

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY,
1ST SEPTEMBER, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Bollands in the Chair

Councillors Boyes, Cooney, Forbes and Woodwark.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Armstrong, McMillan and Wright.

Appointment of Vice-Chairman

This item of business was to be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee when all Members were in attendance.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

The minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 7th July, 2008 were to be amended to reflect that the Committee resolved that Councillor Bolland be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing period to the next annual meeting, not Councillor Bell.

Subject to the above-mentioned amendment, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 7th July, 2008, Part I (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Attendance Management in the Fire and Rescue Service

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the issues which had emerged following a review of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's approach to attendance management.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that a study on attendance management in the Fire and Rescue Service was commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive and Communities and Local Government in 2007. The research involved an in-depth review of attendance management across five Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, including Tyne and Wear.

A subsequent confidential review of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was then conducted to identify any areas for development in relation to the Authority's approach to attendance management, in particular their policies and practices.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer drew Members attention to the full review, which had been attached as Appendix A. In doing so, he advised that it highlighted that the policies and practices in place were effective. Nonetheless, the review did suggest some areas for improvement, which the Authority were currently working on.

The Chair stated that it was reassuring to know that the Authority's current systems, policies and procedures were adequately in place.

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

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

Stress Survey

The Chief Fire Officer and Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Members of the way in which the Authority manages risks, specifically those associated with work related stress using the Work Related Stress Survey.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that the Work Related Staff Survey was an analysis tool provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and was allocated to a random sample of employees in the format of a questionnaire.

The survey was initially administered in 2006, and contained 35 questions that addressed 7 stressor categories. There were 322 questionnaires returned from the 2006 survey and a further 282 in 2007. The results of which were all benchmarked against a national comparison group. Details of the HSE method and the benefits of utilising it were then outlined for Members.

Members having been afforded the opportunity to comment on the report, Councillor Bollands remarked that the current state of the economy would not be helping the stress levels of those in the organisation. The Deputy Chief Officer responded advising that a counselling service was available, which staff could be referred to via the Authority's Welfare Officer should they wish.

A discussion then ensued with regards to publicising the services that were accessible to staff in an issue of the staff magazine. The Committee unanimously held the view that this would be useful to refresh people's minds.

Councillor Boyes in referring to the list of conclusions that had been drawn from the analysis of the survey enquired whether there was anything documented setting out individuals reactions to stress. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that it was difficult to monitor due to confidentiality reasons. Nevertheless, monitoring did take place to a certain degree by comparing stress levels with the general public and training was offered to managers to enable them to recognise stress.

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

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

Internal Audit – Attendance Management

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report (circulated) updating Members of the objectives and findings of a recent internal audit of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's Attendance Management systems.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer briefly outlined the report, drawing particular attention to the objectives of the audit, which were to review, appraise and report to management on various issues. The scope of the audit was then described, as were the findings, including specific areas of good practice as well as a small number of minor areas where controls could possibly be strengthened.

Having considered the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report;
- (ii) endorse the progress made to date; and
- (iii) undertake further reviews as appropriate and make recommendations in respect of absence management.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

5. 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 to involve a likely disclosure of exempt information relating to any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 1, 2 and 3).

(Signed) D. BOLLANDS,
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.