

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

**Item 5 (ii)**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 6 February 2017 at 10.30 a.m. in the  
Fire and Rescue Headquarters, Barmston Mere, Sunderland**

**Present:**

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Councillors Hayley, Oliver, Pickard, Renton 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.

Prior to the commencement of the business of the meeting, the Chair introduced a video of a Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue Service Choir recording of the song, "True Colours," as part of the Mind Blue Light Challenge.

The Human Resources Manager, Lorna Hodson, reported that the choir would be taking part in a Blue Light Event at the Sage, Gateshead in May 2017 with choirs from the Northumbria Police and Ambulance Service. In addition the choir had been invited to participate in an event in Blackpool in July 2017 with the North West NHS Choir.

Councillor Haley suggested that the choir should also take part in the Newcastle Pride Breakfast Event.

The Chair extended an invite to anyone interested in joining the choir to join the practises which take place weekly on Thursday's at 5.30 p.m.

The Chair then referred to the major fires which had occurred over the weekend in Southwick, Sunderland and Houghton-le Spring. She reported that two arrests had been made in relation to the fire at Southwick. She was also saddened to advise

Members that a firefighter had been attacked and injured whilst attending the fire in Houghton-le-Spring. She added that despite his injuries, the firefighter remained on duty to assist his colleagues to put out the fire as he was mindful of the resources required at the Southwick fire.

Councillor Wright drew the attention of the Committee to the discussions on social media which highlighted an overwhelming support for the Fire and Rescue Service, also commended the firefighters who had attended the two major fires. In particular he praised the firefighter at the Houghton-le-Spring fire for remaining on duty despite his injuries. He noted that this showed the calibre and dedication of the people who worked for the Service.

The Committee was advised that a third of the Service's appliances had been drafted in to cover both fires.

Councillor Wright reported that he had been immensely proud of the firefighters responding to both incidents and requested that the commendations of the Committee be communicated to them.

ACFO Baines thanked the Committee and advised that he would pass on the gratitude of Members. He reported that the firefighters were highly trained to deal with incidents such as these and he was pleased to see how motivated and professional the personnel were in combatting the fire and their dealings with the public in both areas.

## **Minutes**

46. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 10 October 2016 Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

## **Investors in People 2017**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform of the Investors in People (IIP) audit which was scheduled to take place in February 2017.

ACFO Baines reported that the IIP assessment was undertaken every three years to maintain the standard. He highlighted that the TWFR had achieved Gold in 2010 and in 2014 it had been successful in achieving Gold with Championship status. He commended the work of the Area Manager for Human Resources and his team in assembling the information.

The Committee was advised that the IIP would assess the Authority using the new 6<sup>th</sup> generation framework which covered new standards and performance criteria. The new assessment would require a minimum of 24% of the total organisation to complete an on-line assessment prior to interviews taking place. To date 28% had completed the on-line assessment and encouragement would be given for even more staff to undertake it.

ACFO Baines advised that the standard was now divided into nine indicators, as shown in paragraph 4.2 of the report, which were underpinned by various `evidence requirements`. He explained that the assessor would interview a wide variety of employees across the whole organisation and from numerous departments. He added that each of the nine indicators were divided into three categories with four levels of achievement in each, namely Achieved, Silver, Gold and the new level, Platinum. He commented that the Authority would be aiming to retain its Gold standard and that the new assessment criterion would make that more difficult.

ACFO Baines reported that an exit meeting would be held between the Authority and the assessors approximately three to four weeks after the assessment however he did not expect to receive all the feedback at that stage.

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

47. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted;
- (ii) support and contributions be given to the IIP process and assessment; and
- (iii) further reports on the matter be submitted to the Committee for consideration as required.

### **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide an update regarding the proposal to enter a submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2017 (WEI) and the impact on the Authorities resources.

ACFO Baines reported that the Authority had forged strong links with the local Stonewall office in Edinburgh. He explained that for this year's submission, a comprehensive on-line questionnaire had to be completed which included supporting evidence regarding; policy and practice, staff engagement, staff development and support, monitoring, community engagement, procurement and innovative development of LGBT related initiatives.

The Committee was advised that the Authority had continued to successfully achieve excellent placements in the Equality Index and by taking part it demonstrated its commitment to LGBT equality and inclusion.

In response to Councillor Wright, ACFO Baines advised that he would confirm the date and time of the regional Stonewall event in March with Members in due course.

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

48. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted, and
- (ii) further reports on the matter be submitted to the Committee for consideration as required.

### **Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework Action Plan**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide an update following the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) Excellent re-accreditation.

The Area Manager for Human Resources highlighted that the Authority was the first Fire and Rescue Service to undertake the re-accreditation and be awarded the 'excellent' level of the Framework following a peer assessment. He reported that the Equality Framework served as an effective tool which allowed the Authority to understand and measure its performance across all aspects of the organisation and helped the Authority to maintain its status and reputation in continuing its journey of excellence.

The Committee was advised that following a rigorous and intensive process, the peer team had re-accredited the Authority with 'excellent' status and use of the 'logo', which could be used to promote the Authority's success and further demonstrate its on-going commitment to equality and inclusion.

The Area Manager for Human Resources reported that a feedback report had summarised the findings of the challenge. He explained that not only did it identify some areas for consideration to assist the Authority in improving further, the peer team highlighted some examples of innovative projects and initiatives. They were also particularly impressed by the strong leadership and management in place throughout the organisation. He advised that this feedback created an Action Plan to maintain and improve equality, diversity and inclusion, highlighting five key areas, Human Resources, Policy, Community Safety, Collaboration and Partnership.

The Committee was advised that in addition to the Action Plan, the Authority had also introduced a number of key pieces of work and arrangements, which would help to develop and improve its structure and future ways of working. These included the Organisational Development Strategy, Engage Programme, Leadership Bond, and Blue Light Collaboration.

Councillor Pickard referred to the Action Plan and enquired whether it also included a timescale for improvements against the actions and identified a lead officer. ACFO Baines confirmed that these were included and would undergo constant reassessment to ensure that continuous improvement. He added that the next accreditation process would take place in three years.

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

49. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted, and
- (ii) further reports on the matter be submitted to the Committee for consideration as required.

### **Fitness for Life**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide an update of work that had been undertaken to provide the service with an overarching approach to the health and wellbeing of all employees; entitled 'fitness for life'.

The Area Manager for Human Resources reported that a physically fit and healthy workforce was recognised as being central to the long-term productivity of any business whether employees had a physically demanding component to their role or not. He explained that research had shown that those employees who were physically active reported less illness, recovered more quickly from illness, reported greater enjoyment from their work, and had improved concentration and mental alertness. He advised that the four main risk factors of physical inactivity, smoking, harmful use of alcohol and an unhealthy diet lead to a large proportion of common conditions.

The Committee was advised that the Authority continued to proactively embrace all areas of health and wellbeing for the employees since the establishment of an Occupational Health Unit in 1993. The Unit offered support, guidance, provided health promotion to assist in the early detection and prevention of ill health, together with reasonable adjustments to support staff with disabilities. Firefighters had access to gymnasiums and gym equipment and had allocated training time within their working day. The Authority had also pledged a commitment to the Blue Light 'Time to Change' challenge in 2015, to tackle mental health stigma and support staff well-being.

The Area Manager for Human Resources highlighted that following a review of the services provided it was evident that much of the work previously undertaken had focused on the Operational workforce who undertook tasks that placed large physical and psychological demands on firefighters that could be unpredictable and sporadic in nature. He emphasised that the new 'fitness for life' approach would focus on the health and wellbeing of all employees. He explained that a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Services Health and Wellbeing agenda

for all employees was underway and a report would be brought back to the Committee if any cost implications were identified.

Councillor Oliver enquired what the level of sickness absence was. ACFO Baines reported that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had a strong performance in this area and was in the top quartile in the North East with an average of 5.9 days lost per employee. He explained that there had been a slight increase in sickness absence in the previous year however he anticipated that this would reduce significantly as the 'Fitness for Life' programme was developed. He reported that the new holistic programme of health and wellbeing support was essential particularly as the Authority had a diverse and ageing workforce and it was vital to continue to develop a bespoke, overarching health and wellbeing programme ensuring employees were fit and healthy to attend work.

The Chair having asked if training on the use of the gym equipment was given, was advised that there were a number of dedicated PT Instructors and instruction videos available.

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

50. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted, and
- (ii) further reports on the matter be submitted to the Committee for consideration as required.

### **Annual Equality Data Report 2017**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform of the completion of the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data Report 2017.

The Area Manager for Human Resources advised that the Authority was required to publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty of the Equality Act 2010 by 31 January each year. The published report referred to data from 1 January to 31 December 2016 and was under consultation until the end of February 2016.

The draft Annual Equality Data Report compared internal and external equality data and showed the progress that had been made towards equality objectives compared against the previous year. All associated equality actions were now complete and the process of preparing the future equality strategy would begin in the spring.

The Area Manager for Human Resources advised that with the austerity measures and a recruitment freeze, it had been challenging to positively enhance diversity within the Service. He explained that through engaging agency staff, fixed term contracts and volunteers, the Service had ensured diversity had continued to enhance the workforce; and by developing talent of exiting employees the Authority

had provided temporary development opportunities that benefitted both individuals and the Service.

The Committee was advised that the Authority had been re-accredited with an 'Excellent' award for the Fire and Rescue Services Equality Framework. The assessment team had highlighted the Authority's positive culture and active promotion together with its commitment to improving mental health and wellbeing with its 'Blue Light Programme.' The Area Manager for Human Resources reported that in 2016, the Authority had been awarded thirteenth place in the 'Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers.'

The Area Manager for Human Resources reported that equal pay was part of the government equalities agenda to address gender and other pay gaps in the UK. He advised that the Authority's transparency on this issue underlined its commitment to equal treatment for employees, regardless of personal characteristic and ensured the Service remains at the forefront of equality best practice. He added that the Authority differed from many areas of local government as, in meeting the emergency response needs of its communities; some operational roles required additional on-call and response arrangements, in addition to management duties. Such roles attracted an additional flexible duty allowance, with the core managerial elements providing remuneration at the same level for equal work.

The Committee was advised that continued support for employees was given within four employee networks groups for Disability, LGBT, Gender and BME. Opportunities for greater staff engagement were being explored and also continued development and recruitment Community Volunteers to support staff with the delivery of fire safety messages, including the recruitment of volunteer team leaders.

The Area Manager for Human Resources highlighted that in compiling the report the Fire Authority had used both total approved head count of 892 employees and 65 volunteers as the baseline comparator. He acknowledged that the Service was an aging workforce, with 68% of employees being over the age of 41. Changes to pension provisions and people choosing to work beyond retirement age had slowly increased the numbers of staff in the oldest age group ranges which would result in this remaining the trend in the coming years. He advised that the Authority would continue to be proactive in promoting itself as a prospective employer to young people, to support long-term balance to the age profile of our workforce. Programmes such as the Young Firefighters' Association and Ignite might provide opportunities for young people to consider applying for apprenticeship programmes, which were currently evolving. Work experience placements were also being offered and older workers with valuable skills and experience were encouraged to continue to work with the Service.

With regard to disability, no major differentials were revealed and the pattern was very much the same for ethnicity. For sexual orientation and gender reassignment, comparisons were difficult due to the small number of employees declaring their orientation. There had been a slight increase in the percentage of women in the workforce and the Authority continued to work closely with the Fire Brigades Union Women's Section to encourage recruitment and retention, development and progression of women within the Service.

The Committee was advised that work-life balance policies, flexible working options and shared parental leave available to employees had resulted in 100% of the women who had taken maternity leave to return to their respective roles

There had been ten grievances recorded in 2016, an increase of 6 on 2015. Of these cases, seven have been resolved with three currently in progress. There were no dismissals during 2016.

Councillor Wright referred to pay per gender table on page 45 and was concerned that the wage of female station managers was lower than that of male station managers. ACFO Baines explained that this usually related to an employee in a temporary role or in a development role as opposed to an employee on a substantive pay grade. The Personal Advisor added that the tables graded employees by ethnicity and gender and overall it should reflect parity in grade. ACFO Baines highlighted that the Authority outperformed many other fire services as a fair employer and findings indicated that the pay gaps, on a grade by grade basis between women and men were generally below 5%. He reported that the Authority was very open in relation to the data published and welcomed challenge in order to make continuous improvements.

Councillor Wright then raised the firefighter recruitment freeze and the aging workforce which could lead to problems in the future. ACFO Baines reported that there had been a number of firefighters recruited via inter-service transfers from other Fire Services and savings had been made as basic rather than full training courses had been given. He advised that there had been a slow increase in the numbers of staff in the oldest age group ranges and explained that the Authority had been redefining the future of its leadership and management development programme and reconsidering its succession planning needs.

In response to Councillor Wright's question on the number of employees who had preferred not to respond to specific sections of the questionnaire, ACFO Baines reported that a higher proportion than in the past had declared responses however there were still some employees who chose not to. He anticipated that participation levels would increase through the leadership working and face to face discussions with employees on what the data is used for, namely to help inform policies and strategies for the Service.

Councillor Renton enquired whether discussions were held with those employees leaving the Service to determine their reasons for leaving. ACFO Baines reported that a two stage process was undertaken; an anonymous on-line questionnaire and an exit interview with the Chief Fire Officer.

Councillor Oliver asked if there was any interest expressed by girls to join the Service when undertaking engagements with your people, particularly with the Young Firefighters' Association. The Area Manager for Human Resources advised that there had been a level ratio of boys to girls in the proactive work which had been undertaken with the Prince's Trust and the Young Firefighters' Association to encourage applicants to join the apprenticeship programmes and work experience placements. He added that there had been studies undertaken nationally and it was



found that engagement at infant school ages would be needed to change perceptions of young people thinking about future careers.

The Human Resources Manager, Lorna Hodson, reported that workshops had been undertaken in conjunction with the Fire Brigade Union about breaking down barriers to re-address the perception of the role of a firefighter in communities. Much work had been undertaken with citizenship ceremonies and working with refugees.

In response to Councillor Renton's queries in relation to flexible working arrangements and support for those with carer responsibilities, ACFO Baines highlighted that there was a career break scheme available and schemes to enable those employees to maintain their skills and agility.

Councillor Haley referred to the cost of social care and the contribution of the Fire Service could have an important role to play. ACFO Baines

Having thanked officers for their detailed report, it was: -

51. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the comments of Committee on the draft Annual Equality Data Report 2017 be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **Excellence in Diversity Award Submission and Inclusive Top 50 UK Employer Award**

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide an update regarding the proposal to submit an entry into the 'Excellence in Diversity' awards and highlight the Authority's success in attaining thirteenth place in the 'Inclusive Top 50 Employer Award'.

The Human Resources Manager, Lorna Hodson, reported that the Authority had been invited to submit an entry in the 2017 Awards. She explained that the Equality Team would be formulating the submission over the coming weeks to meet the deadline of 17 March 2017. The winners would be announced at an Awards Ceremony in June 2017.

The Committee having been advised that the Authority contributed £1,495 per annum its corporate membership of Excellence in Diversity, it was:-

52. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted, and
- (ii) further reports on the matter be submitted to the Committee for consideration as required.

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

At the instance of the Chairman it was: -

53. 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 exempt information relating to a particular individual or which is likely to reveal the identity of any individual (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1 and 2). The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(Signed) J BELL,  
Chair.

### **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.