

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY
21 FEBRUARY 2011 at 10.30 am

Present:

Councillor Charlton in the Chair

Councillors Boyes, M. Forbes, Woodwark and T. Wright.

Part I

Apologies

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

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Boyes and Woodwark declared a personal interest in item 5 "Default Retirement Age" as members of the LGPS.

Minutes

17. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 18 October 2010 (copy circulated) be confirmed as a correct record.

Better Health at Work Award – Achievement of Bronze Award

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with details of the Better Health at Work Award Scheme.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the award was a North East Regional Scheme to encourage employers to improve the health of their employees. The award also recognised the achievements of the organisation in managing health at work.

Members were informed that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority had been successful in gaining the Better Health at Work Bronze Award.

The aims of the Better Health at Work Award were then outlined as follows:-

- Support improvements in health and wellbeing for North East workers and employers;
- Create an inclusive, standardised framework within the region;
- Compliment existing, local workplace health schemes;
- Give regional recognition to those work places which actively promote the health of their employees;
- Share good practice and promote the contribution workplace health can make to a healthy community.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that promoting a healthy workplace had considerable benefits to employers, possibly leading to reduced absenteeism, enhanced productivity and improved performance. The award was due to be presented at a ceremony at Gateshead College on 26 February 2011.

Councillor Wright congratulated the Authority on its achievement, then went on to enquire how it intended to go on to achieve a silver award. In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the Authority fully intended to continue to strive towards achieving the silver award and will monitor progress.

Councillor Boyes commended the Authority for the attention and care provided to firefighters.

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

19. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note that the Fire and Rescue Authority had been awarded the Better Health at Work Bronze Award;

- (ii) offer congratulations to all personnel concerned within the Authority for the achievement; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate.

Default Retirement Age

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the provisions for the removal, by Government, of the default retirement age.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that on 13 January 2011, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) confirmed that, subject to Parliamentary approval, it would phase out the default retirement age of 65 from April 2011.

Members were reminded that the ‘normal’ retirement age for Grey Book employees, previously 55 years, was removed as a consequence of the age discrimination legislation. A default retirement age of 65 years was in place and it was this that was subject to change.

In terms of managing the removal of the default retirement age, it was intended that it would be phased out between 6 April and 1 October 2011 using transition arrangements.

Compulsory retirements during the transition period would be lawful provided that:-

- notification of retirement had been issued before 6 April 2011;
- the date of retirement would fall before 1 October 2011; and
- all required statutory retirement procedures had been met.

However, Members were asked to note that the final bullet point would require the employee to be given at least 6 months’ notice of the intended date of retirement. This would mean that the last day employees could be lawfully compulsorily retired using the default retirement age provisions was 30 March 2011 to ensure retirement took place on 30 September 2011.

It was unlikely that compulsory retirement could be justified unless the individual was not fit for the role i.e. capability issue.

Councillor Wright enquired whether any savings could be generated from the change if a employee who retired was replaced by a new employee on a lower salary/grade. In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that budgets were set at the middle-point within the grade, therefore no budget savings would be realised at the present time. Nonetheless, he stated that the Authority would continue to monitor this together with any financial impact.

Councillor Charlton enquired if pensions would increase if employees continued to work. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that a full service would need to be worked in order to qualify for full pension contributions.

Councillor Woodwark commented that removal of the default retirement age could potentially make it difficult for the Authority to plan and predict finances, particularly if employees could choose to retire when they wanted. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer concurred with the point raised, stating that it would indeed prove to be more challenging for the Authority in future.

Councillor Wright enquired how many employees within the organisation were members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

At this juncture, Councillors Boyes and Woodwark declared a personal interest as members of the LGPS.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded advising that approximately 290 staff in the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority were Members of the LGPS, and that other staff were Members of the Firefighter's or New Firefighter's pension scheme.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

20. RESOLVED to: -

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

Employee Survey

The Chief Fire Officer, submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an overview of the results of the 'Your Views Count' 2010 Employee Survey.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Authority had undertaken annual employee surveys since 2004, and that following concerns regarding value for money, in 2009 the Chief Fire Officer decided to develop a bespoke employee survey that met all organisational needs.

He went on to explain that the bespoke survey presented an opportunity to adopt an alternative approach to involve various staff groups in the design and development of the survey, including the identification of relevant questions to ensure the survey was appropriate, credible and pertinent.

Members were advised that the overall return rate was 38%, with Echo-U advising that this was an acceptable return rate for a public sector organisation.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the majority of results were pleasing, particularly that 87% of those who completed the survey were satisfied with their current role, which was seen as a significant increase compared to 65% in 2007 and 54% in 2005.

Results of the survey showed significant improvements to employees' perception of culture within the Service and employees were positive regarding their attitude towards their work.

The following areas were highlighted from within the report as areas that continued to concern employees: -

- ADC / Promotion / Development opportunities
- Dealing with poor performers
- Minimising bureaucracy

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Chief Fire Officer was developing an improvement action plan to deal with these issues.

Councillor Woodwark enquired how staff were encouraged to take part in the survey. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded advising Members that the survey was published on the Fire Authority's Intranet Site, champions were also used to publicise the survey and provide encouragement through the Functional Management Teams.

Councillor Wright commended the report and stated that the excellent responses were a testimony to the Chief Fire Officer's leadership style. He also stated that he would encourage every employee to complete the survey.

Councillor Boyes in referring to paragraph 5.1 drew attention to the fact that the 2010 survey contained no neutral option, and in doing so enquired what impact this had on results. In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that in previous surveys a neutral option i.e. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied was used but in 2007, 39% of respondents selected this option therefore the decision was taken to remove the option. He went on to state that in two years time the Fire Authority would have a better comparator.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

21. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) note the content of the report;
- (ii) consider areas for improvement; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the new public sector equality duty that was due to come into force on 6 April 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that on the 1 October 2009 the Equality Act was implemented bringing together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Act included a new public sector equality duty which was intended to replace the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality.

Members were informed that the new duty covered eight protected characteristics, namely: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The general duty also covered marriage and civil partnership, however not for all aspects of the duty.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the Authority would ensure that the all policies, procedures and training would be amended in accordance with the legislation.

Councillor Woodwark commented that in the past Authorities had to prove how they met legislative targets. He went on to enquire if the Authority intended to monitor the historic legislative targets or the ones introduced most recently. In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Authority would continue to monitor performance against the most recently introduced targets using the methodology developed for Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs). He reassured Members that if any of the historic BVPs were removed by government that the Authority would continue to monitor these in-house.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

22. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) endorse the content of the report; and
- (ii) receive further reports as appropriate

Review of Corporate Equality Plan & Single Equality Scheme

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the current review of the Authority's Corporate Equality Plan (CEP) and Single Equality Scheme (SES).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that over five years ago a CEP was introduced as an overarching diversity and equality strategy document for the Authority. It included improvement actions in relation to diversity and equality and was monitored via the Strategic Management Team.

However, since then the Authority had implemented a Single Equality Scheme (SES). The SES was introduced in 2009 incorporating the race, disability and gender duties and plans for religion or belief, Age and Sexual Orientation. The SES superseded the CEP as authorities were no longer required to publish a CEP.

Members were informed that the SES was currently under review to take into account requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and that a report would be taken back to the Human Resources Committee in due course.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

23. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) endorse the content of the report;
- (ii) consider and comment on the anticipated outcomes; and
- (iii) receive further reports as appropriate

(signed) D. CHARLTON,
Chairman.

