

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 15 FEBRUARY 2022
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: 2021-2022 STAFF ENGAGEMENT FORUM

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with a report on the activity of the 2021-2022 Staff Engagement Forum.

Recommended:

That the report is noted.

Background

2. The 2021-2022 Staff Engagement Forum is the third cohort to be established since the introduction of the concept in 2018. The Forum comprises of a range of individuals from across the Service who have applied to join the Forum, with membership selected to provide a broad cross-section of the workforce.
3. The Forum largely set its own agenda and meets monthly to discuss various issues and topics, with the aim of suggesting ways in which improvements could be made to the Service.
4. There were 13 Members of the 2021-2022 Forum, who encompassed a range of roles and experiences from across the Service and the joint corporate services. They were:
 - Kirsty Hornby (Service Delivery, Ellesmere Port, Chair)
 - Martin Boardman (Service Delivery, Chester, Vice-Chair)
 - Kate Wilkinson (Protection, Cheshire West and Chester, Vice-Chair)
 - David Cross (Service Delivery, Widnes)
 - Alan Davis (Service Delivery, Penketh)
 - Angela Groom (People and Organisational Development)
 - Warren Hansford (Protection, Halton and Warrington)
 - Phil Marke (Service Delivery, Macclesfield)
 - Claire Moores (Prevention, Cheshire West and Chester)
 - Joel Olszewski (Service Delivery, Crewe)
 - Anant Patel (Protection, Cheshire West and Chester)

- Abigail Van-Loon (Service Delivery, Warrington)
 - Susan Watkins (Joint Corporate Services, Strategic Change)
5. The Forum held a total of eleven meetings over the course of its year long tenure, covering a range of topics and issues:
- Mental health and wellbeing
 - Learning and development
 - Culture and Communications
 - Sports and welfare
 - 2021 Staff Survey feedback
 - HMICFRS Inspection feedback
 - A forum charity challenge
 - Input into the CFO recruitment process
 - Contaminants
 - The cost of living

Forum Contributions

6. Through their meetings, the Forum discussed various themes and made suggestions to improve the Service, which are outlined in more detail below. Also, as a standing item of business, each month the Forum provided an initial assessment for staff suggestions as part of the Ignite staff suggestion scheme. In total over 128 ideas were assessed, with 53 suggestions passed on to Service Leadership Team for further consideration.

Sports and Welfare

7. The Forum considered ways to enhance the Service's Sports and Welfare Association. This included suggestions to: broaden the scope of activities to include wider leisure pursuits and hobbies; rebrand the association; and seek ways to encourage new members and potential representatives for the various sporting sections. Work to incorporate these suggestions and refresh the sports and welfare offering is ongoing.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

8. Suggestions around mental health and wellbeing included: refreshing and updating some of the associated advice and information on the Service's intranet; updating the posters providing contact details of local mental health first aiders and TRiM practitioners; and investigating the possibility of developing additional routes to access mental health support, if required.

Learning and Development

9. The Forum provided input into the development of a new appraisal system using the PDRPro platform, which is being rolled out across the Service for the next appraisal window. As well as giving their feedback on what they would like to see from the new system, such as the ability to update objectives regularly and promote a more regular discussion between the appraiser and appraisee,

several members of the Forum took part in the user trials and testing to ensure the system met expectations.

10. The People and Organisational Development department ran a focus group session with the Forum to gather feedback on promotion boards. The ideas and comments generated by the Forum helped inform a wider review of the promotion board process.

Culture and Communications

11. The Head of Communications and Engagement sought views from the Forum on the current range of communications channels used by the Service and how these may be improved, and also gathered suggestions from members on features that could be considered for the Service's new website and intranet.

Contaminants

12. The Forum also provided thoughts on how to reduce the risk of staff coming into contact with contaminants through the course of their roles. Several suggestions were made including reviewing and, where necessary, updating instructional videos; introducing specialist shampoos and body wipes to help remove particulates from staff after training or incidents; and investigating how to reduce the risk of exposure to diesel particulates both on an incident ground and within Service premises. These ideas have been fed into the Service's contaminants working group to review and action where relevant.

Wider Feedback

13. The Forum took part in two further focus group sessions, using their broad range of roles and experiences to provide feedback. The sessions helped to inform the Service's response to the 2021 staff survey outcomes and the second inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
14. Four members of the Forum also took part in the recruitment process to appoint the current Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. They formed a staff panel to ask questions of the candidates regarding their leadership priorities and thoughts on culture and staff engagement. Feedback from these sessions was then considered as part of the selection of the successful candidate.

Charity Challenge

15. Finally, the Forum devised and implemented a charity fundraising challenge to raise funds for the Firefighters Charity and The Hospice of the Good Shepherd. The challenge saw members cycle a loop of Cheshire over the two days of Friday 23 and Saturday 24 September 2022, encompassing 189 miles and a stop at each of Cheshire's 28 fire stations while riding a custom built four person tandem bicycle. The Forum raised over £1,800 in total for the two causes.

Financial Implications

16. A total of £9,729.24 was spent through the course of the Forum to facilitate external meeting venues and catering, plus any associated materials such as stationery. In addition, each of the Forum members received a £1,000 performance payment at the conclusion of the Forum in recognition of their individual contributions, totalling £13,000.

Legal Implications

17. None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

18. Members of the Forum were appointed to provide a range of diverse views and experiences from all departments within the Service.

Environmental Implications

19. None.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

**2019-21 STAFF ENGAGEMENT FORUM APPROVED BY THE FIRE AUTHORITY
ON 23RD JUNE 2021**