

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held in the Beech Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 12 March 2020 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Carter, Hartin (Vice-Chair), Mellings (Chair), Middleton, Pardy, Roberts and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Dave Myers	Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Si Hardiman	Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
James Walton	Treasurer to Fire Authority	Treasurer
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Natalie Parkinson	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer	EDIO
Donna Trowsdale	Development Officer	DO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Joanne Coadey, Head of Finance

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 30 January 2020, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Chair varied the order of the agenda to allow items 9, 11, 12 and 13 to be considered at this point.

9 Gender Pay Gap Report

This report explained Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Information Regulations 2017) to publish an annual Gender Pay Gap report and provided the associated details.

The EDIO presented this report and highlighted the following points:

- The Service's mean average pay gap has reduced from 8% in 2018 to 6% in 2019. This is positive especially when compared to the national average pay gap which is 17.3%.
- The Service's median pay gap has reduced to zero in 2019 from 8% in 2018.
- The National Joint Council (NJC) pay award in April 2019 had a significant percentage impact on the salary quartile bands.
- The quartile bands increased as a result of the NJC pay award and the lower quartile moved up.
- The lower salary quartile includes the largest percentage of the Service's female employees and includes those who work part-time.
- The Service has several initiatives in place to address the gender pay gap, including encouraging the take-up of flexible working and changes to the Individual Personal and Development Review (IPDR) process.
- The IPDR changes are designed to recognise potential within the Service and encourage staff progression.

Members asked how the Service's gender pay gap compares to other fire and rescue services. The EDIO explained that it is difficult to compare as you need to look at services that are comparable to this Service in terms of the size and make-up of both the organisation and its senior officer team. The CFO added that executive groups have a large impact on the gender pay gap figure, for example if the Service recruited one extra female executive, it would have a dramatic effect on the data.

The CFO also commented that the data in the report shows the Service's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion as it creates a culture of moving in the right direction, for example there are more female middle managers and an increase in pay for lower paid workers. The HHRA also added that benchmarking across fire and rescue services is difficult as services are not all using the same gender pay gap calculation. This issue has been raised at the national level but definitive guidance on it has not yet been issued.

The Committee commented that it is pleasing to see the Service is heading in the right direction. Fire and rescue services are traditionally regarded as male territory, so it is pleasing to see the change and success that has been achieved so far in this Service, especially as the issue of females being employed in high-level roles is being raised nationally.

Resolved that the Committee note the 2019 data contents of the 2020 report for publishing on the Service's website and the Government website www.gov.uk.

11 Progress on Implementation of the Equality Scheme Action Plan

This report updated Members on progress on the main actions identified in the Equality Scheme Action Plan from March 2019 to February 2020.

The EDIO presented this report and talked through the initiatives and activities that have been undertaken to implement the Equality Scheme Action Plan during 2019/20.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

12 Equality Monitoring Statistics

This report provided Members with an overview of the Service's Equality Monitoring Statistics.

The EDIO presented this report and explained that the statistics in the Appendix to the report are not broken down into operational areas to prevent the identification of individuals within those groups. The EDIO also explained that further work needs to be undertaken on encouraging the completion of equality monitoring data by employees. This will enable the Service to obtain a more accurate view of the composition of its workforce. The equality monitoring data is explained in the induction process, so employees understand why this information is collected by the Service.

With regard to the under-representation of women in the Service's workforce, the CFO explained that the Service cannot do much more than its current initiatives, but it can do those better. The CFO gave the example of the current on-call recruitment campaign which includes a good range of images showing diversity within the workforce.

The CFO added that it is unclear if the low numbers of LGBT+ people recorded within the Service mean that there are genuinely low numbers or if it is the case that people are choosing not to provide this information. Either way this is a problem for the Service as it is important that the public understand how inclusive the organisation is. A series of networks and allies to support minority groups is currently being developed within the Service, which is an innovative step for a small organisation.

The number of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees within the Service is obviously not representative of the population in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin where 7% of the population are BAME. This is a challenge for all fire and rescue services and the Service is working to address this by focusing on its work in Wellington with the Council and local faith leaders.

Members asked if work was being undertaken to look at why employees prefer not to say or state unknown with regard to sexual orientation. The EDIO confirmed that this has been identified as an area where further work is needed to identify issues affecting the responses to this question. It may be that employees are deliberately choosing not to provide this information to the Service, but this needs to be investigated. Members commented that there will always be a group of people who will choose to not provide information such as this. The EDIO acknowledged this and commented that it is hoped that the establishment of networks and allies will help to address this.

The Committee asked if the equality monitoring forms are completed anonymously. The EDIO explained that only the Human Resources Department have access to the data collected and they follow the strict rules related to personal data held by organisations. The EDIO also reported that the equality monitoring form has recently been updated and the reasons for collecting data have been reinforced. There is also the issue in relation to disability that people may not understand that they have a disability, if for example they are dyslexic. The CFO commented that it may be that there is an issue with trust and confidence within the culture of the organisation and officers will look further into this issue outside the meeting. The HHRA added that even if an anonymous form is used, people will still think that it is not anonymous or that it is traceable to individuals.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

13 Reasonable Adjustments Update

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

The EDIO presented this report and talked through the information set out in it. The EDIO particularly highlighted the good feedback that had been received for the Training Department regarding their recognition of different learning styles and adapting teaching styles to suit individuals.

Members congratulated officers on the support that is given through the reasonable adjustments programme, particularly with regard to dyslexia.

The EDIO reported that the Service won a British Dyslexia Award in December and Members commented on how pleasing this was.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

5 Committee Work Plan 2020/21

This report reviewed progress against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2019/20 Work Plan and put forward a 2020/21 Work Plan for consideration and approval by Members.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note progress made against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2019/20 Work Plan; and
- b) Approve the Work Plan for 2020/21, attached at the appendix to the report, with / without amendment.

6 Committee Terms of Reference

The DCFO gave the following update:

A review of the Strategy and Resources Committee Terms of Reference and Delegations is currently being undertaken by a task and finish group consisting of three Fire Authority members. This review follows the governance changes that were agreed by the Fire Authority in June 2019.

Once the task and finish group has completed its review, an extraordinary meeting of the Committee will be called to consider any proposed changes to the Committee's terms of reference and delegations. Any recommendations arising from the review will then be taken forward to the Fire Authority's Annual Meeting in June 2019, for ratification.

Resolved that the Committee note the update given.

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 the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, as attached at the appendices to the report without amendment.

8 Service Targets for Integrated Risk Management Plan Extension 2020/21

This report summarised performance against Service Targets for the period 2015 – 2020 and proposed Service Targets for 2020/21 (extension year).

The ACFO presented this report and the Committee talked through each of the indicators in turn, considering a summary of performance and recommendations for the 2020/21 targets:

Accidental Primary Fires (APF)

The APF target has already been achieved for 2019/20 with a significant reduction occurring in January 2020, which the Service is looking to equate to prevention work.

The Committee agreed the target as proposed in the report.

Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADF)

Good performance has been achieved against the ADF target even though there has been an increase in housing development across the county.

Members asked if the Service was able to work with housing developers to ensure that correct fire safety measures are being included in developments. The ACFO explained that there is a legal responsibility in respect of high-rise developments, but this then crosses over to the Housing Act and local authorities. It is believed that there may be changes to give more legislative powers following the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower inquiry and the Hackett review.

The CFO added that the Service has no statutory powers in relation to housing development so it relies on relationships with council departments but there is no legislative requirement for local authorities to consult fire and rescue services during planning. Work is ongoing to strengthen the Service's relationship with Building Control to try and address this issue.

Members asked if there was anything that the Service or the Authority could do to address this. The CFO explained that the Service can write to Building Control to raise concerns and issues, but nothing can be done once an application has been signed off. The issue is also being addressed through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

The Committee agreed the target as proposed in the report.

Deliberate fires

There has been exceptional performance against this target over the five-year period, but it is a target that is susceptible to variations in performance and can be heavily influenced by weather conditions. There are two options for this target for 2020/21 – 396 fires or 520 fires - but officers are conscious that one of them will require a heavy use of resources to achieve. Officers would therefore look to resource this stretch target with existing resources across the Service.

The CFO commented that the number of deliberate fires is reducing over the years and the target of 520 is within reach. The CFO reminded Members that the Service will not be putting any additional resources into this area and there are influences on performance against this target that are out of the Service's control.

Members debated the two proposed targets and concluded that it was prudent to opt for a target of 520 which would maintain the 5% year on year reduction of 30% reduction over 6 years.

It was proposed by Councillor Roberts, seconded by Councillor Middleton and on a vote with 5 members voting for and 1 voting against, it was resolved that the Deliberate Fires target be set as 520 for 2020/21.

Fire related deaths and serious injuries

The ACFO talked through the reasons for increase in numbers for this target, which is mainly due to changes in reporting techniques and follow up after incidents. There are two proposals related to this target. These are a change of the target wording to 'less than' and the introduction of separate reporting of deaths and serious injuries.

The Committee debated the proposals for this target and concluded that the change of wording was sensible, as was the separate reporting of numbers of deaths and serious injuries. Members requested further information on the profile of the six incidents recorded for 2019/20 to see if this reflected the changes in the older population and increased independent living. The ACFO explained that the two fire deaths were both outside the vulnerable age group, but three of the four serious injuries fell with this age group.

The Committee agreed the target as proposed in the report.

Fires confined to room of origin

The CFO explained that this target is a meaningful metric which the Service would continue to use internally as it provides analysis of incidents and the factors involved in them.

Members asked if officers could provide an update on the ongoing debate about the use of sprinklers in domestic settings. There is a feeling that as the Government is pursuing sprinklers more in schools and houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) this may be an indication of movement in relation to domestic sprinklers. The ACFO undertook to provide feedback on this issue outside the meeting. The CFO commented that sprinklers are only one solution to this issue.

Members discussed the suggested target and whether it should be retained as a Service Target. The Committee agreed that it could see no reason not to retain the target for 2020/21 although it recognised that it may be more appropriate, in future, as a standard that the Service would hope to set rather than a target.

The Committee agreed the target as proposed in the report and agreed to retain it as a Service Target for this 2020/21, with it then being reviewed within the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Response

Members debated several issues related to this target including the increasing risks in more rural areas as a result of the increasing elderly demographic of the county; whether there needed to be more focus on provision of resources in the south of the county; and the ability of appliances to access locations. Members also queried if consideration had been given to whether fire stations are in the right place. The CFO explained that the Service has commissioned a piece of work related to this, but it is likely that this will show that stations are in the right places. The CFO also reassured the Committee that the IRMP will consider the points raised in this discussion.

The Committee agreed the proposed target as set out in the report.

Injuries to staff

The ACFO explained that because of the small numbers of injuries sustained by staff through firefighting, performance against this target can be affected by a single incident which gives a spike in performance. Most of the injuries are sustained during training rather than operational response and no medical discharges have resulted from the injuries sustained.

The Committee agreed the proposed target as set out in the report.

The Chair emphasised the work that is being undertaken by the Strategic Alliance between Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services, as set out in section 13 of the report, and the collaboration opportunities that this may identify.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Consider the proposed rationale for each of the Performance Indicators to be contained within the Annual Service Plan for 2020/21; and
- b) Agree the proposed Service Targets for 2020/21 without amendment.

10 People Strategy End of Year Report

This report provided an update on the changes that have been made to the People Strategy.

The HHRA presented the report and advised that the People Strategy has been extended by one year to bring it in line with the Service's IRMP process. The HHRA then highlighted the actions, as set out in the report, that will be undertaken in 2020/21.

The Committee also noted that the last update report on the People Strategy had come to the Committee in November 2019 because of the change in committee structure. This report will now be brought to the Committee on an annual basis.

Referring to Health and Wellbeing issues, Members asked how the Service is dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and what systems are in place to cope with a significant worsening of the situation. The CFO explained that COVID-19 is now a major issue for the Service which has arisen just as the Service came out of the flooding issues. The following updates were then given:

- The ACFO reported that the Service is looking at pandemic flu business continuity plans. It is estimated that 50% of the workforce could be affected with a peak of 17-21% affected across the workforce. Priority issues to be addressed include decontamination of equipment and supply of essential equipment.

- The HHRA reported that work is being undertaken on HR issues such as sick pay. There is also major concern about Prevention / Protection issues such as business audits and concern about employees being carriers of infection when undertaking visits. Visits are being prioritised, for example referrals from partner agencies, and any visits to Exeter data people are being deferred as those individuals are in the vulnerable group.
- The DCFO reported that planning assumptions for remote operations and working are being considered, including the use of Microsoft Teams as a tool for video conferencing.

Members asked if any guidance had been received from central government regarding testing for the virus. The CFO advised that there had been no specific guidance in relation to testing but one of the main concerns is the issue of the speed on testing and receiving results. Issues such as this will be raised through the Strategic Co-ordination Group.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Councillor Pardy left the meeting at this point (4.00 pm)

14 Findings from the 2019 Staff Survey

This report provided the Committee with an overview of the 2019 staff survey results, together with actions taken and recommendations going forward.

The DO presented this report and explained that there was a good improvement in the return rate for the 2019 Staff Survey. Of particular note, were the more positive responses in relation to senior management and how they are perceived.

The two areas that have shown a decline in satisfaction from the 2017 survey were IPDRs and career progression. The Service is currently undertaking work on both of these areas.

Members commented that they were pleased with the report and that it had been helpful to see the information that was set out in the Appendices to the report.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

15 Update on Apprenticeship Levy Spend 2019/20

This report provided an update on the apprenticeships funded through the levy, since the update report in September 2018.

The DO presented this report and explained that the Service has had some 'expired' funds which have been taken out of the levy account. It does seem however, that there are issues at the national level with the Apprenticeship Levy initiative, which it appears has not been as well received as was hoped.

Resolved that the Committee note

- a) the contents of the report; and
- b) the recommendations made to manager in section 6 of the report.

The meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....