

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 8

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 2 FEBRUARY 2015

SUBJECT: RESEARCH INTO EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNDER-REPRESENTATION

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a key piece of independent research undertaken into employee attitudes towards under-representation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Authority commissioned independent researcher, Dr Paul Andrew, to undertake this research which is directly linked to achieving Equality Objective 4: To achieve a measurable improvement, through raising awareness and providing greater support, in the number of individuals from under-represented groups applying for promotion, for all roles across the Service.
- 2.2 The overall aim was to engage with employees, including those from under-represented groups, to understand gain a clearer understanding of barriers that may exist to employees reaching their full potential within the Service.
- 2.3 The research was carried out during autumn with the final report completed October 2014 and included consulting with staff from a range of roles across the organisation.

3. RESEARCH

- 3.1 The summary report can be found at Appendix A with the full report available should Members wish to consider the research in greater detail. The key findings are as follows:
- 3.1.1 There is tremendous loyalty to TWFRS from employees. There is recognition that the Service encourages respect and of progress made internally and with communities.
- 3.1.2 A number of staff, predominantly women, perceive a gap between organisational policies and their actual work experiences. It was evident that a positive approach taken by line managers plays a crucial role in shaping workplace culture by assisting in the developing of policies and ensuring they are implemented effectively.
- 3.1.3 There is frustration with the austerity programme, tempered by the acceptance that circumstances are outside the control of TWFRS.
- 3.1.4 There is an appreciation of the Service's specialisms and traditions, but not of practices seen as less essential.

- 3.1.5 There is a good application of the appraisal process. There is a sense that although employees are receiving support, they do not feel better equipped to be professionally mobile. Some of this is due to perceived structural barriers.
- 3.1.6 Work on under-representation is seen as integral to the Service's operations. Differences of opinion arise over how aims can best be achieved. There is little desire for staff from under-represented groups to be treated as a special case.
- 3.1.7 The feedback indicates that movement need not be encouraged by positive action, but by the application of transparent procedures. Pathways based on competency and merit as well as grade, supported by a coaching culture could provide accessible options.
- 3.1.8 The existing work-life balance arrangements in place at TWFRS are strongly welcomed, across all occupational types. The evidence suggests that any extension of these principles can bring both employee and operational benefits.
- 3.2 This consultation has been welcomed by participants and is in line with TWFRS' approach of learning from the input of their stakeholders. The responses reveal high levels of loyalty from employees towards their Service. This can encourage TWFRS to make further progress in delivering a workplace built upon respect, fairness and inclusion, which works in partnership with and reflects the communities it serves.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The report was considered by the Service Equality Committee on 14 January 2015, where Dr Andrew presented the detailed findings.
- 4.2 The results of the research were well received by Equality Committee members. It was felt that this was a worthwhile piece of work which provided a valuable insight into under-representation in the Service.
- 4.3 It is proposed to develop an action plan which could be presented to a future HR Committee for consideration.

5. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- 5.1 The cost of the research was met from existing budgets.

6. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 By supporting this piece of work Members continue to demonstrate their commitment to fostering good relations and advancing equality of opportunity for under-represented groups. This research has provided a useful measure of how under-represented employees feel and perceive various aspects associated with working for TWFRS. The findings and suggested options moving forward will help to shape future objectives and lead to improved equality outcomes.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of this report;
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Exploring Employee Attitudes towards Under-Representation. A report on Consultation at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, October 2014 by Dr Paul Andrew. Executive Summary.
- Exploring Employee Attitudes towards Under-Representation. A report on Consultation at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, October 2014 by Dr Paul Andrew. Full Report.

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