

CHESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 10TH DECEMBER 2019
REPORT OF: STAFF ENGAGEMENT FORUM
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: 2018-19 STAFF ENGAGEMENT FORUM

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an overview of the Staff Engagement Forum 2018-19 and to update on the subjects considered by the Forum during the period November 2018 to November 2019 and the outcomes of work undertaken.

Recommended:

That Members note the contents of this report.

Background

2. The Staff Engagement Forum was developed to improve engagement. It provided a platform for staff to identify issues affecting them in the workplace and to seek ways to deal with them. It was able to help shape future plans within the Service. The forum also served as a reference group for the organisation, providing feedback on key policies and proposals.
3. Expressions of interest were sought from staff during Summer 2018 and selections were made during the Autumn. A total of 15 members were appointed to the forum, alongside one member of staff to provide secretarial and administrative support.
4. Staff on the Forum were released from their normal duties to attend each of the meetings, which were scheduled for a full day each month. This gave members of the forum time to discuss and consider subjects in more detail. The Chief Fire Officer would also attend at the conclusion of each meeting to hear the feedback from forum members directly. This helped to provide a broad 'ground truth' that has assisted in improving and shaping the organisation.
5. At its first meeting, the Forum elected its own Chair and Vice-Chair and agreed terms of reference and subject matters they wished to discuss through the duration of their tenure. The initial Forum members are listed below.

Mark Shone (Chair)
Safety Central Manager
Prevention

Jon Woolley (Vice-Chair)
Station Manager
Operational Policy and Assurance

Chris Mannix
Watch Manager
Nantwich Fire Station

Hannah Caulfield
Watch Manager
Crewe Fire Station

Lee Marland
Watch Manager
Warrington Fire Station

Joanna Collier
Watch Manager
Warrington Fire Station

Gary Raper
Watch Manager
Widnes Fire Station

Erdal Cankaya
Crew Manager / On-Call Firefighter
Chester Fire Station / Knutsford
Fire Station

Stuart Guy
Crew Manager
Powey Lane Fire Station

Anthony Carney
On-Call Support Crew Manager
Service Delivery

Stacy Dearden
Firefighter / On-Call Firefighter
Ellesmere Port Fire Station /
Frodsham Fire Station

Tony Hughes
Station Manager
Operational Policy and Assurance

Jeanette Murphy
Fire Safety Inspecting Officer
Protection and Organisational
Performance

Philip Massey
Fire Safety Inspecting Officer / On-
Call Firefighter
Protection and Organisational
Performance / Penketh Fire
Station

Trisha Healey
Targeted Youth Support Worker
Prevention

Graeme Worrall (Secretary)
Policy and Transformation Officer
Transformation

Forum Topics

6. While there were some subjects that the Service asked the forum to consider and discuss, the Forum was able to determine its own agenda and priorities. The list below outlines the subject matter discussed by the Forum through its tenure:
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - Culture and Values
 - Reward and Recognition
 - Training and Development
 - On-Call Duty System
 - Occupational Health

- Promotion Processes
 - Equality and Diversity, Apprenticeships
7. Issues discussed by the Forum, including ideas and recommendations for improvement, were captured on a rolling action plan. The action plan is included as an Appendix to this report. The following section highlights some of the ideas as developed by the Forum and its recommendations.

Mental Health

8. As a direct result of feedback from the Forum, the Fire Authority resolved to approve funding for the creation of a dedicated Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor post, who was recruited to.
9. The introduction of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor has been well received throughout the organisation as a tangible demonstration of the Service's approach to supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. Since taking up his post, the Advisor has relaunched the Service's mental health network, took on the co-ordination of the Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) process and supported several campaigns to raise awareness of mental health.
10. The Forum also suggested that the Service should mark World Mental Health Day on 10th October 2019, which culminated in a major programme of events on the day. This involved staff from across the Service taking time out from their normal duties (though maintaining emergency response) to take part in activities to promote mental health and wellbeing.
11. Events across the Service included yoga sessions; forest walks; bringing teams together to refurbish station community gardens and specific talks on mental health related issues. The feedback from staff regarding this event has been very positive and planning is underway for next year's activities.

Core Values, Reward and Recognition

12. The Forum considered the Service's core values as well as how it rewards and recognises the performance of staff. As a result of these discussions, it was decided at the time to temporarily pause the review of the core values, so that feedback from the 2019 staff survey could be incorporated. The review has now resumed having taken into account the findings of the survey.
13. A draft set of core values were developed by the Forum, which are being fed into the wider review to ultimately be considered by staff.
14. Work is underway regarding reward and recognition include relaunching a staff suggestion scheme and updating the intranet to increase awareness of the various benefit schemes and high street discounts available to employees.

On-Call Duty System

15. Several recommendations were made aimed at improving the on-call duty system, such as providing a payment to on-call staff to recognise their development to become operationally competent; increasing flexibility regarding the hours of cover provided through the standard on-call contract; and improving how the Service recognises staff in maintaining the availability of on-call fire engines. These have been fed in to a separate team reviewing the on-call duty system and are being incorporated into its programme of work.

Occupational Health

16. The Forum also considered the organisation's occupational health provision. Recommendations taken forward include: building greater availability and flexibility for staff into the future procurement of the occupational health provider; increasing awareness of the availability of health screenings and promotion of health campaigns; and including menopause-related risk factors within the health questionnaire for female staff over 45.
17. One member of the Forum will also form part of the procurement panel to assess tenders for the occupational health contract, ensuring staff input into the new provision.

Apprenticeships

18. The apprenticeship programme was a subject that the Forum discussed on two occasions. To further improve and develop the scheme, it was suggested that a single point of contact was required to co-ordinate the progress of apprentices through the programme. It was also felt that more regular consolidation meetings between the apprentices and their coordinators and mentors were needed to monitor progress.
19. Following these discussions, the vacancy for the coordinator position has now been filled to provide an identifiable single point of contact. In addition, regular time has been scheduled for consolidation and review meetings.

Wider Feedback

20. The Forum has provided input into several corporate projects. This has included its views being sought on the development of the action plan to address the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services; the development of the Whole Service Review; and focus group sessions examining the results of the 2019 staff survey and providing input in promotion board processes.
21. More generally, members on the Forum have been able to use the platform to raise issues discussed with their work colleagues and conversely have also been able to use their own networks to update their teams on the work of the Forum.

Financial Implications

22. A total of £20k funding was allocated from reserves to fund the 2018-19 Staff Engagement Forum. The majority of this (£16k) was provision for the special responsibility allowance payable to each member of the forum. Other costs relate to venue hire to facilitate five meetings at external venues. Funding for the Forum has now been built into base budget.

Legal Implications

23. None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. As far as possible, membership of the Forum was selected to encompass representation from across all departments the Service as well as to ensure participation of traditionally under-represented sections of the workforce.

Environmental Implications

25. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE