

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY
15 October 2012 at 11.00 am

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair

Councillors Haley, Mole, Mortimer, Stephenson and T Wright.

Part I

The Chair reminded members of the committee that there was a tour of the Occupational Health Unit (OHU) at the close of the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Renton and Waller.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

12. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 9 July 2012, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

New Local Government Pension Scheme 2014

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report updating members on the new Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) 2014.

Area Manager Robson advised members that consultations had overwhelmingly approved the proposals for a reformed LGPS at the end of May. A statutory consultation process would now be undertaken by Government in order to implement these proposals.

The proposed new scheme, which would commence 1 April 2014, would apply to all service that built up on and after 1 April 2014. It was intended that Government Regulations would be in place early in 2013 following statutory consultation.

Members referred to the main provisions of the proposed LGPS 2014 detailed within the report. All other terms remained as in the current scheme.

13. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report to provide an update for members with regards to the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) and an overview of Equality Peer Challenge process.

Members were advised that having assessed at level 4 the Authority was awarded the interim level of 'working towards excellence', valid for a period of three years. An Equality Peer Challenge was therefore required to test the Authority's case for 'excellent' before the end of March 2013. The peer challenge was not an inspection but aimed to help Fire and Rescue Authorities to strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services.

Area Manager Robson explained that the peer challenge team would wish to speak to members as they believed that members played a crucial role in driving diversity and equality. Contact would therefore be made with those members who had volunteered to be involved in the process.

The Chair questioned the implications of Councillor Waller resigning from the Authority and was advised that both Councillors N Forbes and Ahad had agreed to be substitutes.

A mock assessment was undertaken in mid-august 2012 and was carried out by Asha Pawar. This proved to be very useful with Asha stating that the Authority was almost in a position to be classed as 'Excellent' however she did identify a small

number of areas that needed to be addressed. The Chief Fire Officer had therefore made the necessary arrangements to ensure that improvements were made prior to the final assessment in March 2013. Members acknowledged that Asha was an excellent advocate to have and commented that the mock assessment had been extremely useful.

The estimated cost of the Equality Peer Challenge was £7,000, which was included in 2012/13 delegated budgets.

The Chair commented that this was a small investment for the benefits this bespoke standard generated.

Councillor Mole agreed and highlighted the importance of communicating achievement of the standard once this had been completed.

14. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Human Resources Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide members with an update as to the progress made in relation to the Human Resources (HR) Strategy and action plan.

Members were advised of a continuous improvement in HR service delivery driven by the Strategic Plan and annual actions plans previously developed.

The revised HR Strategy and Action Plan were appended to the report. Area Manager Robson explained the contents of the documents and commented that it had been modernised and refreshed having listened to colleagues internally.

Referring to Page 4, members noted the reduced focus on a national and regional perspective with greater attention being given to local issues. The HR principles remained unchanged and the risks had also been reflected within the Corporate Risk Register.

In response to a question from Councillor Wright regarding how recent staffing changes had affected employees, Area Manager Robson explained the excellent support mechanisms in place for all staff. This had been well received, especially by some staff who had been affected by the back office review.

15. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the action taken by the Chief Fire Officer be noted and endorsed;
- (ii) the revised HR Strategy be approved; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

The Firefighters Charity

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to update the Authority about the support and facilities available through the Firefighters Charity.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) Hindmarch reminded members that the Firefighters Charity existed to help members of the fire service community in times of need. The Charity was now the UK's leading provider of services that enhanced the quality of life for serving and retired firefighters, fire personnel and their families.

Members were advised that the Firefighters Charity had three rehabilitation centres based in Devon, Cumbria and West Sussex. The report detailed the services available at each of these facilities.

In addition, the Charity aimed to provide financial assistance to past and present fire and rescue service personnel and their dependents when they suffered misfortune, illness or hardship. Support was provided in the form of grants and awards, with the aim of maintaining quality of life, and every application was given careful and equal consideration.

Members noted that it cost around £9 million per year to keep the Charity running and with no Government funding they were completely reliant on the generosity and enthusiasm of their supporters.

The Chief Fire Officer had received the annual 'Certificate of Appreciation' from the Charity in recognition of the dedication and effort that members of the Service had shown.

Area Manager Robson explained that Jubilee House, Cumbria was the closest facility to Tyne and Wear and proposed arranging a visit for members. The committee felt that this was an excellent idea and also asked that staff be congratulated on the amount of funding raised.

16. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) a visit to Jubilee House, Cumbria be agreed;
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

17. RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered likely to reveal the identity of an individual, or the disclosure of exempt information relating to any consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Authority and

employees of the Authority (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2 and 4).

(Signed) J. BELL,
Chairman.

Note:-

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.

