

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY
11 February 2013 at 10.30 am

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair

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

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Price.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

20. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 15 October 2012, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Annual Equality Data Report and Equality Objectives Update

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report providing Members with an update regarding the recent equality data refresh exercise undertaken to inform the 2013 Annual Equality Data Report, and to provide a

progress update against the Authority's equality objectives, as set out in the Equality Strategy 2012-2016.

Area Manager Robson advised that the Authority published the Annual Equality Data Report 2013 by 31 January 2013 as was required under the Public Sector Equality Duty. A copy of the report was attached at Appendix A.

A further appendix was attached showing the progress that had been made towards the equality objectives since their publication in April 2011.

It was confirmed that progress had been made against many of the actions including those specifically relating to the Procurement objectives. Revised equality related content had been developed to improve the Procurement Strategy, and this was appended to the report at Appendix C.

Councillor Wright commented that it was evident the Authority continued to support the work around achieving equality objectives, and the report clearly demonstrated a clear commitment to equality for all.

The Chair commented that the report was very comprehensive, thorough and easy to understand. She stated that the positive progress shown in the report was testament to the Authority.

Councillor Mole commented that the document was satisfying to read. He stated that the Authority continued to be astute and was mindful that the rules around equality change regularly and are never complacent in this regard.

Councillor Mortimer commended the report.

Area Manager Robson thanked Members for their positive comments and assured the Committee that all of their compliments would be passed on to those that been involved.

21. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the comments on the Annual Equality Data Report 2013;
- (ii) note the progress made against equality objectives;
- (iii) endorse revised equality related content for the Procurement Strategy; and
- (iv) receive further reports as appropriate.

Review of the Secondary Employment and Pecuniary Interests Policy and Procedure

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisory submitted a joint report informing Members of the results of the review, the associated consultation regarding the proposals and sought approval to implement the identified policy provisions.

Area Manager Robson advised that for grey book staff, access to the Secondary Employment scheme was derived from the Scheme of Conditions of Service of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire and Rescue Services, Part B, Paragraph 8, as follows: -

“An employee (other than one on the retained duty system) shall not hold any other office or employment for gain or reward or carry on any trade or business without the express permission of the fire and rescue authority, which may be granted subject to any restrictions or conditions the authority thinks fit”.

Members were advised that the review had identified a number of changes to the policy and procedure in order to ensure an effective and efficient balance could be determined between the Authority, as an individual's primary employer, and any secondary employment an individual may wish to apply to undertake.

A list of the changes was included within the main body of the report.

The Chair commented that the procedure clearly defined the Authority's position which left employees in no doubt of what the rules were.

22. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) note the content of the report;
- (ii) approve the revised procedure; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2013

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report informing Members of the results of the Stonewall 2013 WEI and provided details of the Authority's standing in the index.

DCFO Hindmarch explained that the Authority continued to be committed to achieving equality of opportunity and removing discrimination or prejudice on any grounds including sexual orientation.

Members were advised that in the 2012 Index the Authority retained 60th place and was hailed the Top Fire and Rescue Service for equality. This was an equally impressive achievement as in 2012 there was a number of changes to the WEI.

This year was Stonewall's ninth WEI. It was confirmed that every year the Index was reviewed in terms of its design and scoring mechanism and participation had increased year on year making it an on-going challenge to attain a place in the Top 100 list.

In order to participate in the WEI, a comprehensive online questionnaire had to be submitted alongside supporting evidence to demonstrate how the Authority supported LGB equality both in the workplace and community.

The Chief Fire Officer was pleased to report that the Authority had seen substantial improvement in its position in the Index, and that it had moved up 32 places and being awarded 28th position. For the third consecutive year the Authority had also been awarded the prestigious title of Top Fire and Rescue Authority, and was recognised as the best performing Authority in the country in the equality field.

DCFO Hindmarch reported that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority had worked alongside four other authorities in the fire sector to share best practice, and was pleased to announce that each of them had gained a higher position resulting in them now being in the Top 100 this year.

Councillor Wright stated that to have been awarded 28th position was an excellent achievement for the Authority, particularly as this had been recognised independently. He encouraged Members to look at the Top 100 organisations on the WEI, because it was interesting to see the big name companies that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service were up against.

The Chair stated that it was very pleasing to see that the hard work and commitment of the Authority be acknowledged by Stonewall and the four authorities that worked with the Authority.

Councillor Haley commented that 376 organisations had entered into the Stonewall WEI exercise which proved that it was hugely more popular than it had been in previous years. He also stated that to have mentored other authorities was impressive and commended the authority for this.

Councillor Mole on behalf of the Committee requested that thanks be expressed to the entire organisation for this great achievement.

23. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) congratulate the core team on the achievement; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

Equality Framework Update

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report providing Members with an update on preparations for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Equality Framework Peer Challenge, including details of the briefing process for challenge participants.

DCFO Hindmarch advised that the Peer Challenge would be the next biggest audit that the Authority was likely to face in relation to equality and that the Authority was currently towards to achieving 'excellent'.

Rachael Beadle, the Equalities Advisor was introduced to the meeting and outlined the report. In doing so, she stated that the FRS Equality Framework was a bespoke framework designed to enable fire and rescue services to measure their performance in relation to equality. It had three levels, which were 'developing', 'achieving' and 'excellent'.

Members were advised that in December 2009, the Authority migrated to the 'working towards excellence' level of the FRS Equality Framework. The Authority had been deemed to be performing above the 'Achieving' level, however a formal assessment was required to confirm it was working at the 'excellence' level.

The Equalities Advisor confirmed that at present the Authority was in the process of preparing for an Equality Peer Challenge at 'excellent', scheduled for 26-28 March 2013.

Members were advised that in August 2012 the Authority undertook a mock challenge and recommendations had been taken on board and progressed to further prepare for the formal challenge process.

Members of the Peer Challenge were detailed within the report and Committee Members were advised that the first stage of the process had been completed. This was to produce a narrative and self-assessment together with case studies which presented a case for 'excellent'. Further supporting evidence was required to be sent to the Peer Challenge Team at the beginning on February 2013.

Members were advised that a briefing had been arranged to take place on 27 February 2013 at 10.00am.

Members commented that they were keen to attend the briefings and for those that couldn't attend the scheduled dates were asked to inform the Authority.

24. RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) receive further reports as appropriate

Firefighter Pension Scheme Consultations

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report requesting Members to consider a proposed response to Government's consultation document which covered changes to the Firefighter's Pension Scheme (FPS) and the New Firefighter's Pension Scheme (NFPS).

Area Manager Robson outlined the report and in doing explained that following the review of public service pensions, at the Spending Review Government accepted Lord Hutton's rationale to increase employee pension contributions by 3.2% on average by 2014-2015. This was in order to make for a fairer balance between what employees paid and what other taxpayers had to pay.

In terms of the 2013-2014 contribution increases, Government had proposed that the employee contribution tariffs from 1 April 2013 should deliver a 1.28% increase, on average, across the two firefighter pension schemes. It was expected that this would lead to a cumulative 1.92% increase during 2012-2013 and 2013-2014.

The proposed employee contribution rates were outlined in the report according to firefighter pay bands together with Government responses to four questions that arose during some consultation.

The Chief Fire Officer was of the opinion that the various proposed changes to the pension schemes were both complex and highly sensitive with the potential to impact detrimentally on industrial relations.

Changes to pensionable pay, abatement rules and especially proposed increases in contribution were considered to be very sensitive issues. It was therefore considered essential that government, through a process of exhaustive and meaningful consultation, sought to find a mutually acceptable solution with regard to the issue.

Councillor Wright commented that an amendment was required to the final pay band figure contained within the proposed contribution rates table from £120,00 to £120,000.

The Chair commented that the issue was indeed complex and difficult from an employer perspective. Not only that, but she appreciated that this was also a very sensitive matter for employees of the Authority.

DCFO Hindmarch stated that a paper would be brought to the Human Resources Committee in due course in relation to these issues.

Councillor Haley in referring to the Opt Out Review section of the report enquired what numbers had opted out and how the numbers would be affected by auto-enrolment. In response, Area Manager Robson stated that the figures in relation to firefighter auto-enrolment pension schemes had not been determined yet and that the opting out figures were relatively low. However, it was confirmed that figures for the Local Government Pension Scheme under auto-enrolment were predicted to be that 60% would stick and 40% would opt out.

Councillor Haley stated that he would be interested to see some details in relation to firefighter pensions.

Councillor Wright commented he would expect opt outs to increase due to economic pressures and incomes remaining static.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wright regarding auto-enrolment it was confirmed that prior to this being implemented a staging date would be communicated to new and existing staff.

Councillor Renton enquired if the Authority provided pension advice to staff. DCFO Hindmarch responded stating that the Authority provided the relevant contact details to employees wishing to seek pension advice, as the Authority themselves did not specialise in that area.

The Personnel Advisor in attendance informed Members that the Authority must ensure to be very careful when providing information to employees regarding pensions, as it could not be seen to be assisting an individual to make a decision.

25. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) approve that the Chief Fire Officer submits a response to the consultation in line with the comments contained within the report; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

Better Health at Work Award

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report informing Members of the Better Health at Work Award scheme and the Authority's success to date.

Members were advised that the Better Health at Work Award was a North East regional scheme designed to encourage employers to improve the health of their employees. The award also recognised the achievements of the organisation in managing health at work.

DCFO Hindmarch stated that this was an excellent accreditation scheme. There were three levels, namely, Bronze, Silver and Gold with appropriate criteria to be met at each annual stage.

The aims of the Better Health at Work Award were outlined within the report.

Members were advised that in February 2011 the Authority was successful in achieving the Better Health at Work Bronze Award, and staff were determined to continue to make improvements in health provision for all employees.

The report outlined the ways in which the Silver Award built upon the basics of the Bronze Award and the steps the Authority had taken to address the imbalance.

Health Champions, made up of volunteers throughout the service had helped to promote and deliver health promotion initiatives. In January 2012 a meeting amongst the Health Champions was held and they developed the following:-

- February: Healthy Eating
- May Cancer: Awareness
- June Blood: Donor Day
- September: "Know Your Numbers"
- November: "Movember" (Prostate Cancer Awareness).

The Chief Fire Officer was pleased to announce that the Authority had been successful in gaining the Better Health at Work Silver Award.

The Chief Fire Officer maintained that entering the Silver Award had initiated a shared sense of ownership for developing health promotion by involving the Health Champions at each location, and that the health education aspect of the campaign along with the health promotion activities supported and enhanced positive lifestyle changes for all participants.

Councillor Wright highly commended the report and concurred with the Chief Fire Officer's comments that the efforts described demonstrated the Authority's commitment to the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

The Chair commented that this was another excellent news story and requested that the Committee Member's thanks be passed onto all those involved.

26. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) endorse the actions of the Chief Fire Officer;
- (iii) Consider a congratulatory message to staff involved; and
- (iv) receive further reports as appropriate.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

27. 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.

