

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY,
18TH FEBRUARY, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Bolland in the Chair

Councillors Anglin, Armstrong, Boyes, Cooney, Gibson, Forbes and Woodward.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence reported to the meeting.

Receipt of Declarations of Interest

Councillors Boyes and Woodward declared a personal interest in item 5 "The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) – Proposed Changes" as Members of the LGPS.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 29th October, 2007, Part I (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Review of the Race Equality Scheme

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) advising Members of the Authority that an annual review of the Race Equality Scheme had been completed by the Chief Fire Officer.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members of the Committee noted the background to the report, particularly the Race Relations Act 1976 and subsequent Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the duties placed on public authorities to promote race equality.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that under the legislation, the Authority prepared and published its first Race Equality Scheme by May 2002, which was reviewed and amended in 2005 and that a further comprehensive review of the Scheme was scheduled to take place during the latter part of 2008.

The legislation required the Authority to annually:-

- Review the Action Plan, specifically in relation to Policy and Service Delivery and Employment;
- Produce employment statistics in relation to ethnicity; and
- Review Policies and Procedures.

Members were then referred to the action plan attached to the report, which had been produced in accordance with the legislation. Following a review however, Members noted that full recruitment statistics were not yet available and would be submitted to a future meeting of the Human Resources Committee.

Progress made during 2006/07 was then outlined. Two elements were highlighted in particular; the translation of service information into different formats or languages, and the monitoring of racist incidents attended by firefighters. Proposals for 2008/09 were then outlined.

Members having been afforded the opportunity to comment on the report, Councillor Armstrong enquired whether any prosecutions had occurred as a result of racist incidents. In response, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer stated that he did not have that information to hand, however agreed to check and respond to Councillor Armstrong.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

2. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) endorse the progress made in respect of Race Equality; and
- (ii) receive further reports as appropriate.

The Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) – Proposed Changes

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (circulated) updating Members on the latest developments following a statutory consultation exercise undertaken by Communities and Local Government (CLG) regarding a revised Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that Government had, since 2006, been preparing the way to introduce revisions to the existing LGPS to be in force from 1st April, 2008 and that some legislative changes had now been confirmed and issued.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided an overview of the changes, and in doing so, highlighted those which were of particular concern. For example accrual rates were changing from 1/80th to 1/60th and there would no longer be an automatic tax-free lump sum on retirement. In addition there would be a change in the benefits for those suffering ill health, based on a proposed three-tiered system. Each of the tiers were then described in detail, as were the revised contribution rates, which were proposed to become 'bands'.

It was intended that a comprehensive awareness programme would be organised in order to communicate the changes with employees.

Councillor Armstrong enquired whether the changes would impose an administrative burden on the Authority to which the Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded it may, however the burden was likely to be very small due to the size of the Authority.

Councillor Cooney sought reassurance that both employees and trade unions would be involved in the seminars to communicate the transfer arrangements, which the Assistant Chief Fire Officer assured they would.

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

3. RESOLVED to:-

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

Rank to Role – Pay Protection Review

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) providing an overall review of the implementation of rank to role, particularly the implications of pay protection for consideration by the Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer outlined the report, which firstly set out the arrangements that were in place in relation to rank to role. He then went on to inform Members of the current situation and financial implications, where it was confirmed that provision had been included within the revenue budget for 2007/2008 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy to maintain the current protection arrangements until January, 2009.

Members were advised that staff affected by the protection arrangements were continually encouraged to apply for promotional opportunities. Nevertheless those affected individuals had less than twelve months pay protection remaining and that the anticipated National Agreement proposals were unknown.

It was therefore proposed at this time to maintain the current pay protection arrangements.

Councillor Gibson enquired whether plans could be forecast into 2009, and if so how many staff were likely to be on pay protection at that time. In response, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that a 15 year window of opportunity was in place for those wishing to retire, however the figures were not easy to estimate. Nevertheless, he went on to state that out of the 24 personnel who were originally Sub-Officers but who were assimilated into Crew Manager roles, 1 of those was likely to retire and another 3 could retire at any time. Furthermore, out of the 71 personnel who were originally Station Officers but who were assimilated into Watch Manager B roles, there were 6 who could retire, and another 2 that would fall into the same category by the end of 2008.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reinforced to Members of the Committee that the Authority would ensure to explore every potential way of minimising negative effects.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the current pay protection arrangements be maintained; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Regional Human Resources Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) updating Members on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for the North East Fire and Rescue Services.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer briefly outlined the report, drawing particular attention to section 3 which identified a number of regional frameworks which the Authority had led.

Having considered the report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress to date be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

6. 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 to involve a likely disclosure of exempt information relating to any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), or any consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Council and its employees (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 1, 2, 3 and 4).

(Signed) D. BOLLANDS,
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.