

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
held in the Fire and Rescue
Headquarters, Barmston Mere,
Sunderland on MONDAY
14 October 2013 at 10.30 am

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Councillors Haley, Price and Mortimer.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Stephenson and Mole.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

In relation to the item on the Equality Peer Challenge Results, Councillor Haley clarified that the Chair of the Fire Commission supported internal inspections.

8. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 8 July 2013, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Equality Peer Challenge Progress Update

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with a progress update following the Equality Peer Challenge.

ACFO John Baines reminded Members that the Authority underwent an Equality Peer Challenge and were awarded the 'excellent' level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and as reported to the HR Committee on 8 July 2013.

A copy of the Equality Peer Challenge report, produced by the LGA was attached for Members' information. ACFO Baines explained that the report provided background to the challenge, an executive summary, the impact of the challenge on the Authority and detailed findings outlining strengths and areas for consideration for each performance area of the Equality Framework. The report also highlighted innovative projects and initiatives identified during the challenge and signposted areas of good practice.

Members were advised that the peer challenge was a benchmark against five areas of performance which were as follows:

- knowing your communities and equality mapping
- place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- community engagement and satisfaction
- responsive services and customer care
- a modern and diverse workforce

The Executive Summary of the report outlined the conclusions of the Peer Challenge team. Members were advised that the team recognised that the Service was committed to equality and diversity as a means of reducing risks for the most vulnerable within its community and preventing deaths and injuries from fires and road traffic collisions.

The Service was commended for its high reputation for equality amongst its statutory partners and the commitment it continued to show as a lead agency and a key player in a number of partnerships throughout Tyne and Wear.

ACFO Baines informed Members that examples of innovative projects and initiatives and signposting to areas of good practice were contained in sections 5 and 6 of the report.

The Peer Challenge team suggested some areas for consideration. There were two key issues which peers felt were priorities to be addressed. The first was the need to ensure that all staff understood the Service's priorities and were empowered to contribute. The second issue was in relation to funding within the sector becoming tighter, there will be a greater need for more formal arrangements with partners to ensure that excellent projects like Safetyworks could continue.

In terms of next steps, Members were advised that the Equality Peer Challenge report would be published both externally and internally following their approval.

ACFO Baines stated that a draft improvement plan based on the areas for consideration identified by the peer team was being developed and that further consultation would be carried out with the Strategic Management Team, Equality Committee Members and other

key staff to finalise the action plan. This would then be presented to the HR Committee prior to completion.

Councillor Mortimer in referring to the report enquired about the Handy Van Scheme. In response, Area Manager Robson explained that the Handy Van Scheme involved staff offering practical support to the elderly and vulnerable within the community in order to assist them to live independently in their own homes.

The Chair informed Members that South Tyneside Council had received a planning application for a large-scale permanent travelling site consisting of 12-14 timber units. As the facilities were not expected to have any gas, water or electricity the Chair recommended that if the application was agreed, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority may need to put some plans in place around this.

ACFO Baines welcomed the opportunity stating that the Authority had been successful in working with travelling communities, such as the Birtley Boxing Club project, and further engagement work would further improve the safety and cohesion of diverse communities in the Tyne and Wear area.

Councillor Price enquired what problems were being encountered with mosques. ACFO Baines stated that the Service had engaged with mosques following the emergence that in some sleeping and cooking regimes operated during the nights throughout Ramadan. As a result of the strong relationships forged within the community, the Service had worked closely to address the immediate risk, with long term Fire Safety support to introduce the appropriate Fire Safety systems.

Councillor Haley requested that an update be submitted to a future meeting to inform Members how the Service was tackling the areas for development highlighted by the Peer Challenge Team. In particular, Councillor Haley stated that he was particularly interested in what was being done to combat the increasing number of rough sleepers, and he recommended that the Service liaise with the HSC landlords. He also referred to the potential review of Safecall due the conflicting views that the peers had heard about its purpose and value. In doing so Councillor Haley stated that it would be interesting to receive an update in relation to the future of Safecall.

ACFO Baines stated that he would be happy to bring a report back to the HR Committee to update Members on areas for development.

ACFO Baines stated that Safecall was a confidential telephone service for employees to raise complaints and other problems. In external assessments, Stonewall regarded Safecall a very useful facility for staff and it was confirmed that staff had happily used it. Members were informed that Safecall was currently used as part of the Service's Exit Interview process and that it was not used to a large degree by the vast majority of the organisation as most issues were resolved within teams on a more informal level.

Upon consideration, it was:-

9. RESOLVED to: -

- i) note the contents of the report; and

- ii) receive further reports as appropriate

Equality Awards Update

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report providing Members with an update with regards to recent equality award nominations in respect of the Authority's equality and diversity practices.

Area Manager Robson stated that over the last four years the Authority had been successful in a number of awards and had been selected as finalists in relation to their approach to equality and diversity.

Members were advised that recently, the Authority was anonymously nominated for the National Diversity Awards 2013, and had also been shortlisted for entries submitted to the North East Equality Awards 2013.

Area Manager Robson reported that The National Diversity Awards launched in 2012 had attracted significant support from a wide range of organisations. The Awards were designed to showcase the efforts of those who had demonstrated an outstanding devotion to enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion within society.

Members were advised that the Authority had been nominated for the Diverse Company Award demonstrating that others recognised the excellent work undertaken to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion both in the work place and in society. The Award signified a company that employed a diverse workforce, was better able to understand the demographics of the marketplace it served and whose goals were to reassure and encourage people from the most deprived areas to further their careers.

Due to the overall number of nominations received the Authority was selected to give evidence to the judges. A nominee questionnaire was completed and submitted together with a range of supporting information.

Despite the Authority being shortlisted, the Authority did not win the award. However, as the only Fire and Rescue Authority to be shortlisted as part of the awards, the Authority was able to display their Certificate of Excellence which was being presented to all those who were shortlisted, as well as the National Diversity Awards logo.

Councillor Haley commented that for small groups to have won amongst such large organisations was very impressive. Area Manager Robson stated that the award was to bring smaller groups from a grassroots level in to the arena with larger organisations.

Moving on, Area Manager Robson stated that 2013 was a special year as The North East Equality Awards celebrated a 10th Anniversary. The Awards celebrated the success of past and present equality champions and showcased the excellent practices in equality and diversity happening in the North East of England.

Members were advised that the Authority had submitted two nominations for the 2013 North East Equality Awards and the Authority had been selected as finalists for both categories.

Namely, Organisations Supporting Disabled People into Employment and Groups Who Have Made a Difference. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority were announced the winners of both categories on 4th October 2013.

Councillor Mortimer congratulated the Authority on being shortlisted for the National Diversity Awards and for their success in winning the North East Equality Awards.

The Chair, on behalf on the Human Resources Committee congratulated the team for getting as far as they did in the National Diversity Awards and for their success in achieving the North East Equality Awards. It was particularly nice for the Authority to have received some national recognition for its hard work. The Chair requested that praise and congratulations be passed on to all those who had been involved.

Area Manager Robson confirmed that he would pass on the Committee's comments and praise. He agreed that it was indeed very rewarding that the work of the network groups was going to strength to strength.

Upon consideration, it was:-

10. RESOLVED to:-
 - i) note the contents; and
 - ii) receive further reports as appropriate

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

11. RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered likely to reveal the identity of an individual, or the disclosure of exempt information relating to any consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2 and 4).

(Signed) J. BELL,
Chairman.

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.