

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee, held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, on Tuesday, 21 March 2023 at 12:30.

Present

John Gili-Ross
Cllr Lynda McWilliams
Cllr Ian Shead

Representing

Co-opted Independent Member (Chairman)
Tendring District Council
Southend-on-Sea City Council

Also in attendance

Colette Black
Sophie Campion
Cllr Gary Collins
Roger Hirst
Darren Horsman

Director of People Services, ECFRS
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Panel Member attending as an observer
Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement,
Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
for Essex (OPFCC)
Democratic Services Manager

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1. The membership of the Sub-Committee was noted.
2. An apology was received from Cllr D Dadds.
3. Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving police officer and her granddaughter was currently a serving special constable. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service People Strategy Update

The Sub-Committee received report EISC/01/23 from Roger Hirst, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, which provided a snapshot of progress against the delivery of the People Strategy 2020-2024 and the six pillars which enabled delivery of the strategy.

The Commissioner introduced the report and explained that the aim of the Strategy was to embed a good culture in the Service. Feedback from staff was welcomed through the staff survey. The report set out the evidence and progress against each of the six pillars of change. The Commissioner advised that the survey showed an improvement in the staff's positive responses but this wasn't yet at the level the Service wanted it to be.

The Commissioner drew the Sub-Committee's attention to the achievement of the Bronze standard for inclusive employers and explained that the service was now working towards Silver. He also drew attention to the investment in people such as leadership development and coaching support.

In response to questions from Members the following points were made:

- There had been 657 responses out of 1394 staff which represented 47% of the workforce. This was reported to be at a comparable level to other Fire and Rescue services. The survey was only one aspect of gaining feedback from staff, every watch and department was engaged with to seek views.
- The mean gender pay gap had been reduced to 1% in 2022 which was reported to be extremely low in comparison to other organisations. In terms of people being paid the same for doing the same job there was no disparity in pay. There were now more women in higher and mid level paid jobs within the Service and this was achieved through encouraging a wide range of applications. However it could not be planned, there were no quotas and no positive discrimination so it would vary.
- It was confirmed that firefighters were included in interview panels which helped to ensure that the panels were more diverse. The staff network groups were instrumental in helping to ensure that there was diversity across the interview panels and assessors. Particular identified barriers to recruitment, including those that were male focussed, had also been removed through positive action but all firefighters had the same fitness standard.
- It was confirmed that where behavioural issues were identified, there were corrective actions and sanctions if required, through the discipline and grievance process, policies and employment law.
- It was clarified that the aim of encouraging diversity in recruitment was not about excluding any staff currently employed within the service. The importance of being inclusive to all was acknowledged.
- It was suggested that visits to the Fire and Rescue Service by the Panel in future could be beneficial.

The Sub-Committee gave feedback on the format and content of the report and recommended that consideration be given to the following in future reports:

- To include the actual survey response numbers in future.
- To provide some clarity to the figures by using forms of data other than percentages.
- The inclusion of an executive summary.
- The accessibility and readability of graphs.

RESOLVED:

That members of the Sub-Committee noted the report.

4. Date of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting was to be arranged for a date after the Annual Panel meeting had taken place.

It was noted that a report on the HMICFRS inspection into vetting at Essex Police, that had initially been scheduled for the current meeting, would be rescheduled to a future meeting as the inspection report was not yet able to be shared.

5. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business. The meeting closed at 1.44pm.