

Item 3 (iii)



**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 9 October 2017 at 10.30am in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters, Barmston Mere, Sunderland

Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Emerson, Flynn, Oliver, Pickard and Wright.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Stephenson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

8. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 24 July 2017 Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Sunderland Pride

The Chair recognised that hard work which had gone into the Sunderland Pride event at Sunderland Fire Station on 24 September 2017 and Councillor Wright commented on how pleasing it was to see a number of staff and councillors from areas outside Sunderland in attendance.

Investors in People 2017 Improvement Action Plan

ACFO Baines informed the Committee that a new staff survey had been developed and would be brought back to the next Fire Authority meeting.

Trauma Support Provision

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisory to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an update on the Trauma Support Programme.

Laura Lawrence, Trauma Support Team Coordinator and Steve Malley, Member of the Trauma Support Team were in attendance to deliver a presentation on the programme.

The Trauma Support Programme introduced in 1986 used the Mitchell model of critical incident stress debriefing and this was delivered 48 hours after an incident with an emphasis on listening. Laura stated that when she had come into post in 2002 there had been a disconnect between what watches felt and what the Trauma Support team was doing and a decision was made to professionalise the service. Volunteers complete an initial training course which enabled them to co-deliver trauma support sessions with watches.

A unique programme of training and a recognised university qualification had been developed for Trauma Support and the first five members of the Trauma Support Team had graduated from this course in 2009. The Team had received Level 3 status within the last fortnight which was the first nationally recognised qualification in this field.

Trauma Support was automatically triggered after a fatality but the team were seeing increasing calls for input after other incidents. There were three primary objectives for the process: -

- to normalise any reaction to the traumatic event;
- to educate about possible future reactions to the traumatic event; and
- to signpost to further services.

Trauma Support was not a stand-alone service and outside of this was the culture of the organisation and of the region as a whole. As part of the continued development of the team, Tyne and Wear had hosted a National Trauma Support Conference in June 2017 which was attended by 24 UK Fire Services as well as Northumbria Police and the British Red Cross. Feedback from the conference was overwhelmingly positive and there was a willingness to have a national dialogue about Trauma Support provision across the United Kingdom.

The Tyne and Wear Trauma Support team had delivered sessions to London Fire Brigade staff following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. These had been well received and the team had been requested to deliver further sessions within the forthcoming months. It had been a daunting experience for the team as they did not know how people might react, but the London Fire Brigade had been very welcoming and massively appreciative of the sessions carried out.

Moving forward, the Trauma Support team were intending to do more work around preparing for larger scale incidents and to collaborate with other fire and rescue services. There would also be a continuous improvement cycle with regard to training for members of the team.

The Chair commended the work of the team and noted that it was a fantastic part of the Tyne and Wear service. The awareness of the public had been heightened after the Grenfell Tower fire about the job which firefighters did.

Councillor Wright commented that it was reassuring to see the London Fire Commissioner speaking openly about accessing counselling following Grenfell. He noted that Tyne and Wear were leaders in this field and this was a source of great pride for the Authority.

Councillor Flynn asked how the military dealt with traumatic events and ACFO Baines advised that the military had a number of different programmes, the nearest of these was based at Catterick. The fire service offered support where it could and could provide high level guidance, however the challenges were different for the military. Each interaction from the team had a huge impact on staff and this was why the London Fire Brigade was keen to learn from Tyne and Wear.

Councillor Wright referred to the organisational culture and asked if there was any issue with being traumatised or upset being looked at as being as an experience for women and not men. He also queried if there were any problems around individuals who seemed to be okay immediately after an incident but then displayed trauma afterwards.

Laura commented that fifteen years ago the culture may have been for men not to show distress but the professionalization of the service had made a difference to this. It was about letting the workforce know that the Trauma Support team know what they were doing and watches often would get in touch with the team before being referred by Control.

Having been involved in an incident this year, Councillor Emerson said that he could appreciate how firefighters feel in the aftermath of such an event. Councillor Pickard asked how the service responded if it seemed that an individual needed extra support or medical attention.

Laura stated that the team would give signposting information to staff who needed extra support. The sessions held with groups were facilitated discussions and individuals were encouraged to make their own decisions about what they needed. A counsellor could not diagnose Post-Traumatic Stress but could recognise this and refer a member of staff to another service or direct them to their GP if necessary. The service bought in occupational clinical psychology services and staff could be referred and seen within seven to ten days.

9. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and

- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Public Service Governance and Administration Survey

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Officer and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report informing Members of the results of The Pensions Regulator's (TPR) survey on "Public Service Governance and Administration 2016. The full summary of results and commentary was tabled at the meeting.

The Pensions Regulator was responsible for the governance of all public sector pension schemes and had surveyed all public service pension schemes in autumn 2016 on how they were being run. The response rate was 90% over 98% of membership and this had enabled TPR to draw robust conclusions.

The survey recognised that the direction of travel was good but the regulator had also said that it would more likely to take enforcement action if scheme managers failed to demonstrate that they were taking appropriate steps to improve record keeping. The Pension Board had requested that some work be done to assess the position of Tyne and Wear in relation to the survey results.

Councillor Wright commented that it was an excellent response to the survey but queried how relevant it would be now that Tyne and Wear were about to change their pension scheme administrator and opinions might change as a result.

ACFO Baines advised that the survey covered 16 million employees and 24,000 employers and from the Tyne and Wear point of view, the scheme was compliant in many areas. With a survey of this size it was difficult to get the detail of who had responded but there were some areas of policy to be worked on through the Pension Board.

Councillor Pickard asked how the recommendations would be communicated to the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and the Area Manager for Human Resources stated that the regulator would collate all of the results and look at the areas of risk to develop a risk based inspection programme. ACFO Baines noted that through the implementation of the Pension Board a significant amount of training and continuous learning had taken place. Officers attended seminars, including those on exit strategies for individuals who were nearing retirement.

Councillor Haley commented that the survey would be a snapshot in time and that changes in regulations had led to delays. Area Manager Clark added that the survey was a public document and the regulator had a public facing website. The recommendations arising from the survey were directed towards pension boards, schemes and administrators.

10. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Our Equality Journey Continues

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report updating Members on the Authority's Equality Journey and continued progression with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Members had received a comprehensive report setting out the Authority's Equality Journey in October 2016 and it had been decided to bring a general update once or twice a year to report on progress. The Authority continued to work with a number of organisations including the Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service, North East Regional Employers' Association and Stonewell Diversity Champions Programme. Staff network groups supported LGBT, Gender, Disability and BME staff to ensure that they were empowered to add value and make suggestions for improvements.

The report set out a number of initiatives which the network groups had been involved in including Northern Pride, IDAHOBIT Day, International Women's Day, Mind Blue Light and Holocaust Memorial Day. The Service was currently developing its submission for the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and a staff engagement survey had been sent out as part of this.

A 'Just Ask' event had been held on 7 September 2017 to promote the achievements of all staff network groups and to celebrate successes, highlight the activities, promote membership, increase awareness and share best practice. The Authority had launched Stonewall's 'What's It Got To Do With You?' campaign on 20 July 2017 which was aimed at encouraging staff to feel comfortable and safe in disclosing their protected characteristics.

Councillor Wright commented that the Service had celebrated Black History Month in the past but these events seemed to have reduced over the last few years. He also noted that fire stations had excellent facilities, especially for disabled people and suggested that Authority members could be challenged to get organisations to meet in community fire stations.

The Human Resources Manager stated that there were officers who were leading on Black History Month within the service and there were also events planned for Diwali. Councillor Wright suggested that the Authority needed to look at how they were communicating these events. The Human Resources Manager advised that a calendar of events for the next year was being drawn up and this could be circulated to Members.

ACFO Baines said that service headquarters staff did not particularly get invited to all community fire station events. He understood that the footfall rate was still high at stations and the use of Safetyworks! was increasing. The Chair referred to the forthcoming Great Exhibition of the North and ACFO Baines highlighted that efforts were being made to get cadets and volunteers involved in the exhibition.

11. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the content of the report be noted; and

- (ii) further reports be received as required.

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report providing an update regarding the submission to enter the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2017 (WEI).

The Authority had first entered the Stonewall WEI in 2011 to benchmark and evaluate its performance in relation to LGBT equality and inclusion and had been ranked as the top fire and rescue service in the country in 2014. In 2015, Stonewall had launched a new framework assessment and questionnaire and the Authority had achieved 37th place in the WEI.

A submission was not made to Stonewall in 2016 as the Authority had been focusing on Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework Assessment, for which it had gained the 'Excellent' level for the second time in 2016. Following on from this, the Authority had directed work towards a 2017/2018 WEI submission and was now at the stage where all of the supporting evidence had been submitted and a staff survey was being undertaken. The survey would ask staff about attitudes towards culture, diversity and inclusion. Responses were completed online anonymously and submitted directly to Stonewall. It was hoped that the result of the submission would be known in January 2018.

The Chair commented that now the Equality Framework was in place, this would provide more evidence for the WEI. ACFO Baines said that one of the discussions which had taken place was about how evidence was presented as Stonewall wanted LGBT to be cited in all documentation. Tyne and Wear had a fully embedded approach and it would be interesting to hear the feedback on this.

12. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Employment Tribunal System Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report providing an update on changes to the Employment Tribunal system.

The Human Resources Manager advised that the Employment Tribunal system was created in 1964 and in 2013, fees were introduced for the first time. Proceeding to a full hearing for a simple case attracted fees of £390 and for a more complex matter fees were £1,200.

Unison had brought forward a legal challenge to the fees and the Supreme Court had

found that the Government had acted unlawfully when the fees were introduced and ruled that any claims brought from 26 July 2017 onwards would not be subjected to any fees. They also ordered the Government to refund any fees which had been claimed, resulting in more than £27m being refunded.

It was anticipated that due to the withdrawal of fees employers would see a steady increase in Employment Tribunal claims over the next few months. Prior to the introduction of fees there had been a number of vexatious type claims and there was a risk that there was no filter if the fees were not there.

Councillor Oliver asked if this was likely to have an impact on Tyne and Wear and the Human Resources Manager stated that ACAS was almost a filter for the service and a lot of claims were ruled out at that stage. It was noted that a few years ago, ACAS had brought in 800 conciliators to provide services in their new system. The CIPD was also looking at the impact of the removal of fees and would be assessing the impact. The Human Resources Manager added that the service had a good mechanism for resolving issues before they got to the grievance stage and there had only been one claim made in the last two and a half years. It was probable that the Tribunal service itself would require some reform going forward.

The Personnel Advisor to the Authority advised that from conversations he had had with colleagues, the trade unions and legal firms who filtered claims had introduced new assessment processes for claims which were still in place. There was a significant school of thought that the Government would introduce a new fees regime at some point which could be achievable if fees were proportionate.

Councillor Flynn commented that it was also his experience that trade unions had changed their approach to claims and that members were directed to speak to a solicitor initially. Councillor Wright said that he was reassured by what had been said, although it was frustrating that fees were necessary, and he asked for confirmation that claims would not cost the Authority anything up front.

The Committee were informed that legal costs would have to be paid and that if the employer lost a tribunal then they would have to pay the claimant's fees. The Human Resources Manager highlighted that there had only been three claims in the previous ten years which had gone to a Tribunal and that the service had prided itself on treating people consistently and fairly.

13. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

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

14. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a

likely disclosure of 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 3).

(Signed) G HALEY
Chair