

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY,
19 OCTOBER, 2009 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Charlton in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Boyes, N. Forbes, M. Forbes, Hayley and T. Wright.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

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

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

9. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 13 July 2009 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

The New Equality Duty

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (circulated) advising Members of the proposed implementation of the new Single Equality Duty.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Government Equalities Office (GEO) aimed to commence the new Equality Duty and for regulations to come into force in April 2011.

The new Equality Duty builds on the existing gender, race and disability duties and extends it to also cover age, sexual orientation, pregnancy/maternity, religion/belief and gender reassignment.

Government had produced a consultation paper setting out their proposals, which would be set out in secondary legislation to assist public bodies meet the new Equality Duty in an effective and proportionate way.

Councillor N. Forbes commented that he welcomed the legislation as it showed that the Authority were putting equality principles and values into practice.

Upon consideration, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the response to the consultation be approved;
- (ii) the Chief Fire Officer and the Chairman submit a response on behalf of the Authority; and
- (iii) further reports to be received as appropriate.

Member of Extremist Political Parties

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (circulated) enclosing for Members' consideration the Joint Statement from the Chairman of the Fire Authority, Chief Fire Officer and Representative Bodies in relation to the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's position regarding membership of extremist political parties or similar organisations.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) Chairperson Samantha Samuels had written to all Chief Fire Officers in the UK Fire and Rescue Service to determine whether they had a clearly defined position on employee membership of extreme right wing organisations.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority continuously strives to ensure that all those employed have the necessary personal qualities and attributes to ensure that they work effectively with all sections of diverse communities to ensure everyone fully supports the Equality and Diversity agenda.

The statement was intended to clearly define the Authority's position that the Authority will not support employee membership of extremist political parties/organisations.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that the statement was fine, but that she was not aware that the Authority had ever been accused of discrimination. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer agreed to look into this.

At this juncture Councillor Hayley stated that the Authority had a Whistle Blowing Policy in place with confidential hotlines available where any discriminatory issues could be raised.

Councillor N. Forbes commented that given the Authority has a strong relationship with people in communities who have a high level of trust instilled in it, it was important to reflect on the information obtained from consulting with the public. He felt the statement was a positive move and was a good example of officers, staff and members working together.

Councillor Hayley stated that it was important not to focus on just one political party.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the wording of the statement had been derived via consultation with other fire authorities.

Members were advised that their comments would be considered by officers.

Upon consideration, it was:-

11. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the release of the joint statement be endorsed; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

HSE Pledge 'Be Part of the Solution'

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) advising Members about the induction of a pledge, launched by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to encourage employers to keep their staff safe at work.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the HSE Pledge underpins what the Authority does in continuing to improve Health and Safety standards as ably demonstrated by the fifth year that the Authority had received this HSE Gold award.

Councillor Boyes stated that consideration be given to whether the deaf can read and understand the pledge given that they communicate differently. She suggested that Councils consult with their Deaf Forums on this issue.

Councillor Haley suggested that Officers talk to partners in the Health Service to ascertain the benefits from redesigning the Pledge.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that the Authority could engage more with the deaf. He went on to state that a firefighter at the Authority does communicate using British Sign Language. He also confirmed that any deaf employees at the Authority are catered for accordingly in terms of the adapting of any equipment. He confirmed that Councillor Boyes' comments would be taken back to see whether there was anything more that could be done.

Councillor N. Forbes enquired how the HSE Pledge links with the IRMP. In response the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the IRMP did link with the issues contained within the Pledge, and although the principles of the Pledge are already implemented internally within the Authority, it was uncertain whether the Authority's principles were well known in other authorities and local groups. This was the reason why the statement was so important.

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

12. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) endorse the Chief Fire Officer in signing the HSE Pledge 'Be Part of the Solution'; and
- (ii) agree that the Chief Fire Officer maintains the Authority's commitment to a safe working environment.

(Signed) D. CHARLTON,
Chairman.