

## **HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the  
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held  
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,  
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY  
18 OCTOBER 2010 at 10.30 am

### **Present:**

Councillor Charlton in the Chair

Councillors M. Forbes, Trueman and T. Wright.

### **Part I**

#### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Boyes and M. Forbes.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **Minutes**

10. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 12 July 2010 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **Review of the Diversity and Equality Policy**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the review of the Authority's Diversity and Equality Policy and outline the main changes for approval.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the current Diversity and Equality Policy had been in place since March 2007, and that in accordance with the Policy a full review had been undertaken in order to bring its content up-to-date, assess how easy the policy was to understand and for readers to access information.

Councillor Wright, in referring to the Useful Contact Information in Appendix A, suggested that external organisations' contact details be included for employees to obtain help and support. In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer agreed to look into this.

Councillor Charlton then went on to enquire if the authority knew how many staff currently seek support in relation to equality and diversity issues, to which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Fire Authority maintained records containing the numbers of employees that had made contact with the internal resources, however no records were available for the numbers of employees contacting external resources.

Councillor Wright enquired whether the announcement of the new Minister with responsibility for fire, Bob Neill, would have any impact on the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's policies. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded, advising that there were no plans to deal with equality and diversity any differently.

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

11. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the content of the report;
- (ii) approve the amended Diversity and Equality Policy and the Dignity and Respect Policy; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

## **The Equality Act 2010**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) advising Members of the key features of the Equality Act 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the new Equality Act 2010 that came into force on 1 October 2010 applied to all organisations that provided services to the public and to anyone who sells goods or provides facilities.

Members were notified that the Chief Fire Officer was currently in the process of reviewing all existing policies to ensure that they comply. Consultation was also underway until 10 November 2010, regarding specific duties in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty, which it was envisaged would be implemented on 1 April 2011.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer also added that the age discrimination ban would come into force in 2012.

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

12. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) endorse the actions taken by the Chief Fire Officer; and
- (ii) receive further reports as appropriate.

### **Review of Audit Commission Equality and Diversity Report**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update regarding progress made against the recommendations of the Audit Commission Equality and Diversity Reports 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were informed that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority were subject to a review of its equality and diversity policies and processes, which was carried out in 2008/2009 as part of the external audit process.

The audit was undertaken within a regional framework covering Tyne and Wear, Cleveland and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authorities.

A final report was collated and presented to each Fire and Rescue Authority in May 2009 which encompassed individual authority findings along with an action plan of recommendations for improvement.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported to the Committee that the Audit Report Action Plan had been fully implemented, however development work would continue in the area recommended by the Audit Commission.

Councillor Wright enquired at what point would this be reviewed next, in order to ensure the recommendations set out by the Audit Commission had been achieved. The Deputy Chief Officer then responded advising that the Authority constantly monitor actions plans and endeavour to appoint external auditors to regularly pick up

the job that the Audit Commission used to do. Members were also assured that updates on actions would be regularly reported to the Human Resources Committee.

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

13. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) endorse the progress made in this area; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

### **Launch of E-Network for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Employees**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) providing Members with an overview of the recently launched e-network for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees of the Authority.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that for four consecutive years the Chief Fire Officer, on behalf of the Authority, has entered the service in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index Top 100 Employers and that one key area for improvement identified as part of this process was to enhance community engagement within LGB people, specifically with employees.

Members were then informed that an Employee Advisory Group (EAG) had been established, including LGB and non-LGB Members which had undertaken to develop an e-network to support the work of the EAG.

The aims and objectives of the e-network had been determined by the EAG Members who had carried out extensive consultation and research on e-networks and also worked closely with e-communications on key details for the e-network, plus on how to create an interesting and informative site.

The six objectives themselves were then referred to within the report and issues around access to the e-network was described to Members of the Committee.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the e-network incorporated a confidential discussion forum, which was accessible only to LGB staff. It was considered that this facility would allow LGB employees to explore personal or sensitive issues they may be facing and receive support from the EAG.

Councillor Wright commented that he was very pleased with the progress that the Authority had made in this regard. He went on to enquire what was it that the Authority had experienced in order for them to have identified that it was a forum that was required. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded advising that the Authority

had in the past provided an opportunity for LGB staff to come together at an outside venue and from that it was decided that a e-network would be beneficial.

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

14. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the concerns of the report;
- (ii) endorse the actions taken by the Chief Fire Officer; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

### **2010 North East Equality Awards**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the Authority's achievement in being selected as a finalist in the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category as part of the 2010 North East Equality Awards.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the North East Equality Awards, sponsored by ONE NorthEast recognise and reward employers, learning providers and individuals who strive to ensure that good equality and diversity practices are implemented in their workplace, improving recruitment and retention for people from diverse groups.

Attention was drawn to the Awards Criteria outlined in the report. During which, Members were informed that when evaluating applicants within the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category, the judges would be looking for initiatives, projects or strategies that, by their consideration support the Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plan by:

- Encouraging participation of under-represented groups in the labour market;
- Increasing the pace of diversity and equality engagement within public sector organisations;
- Increasing awareness and engagement or diversity and equality within private sector organisations; and
- Ensuring that the procurement process effectively takes account of the diversity and equality agenda for clients and suppliers.

Details surrounding the application that had been submitted were then referred to within the report.

The results of the 'Outstanding Practice by a Larger Organisation' category were expected to be announced at an Awards event on Friday 22 October 2010 to be held at Newcastle upon Tyne. The results would be reported back to the Human Resources Committee.

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

15. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) endorse the actions taken by the Chief Officer;
- (iii) consider a letter of appreciation to the staff involved in the programme;  
and
- (iv) receive further reports as appropriate.

### **Community Engagement Film Project**

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 progress of the Community Engagement Film Project.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that in 2008, the Authority and Tyneside Cinema came together to discuss the idea of working with young people to produce a documentary film, which would engage young people, increase the exposure of the Authority with under-represented groups and raise the profile as an employer of choice within BME Communities.

In late 2008 a group of twelve young people from a wide range of backgrounds produced a documentary on the Service, entitled "1253 Life Savers!". The documentary was premiered at Tyneside Cinema on 15 October 2009 and since then the film had been shown at recruitment and community events across the Authority area.

As part of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 an evaluation was being undertaken to measure opinions before and after viewing the documentary. Feedback received to date following the evaluation was shown within the report, which clearly demonstrated that the documentary had a positive effect in changing the views of audiences.

Copies of the documentary were available should Members require a copy.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer commented that it had been very pleasing to see the way in which the twelve young people engaged with the process and worked to achieve the end result.

Councillor Wright commended all those involved.

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

16. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the content of the report;
- (ii) endorse and support the Community Engagement Film Project; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

(Signed) D. CHARLTON,  
Chairman.

