

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF MATERNITY / PATERNITY PROCEDURE**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY,
THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to consider a review of the Authority's Maternity / Paternity Procedure and Guidance (MPPG).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 During the later part of 2011, pregnant women and new mothers within the Service from both operational and corporate roles raised several issues in relation of the current MPPG. For example, the issue and suitability of work wear and the effectiveness of communication during their time away from the workplace.
- 2.2 As a result of the feedback received various points were raised and debated at the Equality and Diversity Committee and discussions took place between Fire Brigades Union members and senior management. The Chief Fire Officer therefore proposes a review of the MPPG to explore the issues raised in more depth and to recommend potential solutions.
- 2.3 The Authority's current MPPG is predominately based on previous best practice from like-minded organisations and is regularly updated as legislation changes. However, this review will present an opportunity to further explore issues in the context of the Fire and Rescue Service, Equality Act 2012 and the new Public Sector Equality Duty, which now incorporates Pregnancy and Maternity as a protected characteristic.
- 2.4 It is also considered beneficial to review the MPPG in line with the 'Excellent' level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) to ensure the Authority is demonstrating its commitment to equality and meeting the standard in preparation for an assessment in late 2012.

3 REVIEW OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 It is therefore proposed that the lead officer for the review be the Diversity and Resources Manager. In addition, the review will include a comprehensive assessment of the Maternity / Paternity Procedure and Guidance and associated protocols, to identify if there are any areas for development / improvement in relation to the practical application, interpretation and content of the procedure and guidance.
- 3.2 The main objectives of the review will be:-

- To seek views and constructive feedback from key employees and individuals who have had experience of implementing and interpreting the current MPPG exploring for example; provision of clothing, communication protocols, pay, returning to work, welfare/support, facilities, understanding rights and responsibilities;
- To undertake a comprehensive review of the MPPG to ensure it incorporates necessary maternity, paternity, and adoption information which support the Authority's equality objectives in line with organisational goals and priorities.
- To review the content of the MPPG to ensure it is easy to interpret and relevant for employees and line management both from an operational and corporate perspective to ensure consistent, effective welfare and support protocols/mechanisms are in place for expecting/new parents/carers.

4 REVIEW PROCESS

- 4.1 Qualitative and quantitative information will be collected from individuals who have experienced interpreting and/or implementing the MPPG in the first instance for example, expecting/new parents/carers as well as their respective line managers.
- 4.2 Once this data is collated and analysed a small core working group will be formed to progress the review to recommendation stage and to conduct focus groups to explore the key issues raised during the initial consultation exercise.
- 4.3 Key personnel responsible for the implementation, review and support in terms of the procedure and guidance will be invited to review the findings and debate possible solutions i.e. HR, Diversity and Equality, Finance, Procurement, Stores, Communications, Occupational Health Unit, Health and Safety.
- 4.4 Qualitative and qualitative information will be collected from other Fire and Rescue Services via FINDS or individual contact if appropriate, or similar organisations for comparative purposes and to seek good practice.
- 4.5 Legislative information will be collated including details of this specific protected characteristic, along with information regarding green and grey book Conditions of Service as required.
- 4.6 It is intended that recommendations for improvement will be fully considered by the Equality and Diversity Committee in March/April 2012 and a final report to this Committee in July 2012.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 Although it is highly unlikely given the control measures that are already in place, if the Authority was to be found not to be meeting all of its legislative requirements there is a risk of possible prosecution or financial loss.

- 5.2 There is the potential for reputational risk caused by slippage in terms of performance against Diversity and Equality targets or by failure to secure the “Excellent” level of the FRSEF due to having a MPPG that does not reflect an excellent organisation in terms of equality.
- 5.3 There are also risks associated with the health and safety, welfare and support of expecting/new parents/carers. The Authority is very good at looking after its employees but is it getting this right every time, is there consistency in the approach to all aspects from risk assessments to returning to work? Are all line managers confident in their role in supporting expecting/new parents/carers?
- 5.4 Closely related to 5.3, if the MPPG does not meet the needs of those who implement or interpret it and the organisation is not getting it right all of the time then this could lead to increased absence of expecting/new parents/carers and therefore have a negative impact on attendance management performance. This can further impact on team members who work closely with the individuals due to for example, an increased workload, additional stress/pressure.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no current financial implications in relation to this report.

7 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This review is based around ensuring equality for all, taking into account the particular needs of expecting/new parents/carers and focuses on the new protected characteristic of Pregnancy and Maternity.
- 7.2 It demonstrates that senior management and those involved in the review are fully embracing and promoting the Authority’s core values particularly around valuing all employees by practising and promoting fairness and respect, co-operative and inclusive working and providing varying solutions for different needs.
- 7.3 Meaningful engagement of this kind, where the Authority is really listening to the views of its employees, improvements can be made which have a positive impact on equality in the workplace. This can also impact on a wider scale from an external perspective with the organisation being viewed by stakeholders as a proactive, leading Fire and Rescue Authority in respect of equality.

8 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Approve the commencement of a comprehensive review of MPPG;
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Sunderland City Council Maternity Policy
- Maternity / Paternity Procedure and Guidance