



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the Meeting held Remotely on Monday 5 October 2020 at 10.30am
via Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Butler, Dodds, Flynn, Pickard, Taylor and Woodward.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephenson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

37. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 20 July 2020 Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair of the Committee welcomed Lynsey McVay, Assistant Chief Fire Officer to the meeting.

The Chair asked the Committee if they would agree to consider an additional item on 'Recruitment and Promotion Activity Update 2020' which had been circulated after the publication of the agenda.

The Committee: -

38. RESOLVED that an additional item titled 'Recruitment and Promotion Activity Update 2020' be taken at item 8 on the agenda.

Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report 2019/2020

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Strategic Finance Manager and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report presenting the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap report 2019/2020 and seeking approval for its publication.

The Human Resources Director advised that the Authority had a specific duty to publish equality data under the Equality Act 2010 and, from 2017, was required to report Gender Pay Gap information. The duties incorporated the nine protected characteristics and required the Authority to have due regard to: -

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

The Annual Equality Data Report was required to be published before 31 January 2021 and the Gender Pay Gap data by 31 March 2021 and as these had been combined into one report, the document would be published after consultation with the Committee and well within the legislative deadline.

The full report was attached as an appendix and was still a draft; the data was correct but some of the wording needed to be refined. The format of the document was the same as in 2018/2019, however the introduction from the Chief Fire Officer was new for this year. The equality data was for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and the gender pay information was a snapshot on 31 March 2020.

Overall the gender pay gap was marginally smaller than in the previous year; it was most apparent in relation to Green Book employees and this could be attributed to the number of women in lower paid roles. It was highlighted that 55% of the female Green Book employees were paid at the lower end of the pay points and only 13% of higher-level management posts were occupied by women. The structural gender pay differentiation reflected gender roles in specific areas throughout the UK.

The report also highlighted service user data from 'After the Incident' surveys, the results of which were fed into the Home Safety Checks Targeting Strategy. The Community Engagement work undertaken during the year was set out and information provided on how to make comments on the report.

Councillor Woodwark commented that a lot of the report was about statistics and some of these statistics had a historical background, such as the age of firefighters, however he noted that specific statistics had been included in relation to community

engagement in the Newcastle area and suggested that this could be reported for all other districts.

Councillor Butler asked if it was expected that the pay gap would close as further recruitment drives were progressed. The Human Resources Director agreed that one of the biggest drivers of the gender pay gap was the retirement of older men and the progression of that profile had the potential for massive change, as long as the service continued to recruit diversely at the front end.

ACO McVay advised that the Authority was recruiting an inclusion officer and hoped to see a marked improvement in diversity year on year. The Chair noted that it was important to know where the service had been and where it was going and it was not unusual to have a large number of older men within the workforce. He felt it would be useful to have some comparison between the Tyne and Wear workforce and other metropolitan fire authorities. With reference to exit interviews, the Chair commented that it would be interesting to know how many leavers took up this option.

Having considered the report, it was: -

39. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report 2019/2020 be approved for publication; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Occupational Health Unit Annual Report 2019/2020

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report providing a summary of the services provided by the Occupational Health Unit (OHU) and its staff over the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

The Head of Human Resources presented the Annual Report and advised that Occupational Health continued to be a nurse led service with further professional support being provided by the Service Medical Advisor (SMA). The focus of the service was to carry out mandatory obligations along with best practice and health promotion. The core services included: -

- Health Surveillance
- Fitness for Work
- Attendance Management
- Welfare
- Health Promotion and Wellbeing Sessions
- Department policies and procedures
- Workplace immunisations

There were some external services offered which included physiotherapy, aids to vision and counselling services. OHU staff had undertaken a variety of training

courses to enable them to meet their professional revalidation requirements as well as improving their skill bases. Team members were also active representatives on groups such as the Disability Network, Health, Safety and Welfare Committee, Fire Fit Working Group and the Gender Network Group.

The OHU would continue to provide a confidential, proactive and professional approach to the delivery of health and wellbeing services to meet the needs of TWFRS and its employees. This would be achieved through a programme of continuous improvement and for 2020/2021 would include: -

- Preparing and achieving the Continuing Excellence Better Health at Work Award
- Reviewing services provided and ensure that they were delivered in the most appropriate and cost-effective way to meet the changing needs of the organisation, e.g. more services delivered on station, streamline health surveillance programme and co-ordinate by station (ongoing)
- Improved collaborative working with internal and external sources to assist in meeting the changing needs of the organisation and improving the health and wellbeing of employees (ongoing)
- Delivery of Mental Health First Aid training for all identified target groups.

The Chair commented that it was pleasing to see the wide range of activity in which the OHU was involved.

40. RESOLVED that: -

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

Better Health at Work Gold Award

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report providing an update on the Better Health at Work Award. This was a regional scheme which encouraged employers to improve the health of their employees and also recognised the achievements of the organisation in managing health at work.

There were four levels to the award, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Continuing Excellence. The service had been awarded the Silver level in September 2019 and over the last year had been working towards the Gold Award which had been successfully achieved in August 2020.

A lengthy portfolio of information had been submitted to the Assessors for the award and they had commented that the assessment record was of a very high standard and that the three-year Health and Wellbeing Strategy and associated action plans had senior level approval. Assessors also identified that health and wellbeing was fully embedded within the Service culture and practices and that the network of Health Advocates were enthusiastic, passionate and dedicated. The hard work

completed during the pandemic using diverse, innovative and interesting health campaigns was acknowledged.

Following the confirmation of the Gold status, the Service would now commence work on preparing its submission for progress to Continuing Excellence status. Councillor Butler commented that it was absolutely fantastic to hear that the service had achieved the Gold Award and great that the Service was moving forward towards Continuing Excellence.

The Chair asked if 'Continuing Excellence' would reflect the continuing level which the Service was operating at and the Head of Human Resources said that it would, noting that the Service was continually reviewing and refreshing and was viewed as a mentor for other organisations.

Accordingly, the Committee: -

41. RESOLVED that: -

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

RoSPA Gold Achievement Award

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report advising Members that the Service had been awarded the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Gold Achievement Award.

The RoSPA Award scheme recognised achievement in health and safety management systems, including practices such as leadership and workforce involvement. The awards were non-competitive and based on an organisation's individual occupational health and safety performance assessed against the judging criteria.

The Service submitted an 8500-word submission in June 2020 which referenced over 90 separate pieces of evidence and a range of accident, ill health and enforcement data. In July 2020, the Service was awarded a prestigious RoSPA Gold Achievement Award in recognition of practices and achievements for health and safety.

42. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the accolade given to the Service be recognised; and
- (ii) the commitment of staff and representative bodies for their contribution to a safe working environment be acknowledged.

Recruitment and Promotion Update 2020

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing an update on recruitment and staff promotion activity by the Service during 2020.

ACO McVay presented the report and in doing so explained that recruitment had been subdued during the period 2010-2018 and the number of promotional opportunities had been reduced, however since the beginning of 2020 there had been a notable increase in the number of recruitment and promotion campaigns run by the Service, against the backdrop of the pandemic and its associated challenges.

In comparison with the same period in 2019, recruitment and promotion activity between January and September 2020 had increased by 30%. The Service had recruited 26% more trainee firefighters and triple the previous number of internal recruitments. Since March 2020, all recruitment and selection activity had been done in a Covid-secure manner, with adapted processes. Trainees had begun their training in a socially distanced redesigned format and had passed out on 23 July 2020, becoming operational in August. A new trainee firefighter course had commenced on 7 September and was due to be completed in December 2020.

During July and August, a promotion process for operational Crew Manager roles was undertaken. The assessment process had been completely revised following the rigorous evaluation of a previous process and obtaining staff feedback. 21 Firefighters had been successfully promoted to Crew Managers in August and the feedback from candidates and unions on the process had been very positive. Over the first nine months of the year, the Service had actively promoted and appointed managers in the roles of Area, Group, Station and Watch Manager.

Relevant risk assessments had been undertaken and had considered an appropriate balance between risk and control. ACO McVay highlighted that the Service had to carry out recruitment or it would have stood still and it was important to continue to move forward. The costs of recruitment and promotion had been met from within departmental budgets and there remained a journey ahead to ensure that the workforce reflected the diversity of the communities it served.

Councillor Taylor asked if, moving forwards, the relevant training packages were in place for the development of managers who were promoted. ACO McVay stated that there were a number of courses in place including a Crew Manager Managing Incidents course and the same would apply for Watch Managers. An assessment was carried at all levels and there were generic and specific elements of training available; it was the intention to have a very specific assessment of needs and training for every new manager.

The Chair queried to what extent internal candidates had been successful in achieving promotions and ACO McVay advised that all Crew and Watch Manager appointments had been internal and would remain that way for the next 12 months. This may be reviewed in the future, however Station and Group Manager recruitment would be external from this point on. There were a number of employees nearing retirement and there would be gaps which needed to be filled.

Having thanked ACO McVay for the comprehensive report it was: -

43. RESOLVED that: -

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

(Signed) G HALEY
Chair

