

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
held in the Fire and Rescue
Headquarters, Barmston Mere,
Sunderland on MONDAY 3 February
2014 at 10.30am

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

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

Part 1

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

13. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 14 October, 2013, Part I be confirmed as a correct record.

Annual Equality Data Report

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report informing Members of the completion of the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data Report which was currently out for consultation and to provide a progress update against the Authority's equality objectives, as set out in the Equality Strategy 2012-16.

Members were advised that the Equality Act 2010 simplified and replaced all previous equality legislation and included a new general duty for all public bodies which came into force on 5 April 2011.

ACFO Baines confirmed that the specific duties, designed to assist public authorities in meeting the general duty had been undertaken. These included publishing information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty (initially by 31 January 2012) and annually thereafter; and prepare and publish specific measurable equality objectives by 6 April 2012 and at least every four years after.

Area Manager Robson and Clare McCluskey, Equality and Resources Manager jointly presented the report and in doing so explained that the Annual Report was currently out for consultation up until the end of February 2014.

Members were advised that the report compared internal and external equality data and showed the progress that had been made towards the equality objectives since their publication in April 2011.

Clare McCluskey highlighted the report for Members and in doing so advised that the report showed very positive outcomes. Members' attention was drawn to a table within the report which demonstrated the results from the stages of recruitment for volunteers which had been very successful and contributed towards further diversifying the workforce. The table indicated that out of the twenty recruited volunteers 15% were non-White British with 10% being Black African, 40% were female, while 10% had a disability.

In relation to community engagement, Members were advised that this had increased significantly during 2013 due to increased support for engagement events and the introduction of the pilot volunteering scheme.

Members were informed that there had been an improvement in the level of BME engagement on last year, which had seen an increase in fire safety visits in BME communities. Clare advised that this trend was reflected across all vulnerable groups including LGBT groups. Clare stated that nearly 34,000 of the public from vulnerable groups had been involved in engagement and a break down of these was included within the report.

It was reported that progress against each of the Authority's equality objectives was on target. An update on the position of each objective was included within the report.

Members were offered an opportunity to comment on the report.

Councillor Wright commented on the importance of equality and stated that it was pleasing to see that the Authority continued to support and strive towards achieving its equality objectives.

Councillor Wright then raised the issue of salaries being different across the Authority and enquired whether there was an average set of salaries across the Authority. ACFO Baines explained that the Authority had a range of pay scales and confirmed that the reasons staff were paid different rates of pay were genuine and appropriate. For example, the Authority had development rates of pay for all substantive grey book roles.

Clare McCluskey advised that this year the Authority had increased its reporting on salaries to highlight different levels of pay and trend information. Members were advised that the characteristics showed some were on lower grades and rates of pay which the Authority was working on.

Area Manager Robson stated that he would discuss the level of salary information that Members would like to see in future reports.

Councillor Stephenson commended the Authority on its achievements, then went on to comment that it could potentially be challenging for the Authority to continue to meet the general equality duty whilst trying to make significant budgetary savings.

Councillor Haley welcomed the report and the level of detail that was included. In referring to the Service User Data, Councillor Haley commented that the 'After The Incident Survey (ATIS)' showed that everyone in the organisation had a role to play, and that the Authority were obviously using data to prevent and drive down risk which was commendable.

Councillor Haley drew attention to the data in relation to the Prevention and Education Home Safety Check (HSC) Visits, and in doing so enquired why the number of safety checks had reduced in 2013 compared to those undertaken in 2012. In response, ACFO Baines explained that the Authority had seen the prevention teams change which had impacted upon the figures. He did however confirm that the targets and outcomes remained strong.

Councillor Haley stated that homes in South Tyneside regularly received safety checks, and suggested whether there was any potential for the Authority to use other agencies such as Gentoo to assist in conducting more regular safety checks throughout other areas of Tyne and Wear. In response, ACFO Baines explained that some local authorities carried out safety checks as part of some employees' day-to-day work. For example, care workers in some areas conducted fire safety checks as part of their regular visits to service users' properties.

Members were advised that every authority manage home safety checks slightly differently according to the area. However, it was confirmed that all communities benefited from these checks and the Authority do continuously enforce safety messages.

Members having commented on the draft Annual Equality Data Report 2014:-

14. RESOLVED to receive further reports as appropriate.

Equality Peer Challenge Improvement Action Plan

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report informing Members of the Authority's Equality Peer Challenge Improvement Action Plan.

ACFO Baines advised that last year the Authority received a great accolade in being awarded an 'excellent' level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, following a rigorous and intensive peer challenge process, organised by the Local Government Association (LGA). The award had been pleasing to receive in recognition for the hard work undertaken in communities which was something that the Authority was keen to develop.

Area Manager Robson stated that as part of the challenge process, the Authority was presented with an equality peer challenge report, produced by the LGA. The report set out their detailed findings, strengths and areas for consideration.

Members were informed that consequentially, the Authority had developed an improvement action plan, incorporating all of the suggested areas for consideration and good practice identified by the peer challenge team. Area Managers had been involved in producing the Action Plan and Department Leads had been allocated.

Members were advised that more detailed departmental annual plans would be developed to sit beneath the Action Plan and that these would be monitored regularly.

Members referred to the Action Plan that was appended to the report. Area Manager Robson informed Members that the broad areas were set out at the back of the report and were made up of twenty actions. Some of the actions were small, some signposted to other organisations, related to strategic cohesion whilst others looked at equality impact assessments. Each action had been assigned to an officer who was responsible together with a departmental lead. Target dates had also been marked against each one.

Attention was drawn to Action 8 which was to 'ensure that Members are able to champion equality through their engagement at station level'. Members were advised that Area Manager Robson would pick this up with Human Resources Committee moving forward.

The Chair remarked that Members appreciated that the Action Plan was a working document, and agreed to monitor progress.

Upon consideration, it was: -

15. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) Note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) Receive further reports as appropriate.

Fire Fighters Charity Impact Report

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an overview of the Fire Fighters Charity's Impact Report 2012-2013.

Area Manager Robson introduced the report and in doing so advised Members that the Fire Fighters Charity supported serving and retired fire fighters in the UK, fire service support staff and their families.

The support offered by the Charity included access to three rehabilitation and recuperation centres within the Country. All of which offered various services such as physiotherapy and counselling to help individuals following injury, trauma and other issues.

In addition, the Charity provided support in the form of an information and advice helpline to deal with issues such as bereavement, mental health and benefit support. Home visits were also offered by specially trained volunteers should they be required.

The Impact Report summarised how the Charity had performed over the past year and included details of how it delivered services and the difference it made to people's lives.

Members were advised that in 2012/2013 the Charity supported four and half thousand fire fighters, retired fire fighters, support staff and their families.

Access to its rehabilitation and recuperation centres had improved over the last two years, which had helped nearly four thousand fire fighters and its outcome measures project confirmed that the centres up and down the country improved fire fighters health and wellbeing.

In addition, the Charity had reported five hundred home visits to those with more complex problems and an increase in over one thousand five hundred calls which indicated that more people were becoming aware of the support available.

In terms of future developments, Area Manager Robson explained that the Charity had ambitious plans to improve their whole person approach, including the introduction of a new system for managing requests for help and extending their psychological support services.

Further improvements would include the introduction of a pilot project for supporting people within local communities on an outreach basis.

The Charity operated at a cost of over £8 million per year. This was made up of donations to keep the charity running and with no Government funding which was a credit those who supported them.

Councillor Stephenson commented that having visited the Charity, she was very impressed with what she had seen. In terms of funding, Councillor Stephenson suggested a catalogue of goods could be sold to support the Charity in nearby shops.

Area Manager Robson responded advising that Christmas cards were already sold by the Charity and that donations could be made to the Charity via the website. He stated that he would check to see if there was an online shop.

Upon consideration of the report, it was:-

16. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) Note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) Receive further reports as appropriate.

North East Equality Awards 2013

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report informing Members of the results of the Authority's award nominations at the North East Equality Awards held in October 2013.

ACFO Baines stated that Members would recall that the report featured at the last meeting in October 2013 when the Authority announced it had submitted two nominations for the 2013 awards and was selected as finalists in both categories. These were 'Organisations Supporting Disabled People into Employment' and 'Groups Who Have Made a Difference'.

Members were advised that the Authority's LGBT Network Group had been nominated for the Groups Who Have Made a Difference award, sponsored by Newcastle College. The LGBT Network had been instrumental in improving the Authority's position in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, achieving the highest performing Fire Service in the country.

The Authority was nominated for the Organisations Supporting Disabled People Into Employment award for positive equality outcomes achieved for people with disabilities driven by the Authority's Disability Network Group. Members were advised that this work had had a major impact on disabled people in the world of work.

The Authority was pleased to announce to Members of the Human Resources Committee that it had been successful in achieving both awards. Two pieces of glassware were brought before Members, which proved to recognise the Authority's outstanding achievement and the commitment of both Members and employees in ensuring equality for all. It was particularly encouraging to see both network groups be recognised for their efforts.

Members were informed that the award judges believed that the work of the LGBT network group had had a major impact in improving LGBT equality and inclusion in the workplace, making a real difference for LGBT employees ensuring individuals were able to be themselves at work.

The judges had also commented that enhanced engagement with the disabled community had raised awareness, increased disabled employees and given staff a better understanding of disability.

A link was available within the report for Members to access should they wish to view the awards ceremony and photographs taken at the event.

The Chair commended the Authority and expressed thanks on behalf of the Human Resources Committee to all those who had been involved for their hard work, continued commitment and dedication.

Upon consideration, it was: -

17. RESOLVED to:-

- (iii) Note the contents of the report; and
- (iv) Receive further reports as appropriate.

Asian Fire Service Association Diversity Awards

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report informing Members of the outcome of the Asian Fire Service Association Diversity Awards held in October 2013.

ACFO Baines advised Members that the AFSA worked nationally across the UK Fire and Rescue Service and together with supporting agencies to enhance equality and diversity and associated values.

Members were informed that every year the AFSA hosted an awards ceremony to recognise the contribution of AFSA members and employees across the fire and rescue sector nationally.

The Authority had been a longstanding corporate member of AFSA and had nominated individuals in the past that had been recognised as finalists and again nominated a member of staff in the 2013 awards.

ACFO Baines was delighted to announce that the Authority had been successful in attaining an award at the 2013 ceremony.

The Man of the Year Award went to Mr Mehrban Sadiq, Community Safety Advocate for his exceptional work in promoting the values of the FRS, demonstrated by evidence of being an excellent role model for others and supporting in vulnerable communities.

ACFO Baines remarked that Mr Sadiq was a very passionate and committed employee and was a great asset to the Authority.

The Chair requested that congratulations be passed onto Mr Sadiq for achieving the award and for his is commitment and hard work.

ACFO agreed to write a letter to Mr Sadiq to reflect thanks on behalf of the Human Resources Committee.

Upon consideration of the report, it was:-

18. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) Note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) Receive further reports as appropriate

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2014

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report informing Members of the result of the 2014 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) and to provide details of the Authority's standing in the index.

Members were advised that Stonewall was founded in 1989 and, since its inception had worked ceaselessly to place sexual equality on the mainstream political agenda and to achieve equality and justice for lesbians, gay and bisexual (LGB) people. One method that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service used to assist its work was the Workplace Equality Index (WEI) which benchmarks and showcases Britain's top gay friendly employees.

Every year the Authority participated in the WEI TOP 100 employers to measure its performance in relation to LGBT equality to ensure continuous improvement was achieved.

Members noted that in 2010, the Authority was placed just outside of the Top 100, ranked at 101st position. A detailed action plan was then developed by equality staff assisted by the then recently formed LGBT Network

Since then, the Fire and Rescue Authority had gone from strength to strength, achieving an increase of 41 places to 60th position in 2011, where it was ranked joint number one Fire and Rescue Service in the Country,

Members were advised that the Authority retained this place in 2012 and was hailed the Top Fire and Rescue Service in the Index.

Then in 2013, the Authority saw a substantial improvement in its position in the Index, moving up 32 places and being awarded 28th position and was the only Fire and Rescue Service in the Top 100 employers list.

Members were informed that every year a review is undertaken of the Index in terms of its design and scoring mechanism and participation increases year on year making it an on-going challenge to attain a place in the Top 100. 2014 saw a record number of entries from hundreds of organisations in different sectors across the country, including multi-national corporations.

ACFO Baines reported that the Authority was delighted to have once again seen an improvement in its position in the Index, gaining a total of 187 points (an increase of 23 points since 2013). As a result, the Authority had moved up to 20 places achieving 8th position in the 2014 Index and was also the first Fire and Rescue Authority to make it into the top 10 which was an outstanding achievement.

Members were advised that the Authority's LGBT Network had been selected as a Star Performing Network in 2014, and included on their list of 75 networks from various organisations praised for their approach. As a result, the authority was able to use the Star Performer logo, in addition to the Top 100 logo, to promote its achievement.

The Chair commended the Authority stating that gaining 8th position was testament to the Authority and its long standing commitment. She commented that it was remarkable how the Authority was able to achieve such excellent results with the very limited amount funding at it's disposal.

The Chair stated that South Tyneside Homes were very grateful for the support that they had received from Clare McCluskey and the team to enable them to be recognised amongst the list of organisations ranked as being the country's best lesbian gay friendly workplaces, at 72nd place.

Councillor Haley also commended the Authority on its excellent achievement.

Councillor Wright stated that he was very impressed with how the Authority had progressed to 8th place, especially within the current budget constraints. Having read other submissions, Councillor Wright stated that they all mentioned Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service which was fantastic, proving that Tyne and Wear Fire was clearly seen as an exemplar.

On behalf of the Human Resources Committee, the Chair congratulated the entire Authority, in particular the LGBT Network, Area Manager Robson, Clare McCluskey and the team on this great achievement.

Upon consideration, it was: -

19. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) Note the contents of the report;
- (ii) Congratulate the core team on the achievement; and
- (iii) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

20. 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.