFO responded that what is being experienced is timely as there are now different expectations of the Service and a need to balance between flexibility for employees and delivering for communities.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

9 Gender Pay Gap Report

This report outlined Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Information Regulations 2017) and detailed the Service's annual Gender Pay Gap figures for 2022 and the differences in average earnings between its male and female employees. The EDIO presented this report and highlighted the following points to the Committee.

The Service has a legal obligation to publish annual figures on its gender pay gap. The provisional national gender pay gap figure for 2022 for all employees is 14.9%. The Service's gender pay gap for 2022 is 3%, which is a 1% reduction in the gender pay gap from 4% in 2021. The Service's median gender pay gap remains at 0%.

On average, male employees earn 48p per hour more than female employees in 2022. This is a significant decrease from the Service's 2021 data where male employees were earning 63p per hour more than female employees.

The Service's gender pay gap is a very positive figure when compared to other Fire and Rescue Services. Officers are aware that this may change in the next year due to the recent pay awards but issues such as this will be reflected in the narrative of future reports. The Service has introduced numerous new initiatives to reduce the gender pay gap and these are detailed on pages 5 to 7 of the report.

Members asked if data is collected like for like across the sector. The EDIO explained that there is quite a strict range of data that is used for the calculations.

Referring to the additional benefits of working from home, Members asked if this has decreased now. The HHRA explained that Green Book employees are currently allowed to work one day a week from home, with additional days being allowed at the discretion of line managers. Members asked if this was sufficient or could the Service do more for employees in this area. The HHRA explained that Green Book can apply for flexible working arrangements under their terms and conditions. Grey Book staff can also apply for flexible working arrangements, but this does normally require job-sharing arrangements to be put in place to ensure cover is maintained. The CFO added that flexible working arrangements are now at the stage where the Service is trying to balance the maximum amount of flexibility with the demands of face-to-face work.

Members asked how frequently the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group meetings are held. The EDIO responded that the Group has increased its meetings from three to four per year. The Member Champion for Equality and Diversity is involved in the Steering Group and the Service hopes to share its model of work with Services.

The EDIO explained that the Service's On Call 'Buddy' system starts at the point of application if needed or at any point during an individual's employment if required. Members commented that they thought that the buddy system is a great idea and asked if there is anyone that provides a link between the training programme and reasonable adjustment requirements.

The EDIO explained that the Service's Voices Group is always available to provide support to individuals and legal reasonable adjustments are as far as possible, always made. The ACFO (SD) explained that requests for reasonable adjustments are something that the Service is experiencing more regularly.

Members asked if exit interviews are undertaken with leavers. The HHRA responded that every individual who leaves the Service is offered an exit interview, although not all choose to accept the offer.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the 2023 report (for 2022 data) for publishing on the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service website and the Government website www.gov.uk

11 Progress on Implementation of the Equality Action Plan

This report updated Members on progress on the key actions identified in the Equality Scheme Action Plan from March 2022 to February 2023.

The EDIO presented this report and advised the Committee that the Equality Action Plan, which is attached at the Appendix to the report, is a live, ongoing document that is updated on a quarterly basis. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group undertake continuous monitoring of the Action Plan through regular reviews of the document.

The EDIO then highlighted the following examples of employment focussed EDI work from the past year.

- Positive action continues with numerous taster days being held throughout 2022.
- An action plan has been developed to ensure that the Service meets its Mental health at work commitment.
- The EDI Steering Group has confirmed the purchase of a networked version of 'read and write' software for neurodiverse employees, which will be available for all staff to use.
- EDI refresher training has been completed for 18 On Call stations, 12 Wholtime Watches, 2 Fire Control Watches and the Prevention and Protection Department. Training has also been delivered on Equality Impact Assessments during the year.
- The Voices Employee Support Group is now embedded in the Service and numerous successful events have been organised and run by the Group during the past year.
- The Service signed up to White Ribbon accreditation in November 2022 and a focus group is being established to work towards developing an action plan.
- The Service has reviewed the findings of the London Fire Brigade Cultural Review and a gap analysis and recommendations were taken to the EDI Steering Group in January 2023.

The Committee asked about EDI Refresher training for Fire Authority Members. The EDIO advised that this will be offered to Members during the coming year.

Members commented that they are very pleased to see the EDI work that has been carried out during the previous year. They thanked officers and the wider workforce for their input which they feel puts this Service ahead of the game in relation to EDI.

Members also commented that it is pleasing that there is the feeling within the Service that is okay for people to speak up about issues and concerns. The ACFO (SD) explained that the Service is fostering a positive culture that enables employees to speak out and have conversations about a wide range of topics.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

12 Equality Monitoring Statistics

This report provided Members with an overview of the Service's Equality Monitoring Statistics and how the Service uses this data.

The EDIO presented this report and explained that the Service is required to publish its Equality Monitoring Statistics annually. The statistics are used in the Service to understand workforce, create initiatives, and plan positive action.

The statistics for 2022 show that there are low numbers of Black Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) and LGBTQ+ employees within the Service and that women are still under represented in the operational workforce. The EDIO explained that the Service is very committed to increasing employee numbers in these areas and staff are being encouraged to declare their personal details to ensure that the Service's EDI data is up to date. The ACFO (SD) advised the Committee that the station profiling of demographics which used 2011 census data is currently being updated to reflect 2021 data. There are four stations that have BAME communities in the station area and work is being undertaken to see how this can be focused in on for recruitment.

Members asked if the Service links its prevention work with recruitment. The EDIO responded that it does link in with positive action work. Each watch / station has been asked to have its own EDI objective which it is hoped will encourage an increase in these under-represented areas.

The Committee asked if there is a role for Members to play in relation to this issue. The ACFO (SD) confirmed that the Service is definitely looking to encourage Members to get involved and once the On Call Sustainability Programme gets into its stride, the Service will be looking for support to access communities.

Members asked if there is any tie up with Job Centres. The EDIO explained that all vacancies are sent to Job Centres. Officers are also investigating if Job Centres are going to re-start a previous scheme where the EDI Department attend Job Centres for recruitment purposes.

The CFO stated that community engagement is a priority for the Service. The Service seems to be generally very good at telling communities what it thinks they need but not so good at listening to what they need, and this needs to be addressed.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

13 Reasonable Adjustments Update

This report provided Members with an overview of reasonable adjustments made to support employees in their work roles.

The EDIO presented this report and advised the Committee that there are 33 current reasonable adjustment cases within the Service with 162 cases to date. The cost of the Reasonable Adjustment Programme is detailed on page 3 of the report with £11,089 being spent on reasonable adjustments for employees from 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

14 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

15 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2023, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....