

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 13 JULY 2009

SUBJECT: REGIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for the North East Fire and Rescue Services.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It was made clear in the White Paper 'Our Fire and Rescue Service' and in editions of the National Framework that followed it, that Fire and Rescue Authorities, through the Regional Management Board, should identify and implement the most efficient means for the region to deliver a range of personnel and human resource services.
- 2.2 Following review of the strategic direction for Human Resources, at a North East regional level, a collaborative approach was considered to ensure optimising performance improvement in terms of:
- all statutory and regulatory responsibilities are fully met;
 - that the government expectation, set out within the National Framework are satisfied;
 - that both corporate and community risk is reduced; that organisational and operational resilience, for the north east, is achieved;
 - that opportunities are derived for capacity building and efficiency savings;
 - that both performance and community safety services are improved; and
 - that the individual fire and rescue authorities continuously improve.
- 2.3 Members will be aware that this collaborative approach to people management brought forward a regional HR strategy that encompasses recruitment, training and development, occupational health, health and safety, medical advice services, sickness/ill-health management, discipline, mobility and equality. The aim of this strategy is to recognise that our people are critical to our success and enable the respective authorities to maximize its capacity and performance so as to deliver an improved service. The strategy has been previously approved by Members.
- 2.4 The business benefits that have stemmed from the establishment of the regional HR strategy have included the following:
- The development of a more skilled, strategic and integrated HR function;

- The development of workforce planning skills and the HR capacity to assist in the modernisation of the current service culture;
- A Human Resources Strategy that fully reflects the needs set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan(s);
- The Authority will tackle inequalities and diversity issues;
- The development of specialist expertise;
- More effective use of available human resources;
- Improved quality of service delivery;
- A common and consistently applied range of policies, practices and procedures which will enhance the provision of the HR function; and
- Delivery of the Government's modernisation agenda

3 PROGRESS TO DATE

3.1 It is not the intention of this progress report to provide a detailed analysis and evaluation of the HR strategy outcomes to date but simply to provide outline commentary on the current achievements and to demonstrate continuing and measurable progress and, most of all, reiterate the efficiency savings being made through regional collaboration.

3.1.1 Equality and Diversity - The regional application of the Equality and Diversity Strategy has made significant improvement in the respective Authorities approach to not only how we treat each other within the Service but also in developing a closer and more effective relationship with the public we serve. Specific development activity has included:

- Regional Audit conducted by Audit Commission;
- Regional Equalities Risk Register formulated;
- Regional Equalities Strategy;
- Regional Diversity Advisor appointed;
- Regional Equality and Diversity framework 'Strategy into Action' devised;
- Regional Action Plan agreed;
- Regional Communication strategy;
- Regional Equality and Diversity Steering Group established.

3.1.2 Policy and Strategy Development – Listed below are areas where progress has been made:

- Regional Policy Frameworks
 - Overtime
 - Part-time working
 - Day Duty Systems
 - Wholetime/retained
 - Discipline, grievance and capability
 - Secondary Employment Framework
 - Redundancy Policy and Framework
 - Additional Responsibility Allowances
 - Career Breaks
- Collaborative approach to Absence Management;
- Regional toolkit for alternative duty systems;

- Collaborative approach to Health & Safety management including Occupational Health;
- Provision of HR support and guidance to the Regional Control Centre project.

3.1.3 Workforce Development - To maximise resources and improve efficiency the following joint working arrangements have been established:

- Regional recruitment and selection for wholetime staff using the National Firefighter selection process;
- Recruitment and initial training of retained duty system staff;
- Strategy to evaluate the provision of a Regional approved NVQ centre;
- Regional Assessment and Development Centres at Supervisory/Middle Management level;
- Regional Leadership Development programmes;
- Regional workplace assessment strategy;
- Standard regional application form for corporate staff.

3.1.4 Health and Safety – A collaborative approach to Health & Safety has provided a wide range of sub-projects including:

- Health and Safety Strategy, Policy and Procedures
- Attendance Management
- Welfare
- Substance Misuse
- Health and Fitness
- Occupational Health

3.1.5 Training, Learning and Development – the advances made in this field include:

- Completed the regional training portfolio data gathering exercise. This means we know what is provided by whom and where it is provided;
- Regional development programmes approved for regional delivery;
- a regional external course provider list which is being used by IPDS to source external courses;
- Regional cost-effective delivery of FSC modules;
- Establishment of a Leadership Framework.

3.1.6 FiReControl/Firelink – the regional 'People Management Group' has taken the lead in terms of the human resource implications of the migration to a regional control centre and to date much progress has been made as follows:

- Regional Joint Consultative Committee set up;
- Formal consultation commenced;

- Control staff workshops held with the RCC;
- Regional HR Working Group constituted to lead on TUPE issues chaired by Tyne and Wear;
- Local consultations arrangements commenced;
- Officers from this Authority are active members of national groups influencing the outcomes of both projects.
- Firelink now rolled out throughout the region.

4 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

- 4.1 Working together in effective partnerships remains a vital part to delivering more efficient and effective local services and remains a Government expectation as detailed within the draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework document for 2008 - 2010. The draft Framework re-emphasises the expectation to introduce regional personnel and human resource functions, however, in line with the changing relationship between central and local government, authorities have more freedom to shape local services to build local solutions which meet the needs of their local communities and authorities. Consequently, authorities are actively encouraged to consider the appropriateness of the collaborative or joint working arrangements.
- 4.2 The existing collaborative arrangements for HR have produced a cost-effective and efficient delivery of the personnel and human resource functions that have delivered an enhanced level of service and greater value for money. Equally, those collaborative arrangements have introduced, reviewed and maintained effective employment policies, practices, procedures and processes that enable authorities to recruit people with the right skills and potential; develop them to realise that potential, support them by ensuring they are valued, treated fairly and with respect; and provide them with equality of opportunity to progress. Building on this success will be the next challenge.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 A risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the risk to the Authority has been minimised as far as practicable. The assessment has considered an appropriate balance between risk and control; the realisation of efficiencies; the most appropriate use of limited resources; and a comprehensive evaluation of the benefits. The risk to the authority has been assessed as low utilising the standard risk matrix based on control measures being in place. The complete risk assessment is available on request from the Chief Fire Officer.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Members are advised that the costs of implementing the Regional Human Resource Strategy are contained within existing resources for this and subsequent years. Any savings accrued are reported regularly to the Authority through the efficiency savings mechanism.

7 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The equality and fairness implications are contained within the body of this report.

8 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are recommended to:
- a) Endorse the progress made to date;
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Strategic Plan 2006-2010