

Item 3 (ii)

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 10 October 2016 at 10.30am in the Fire and Rescue Headquarters, Barmston Mere, Sunderland

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Councillors Haley, Oliver, Pickard and Renton.

Part I

Announcements

The Chair welcomed Dennis Napier to his first meeting of the Committee in his new role as the Authority's Strategic Finance Manager.

ACFO Baines informed Members that today was World Mental Health Day and invited the Committee to view the displays in the reception area of the building.

ACFO Baines also reported that the Authority had recently received a Disability Confident Employer Award which replaced the Two Ticks scheme. The Chair was pleased to accept the award and would report this to the next meeting of the full Fire Authority. She took the opportunity to congratulate all who had been involved in the achievement of this award.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Stephenson, Turton and Wright.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

37. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 25 July 2016 Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Voluntary Severance Policy

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report presenting revisions to the Authority's Voluntary Severance policy.

ACFO Baines advised that the Committee had previously approved the Authority's HR plan in February 2016 and this plan managed human resources issues arising from planned staffing reductions. The Voluntary Severance policy was a supporting element of the plan and had originally been approved by Members on 3 February 2014.

The Voluntary Severance policy provided flexibility to the HR plan, supporting the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service in meeting the financial challenges, organisational reviews and associated staffing reductions. It was now felt to be an opportune time to review the policy and the revised policy was set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

ACFO Baines drew Members' attention to the significant updates to the policy highlighting that the Chief Officer's decision on voluntary severance would be final. The revised policy also provided clarity on the need for approval from the Chief Fire Officer and the Fire Authority where voluntary severance triggered the release of pension benefits under Voluntary Early Retirement.

Councillor Haley queried if it would be the Human Resources Committee that would ultimately consider such cases and ACFO Baines confirmed that the Fire Authority had delegated these matters to the Human Resources Committee.

Councillor Pickard referred to the implications of the overall cap on benefit payments and asked if there was a possibility that a severance package could exceed the limit. ACFO Baines advised that the Service was aware of the limit and this was why policies were designed to be broad so that they could still be used when Government policies changed. He stated that this could be added to the Voluntary Severance policy for clarification.

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

38. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the revised Voluntary Severance policy set out in Appendix 1 be approved;
- (ii) the changes to the policy be reflected in the Authority's Standing Orders; and

- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Independent Cultural Review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor submitted a joint report informing Members of the results of an independent cultural review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) which had been presented to the Essex Fire and Rescue Authority (ECFRA) in September 2015.

The Area Manager for Human Resources informed the Committee that following the consideration of serious matters within their service, the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service had requested an independent inquiry into the cause of serious incidents and agreed that this would be a cultural review exploring the historic and current culture within the organisation. The executive summary of the review was attached to the report and it was highlighted that there had been 35 key recommendations which were accepted in full by the Essex Fire and Rescue Authority.

Key findings from the review were highlighted as follows: -

- ECFRS had been beset with a number of serious incidents including suicides, allegations of bullying and intimidation and ongoing and protracted industrial disputes. The cumulative effects of these issues, added to the long term absence of the Chief Fire Officer had contributed to the paralysis of the Service.
- Culturally ECFRS was a failing organisation and from its leadership to the frontline, the service was in need of a radical overhaul to ensure it was held to account, became more adaptable to the needs of the twenty first century and ensured the safety and wellbeing of its employees.
- The organisational culture was toxic and there was pervasive bullying and intimidation which may place employees and the communities they serve at risk.
- Even in more senior, corporate positions aggressive and inappropriate behaviour is common place but it was worse in some fire stations.
- 'Old Hands' within the Service exerted a deeply malign influence over anyone who attempted to challenge existing attitudes.
- There was no sense of one team united behind a common goal and there was a 'them and us' sub culture of distrust at many different levels.

Action that had been taken by the ECFRA included the establishment of an External Advisory Panel (EAP) with a range of skills and backgrounds to be accountable to the Fire and Rescue Authority and to provide strategic advice to the organisation for the next 24 months. It was also recommended that the Service developed a concise narrative for change which was well understood and supported at every level of the organisation.

The Chief Fire Officer of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had considered the report in full and was confident that strong and positive leadership

was present within all levels of the Tyne and Wear Service and that it was fit for purpose, adaptable and able to deal with the challenges ahead in keeping with the Authority's core values. Several external reviews had commented on the culture and leadership of the Service such as the Operational Peer Challenge which took place in 2014 and the recent Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework peer review had confirmed Tyne and Wear as the first Service to retain the 'excellent' level of the Equality Framework. The Authority continued to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to equality for all and its positive culture which embraced equality, diversity, inclusion and continuous improvement for staff and the community it served.

ACFO Baines commented that it was sad to see an organisation go through what the Essex Fire Service had but it was pleasing that they had commissioned a report so that others could learn from their experience and reflect back on their own journey.

The Chair noted that the executive summary bore no resemblance to a fire and rescue service as it was known by Tyne and Wear Authority Members. She was concerned about how the Essex service would turn this around and pleased to see how far removed from this culture that Tyne and Wear already was.

Councillor Haley highlighted that the Essex Fire and Rescue Service was completely different to Tyne and Wear but there would be potential for negative press in the Fire sector. He suggested that the Service would need to have a statement ready to emphasise that Tyne and Wear was not in any way similar to Essex and to communicate that message if it was necessary.

ACFO Baines stated that the Authority prepared regularly for that sort of situation and that he believed that some of the Thomas Review emanated from the Essex Fire Service review. In a polarised scale of all organisations, Tyne and Wear was likely to see itself as an exemplar.

The Chief Fire Officer added that one of part of the fire service reform agenda was around diversity, equality and inclusion. It was important to heed warnings from Essex, the Authority had put a lot of time and effort into their approach but this did not mean that it could not continue to learn.

39. RESOLVED that:-

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

Employee Survey 2014 – 2016

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an overview of the cumulative results from the Employee Survey 2014-2016.

The Authority has conducted an employee survey on a biannual basis since 2004 and had used feedback from staff to improve a range of organisational approaches. Since 2014, the survey had been delivered in house using an online survey method in four phases over a two year period.

The 2014-2016 Employee Survey was sent to 951 staff and the overall response rate was 44% which was an increase when compared to surveys carried out by external companies in previous years.

The Area Manager for Human Resources drew Members' attention to the areas which showed a high level of satisfaction amongst staff such as understanding of what was expected in their job and feeling valued by their colleagues. Low levels of satisfaction were recorded in relation to the provision of a blame free culture and job security.

The Authority's Strategic Management Team were also undertaking listening events on a biannual basis and 36 events had taken place with 214 employees between January and September 2016. The outcomes from these events provided context to the survey results and had found the following: -

- 100% of participants felt that the SMT member encouraged staff to say what they think
- 97% felt that they were able to ask questions/raise issues without worrying about any comeback/retribution
- 94% asked a question/raised an issue and felt they gained an adequate response
- 100% felt that the SMT member listened to what they/their colleagues had to say
- 99% felt that the SMT member was interested in how they thought/felt about work

Staff would be updated on the findings of the survey in due course.

ACFO Baines noted that there were some pleasing points to note from the survey and some areas to reflect on. There had been some significant impacts on the service over the last period including industrial action from 2013, reductions in back office staff and recruitment freezes which could have influenced how staff viewed relationships with management and the Government. He also commented that the outcomes arising from the online survey could be quite different from those arising from a face to face conversation and some thought may be given to how the survey was conducted.

Councillor Renton asked about the communications plan for employees and ACFO Baines commented that there had been some real positivity from the consultation on the organisational review and the service was planning to increase the number of communication and listening events which took place. The Chief Fire Officer issued staff bulletins weekly and meetings were held with unions once a month.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that the most effective methods of communication needed to be identified. A lot of sessions were held for staff but feedback still

showed that staff did not feel that they heard management enough. He highlighted that the consultation on the organisational management review had yielded suggestions from staff which were then put forward to Members, demonstrating that staff views were listened to, however the low scoring areas of the survey would not be ignored.

Councillor Oliver referred to the figure of 72% of staff who felt that the service offered value for money which had reduced from 88% at the time of the last survey and asked for the views of senior officers on this. The Chief Fire Officer stated that he believed this came back to communication and that management talked to staff a lot about finances in a positive way. He would like to think that this view would improve and that staff would understand how money was best used to have the best effect for the community.

Councillor Oliver went on to ask about the opportunities that staff had to make suggestions and the Chief Fire Officer advised that, at a high level, there had been four open presentations on the IRMP since the last meeting of the Fire Authority, asking for the views of staff. Employees had been asked how the IRMP could make things better and challenged to come up with great ideas.

At a lower level, the Chief Fire Officer referred to the bottom up approach for procurement which was driven from within the organisation. The Committee were also informed that the actions arising from the survey would include revisiting how the service congratulated and rewarded staff.

Councillor Haley queried whether some views expressed about 'generic management' could include the Authority itself and that maybe employees felt that the Authority members were not connected to the staff. He asked whether Member engagement had been raised and whether it was communicated to the workforce.

ACFO Baines stated that this was something which was covered in listening sessions and his view was that comments were made about 'management' rather than focusing on the real issues and that sometimes there could be a romantic notion of the way things had been in the past. The regular 'Team Talk' which asked questions and requested feedback from the whole organisation, was one of the ways in which management were seeking to be more visible and receptive to staff comments.

The Human Resources Manager, Lorna Hodson advised that a pilot survey called 'People Gauge' was currently being undertaken which was a completely different type of survey to what had been used before. People Gauge used a process of dialogue and feedback and was a more intuitive way of gaining views. An action plan had been developed to address the negative areas highlighted by the survey and the pilot would continue.

Councillor Pickard commented that, given all the changes that the service had undergone, the results of the survey were positive. He referred to 'blame free culture' and felt that this would more appropriately be called a 'learning culture'. With regard to the statement around 'minimising bureaucracy', Councillor Pickard said that it

would be interesting to have examples of where staff thought this was not being achieved.

The Chair added that it was good to see that further detail was being sought under each statement and requested that further information be brought back to the Committee on Team Talk.

Having considered the report, it was: -

40. RESOLVED that: -

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

TWFRS: Equality Journey

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report updating Members on progress with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion within the Service from 2000 to date.

A number of reports had been published into relation to equality and diversity in Fire and Rescue Services across the UK, leading to national strategies and action plans and the key themes of these were set out in Appendix A to the report.

Appendix C to the report set out a detailed breakdown of the equality journey of the Authority and ACFO Baines highlighted some of the key points on the journey. Prior to the publication of the Thematic Review into Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service in 1999, the service had introduced positive action to increase diversity in the workplace. A Fairness at Work Committee had been established which evolved into the current Equality Committee and had undertaken significant work to drive forward the equality agenda.

It was highlighted that the uniform for the service had changed greatly over the years and currently there were 35 different sizes of tunics and over trousers issued including options for gender, maternity and religious practice. Leadership by the Authority and senior management had been essential to improve diversity within the service and the opening of Safetyworks!, the Phoenix Project and Princes Trust initiative in 2000 and 2001 had enabled the service to engage with diverse and vulnerable groups in society.

The Occupational Health Unit had been established in 1993 to offer support, guidance and provide health promotion. A Welfare Officer had joined the team in 2002 to positively promote mental health and provide trauma support. The Authority continued to evolve its approach to equality and diversity and had also continued to achieve Investors in People (IIP) Gold Standard which demonstrated a strong commitment to training and developing staff.

It had been a challenge to positively enhance diversity within the Service since 2010 due to the recruitment freeze and austerity measures being in place but through engaging agency staff, fixed term contracts and volunteers, the Service had ensured that diversity continued to enhance the workforce. The report also set out the journey of the Authority with regard to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. The index was a benchmarking tool used by employers to assess their achievements and progress on LGBT equality in the workplace. The Authority had moved from being ranked in 101st place in 2011 to 8th in 2014. In 2015, the Authority was awarded 37th place when Stonewall had revised their marking criteria. The Authority continued to work with Stonewall to develop its staff and organisational approach.

The journey of improvement was set to continue and the draft Organisational Strategy would streamline the strategic planning framework to support the implementation of the Organisation and Management Review. It would also provide a clear direction of travel for the Authority and Service to continue its journey of continuous improvement. A Leadership Bond had been developed which would sit between the job description and values of the organisation and be supported through the Leadership Development Programme which was being rolled out to approximately 400 staff and managers across the Service.

Support for existing staff network groups would be further developed whilst exploring the opportunities for other groups. In addition to staff networks, the number and diversity of volunteers had increased and this helped to grow the Service's knowledge and provide a better quality of service to communities.

Following the implementation of the organisational restructure, the recruitment freeze would be paused as required and this would provide opportunities to continue to diversify the workforce. As the workforce continued to age, the Health and Wellbeing agenda would become vital to future success both with staff and the wider community.

Councillor Haley welcomed the full and comprehensive report and noted that one of the biggest challenges was health and wellbeing and the increased cost of adult social care. Local authorities were working well together on this agenda and the input of the fire service would be also be vital.

ACFO Baines advised that the Service was building wellbeing into its home safety checks for vulnerable people and was also liaising with carers in these situations. Efforts were being made to secure representation on all local health and wellbeing boards and the Service was also on a journey with regard to information sharing protocols.

Councillor Haley referred to the ageing workforce and operational fitness and queried if any thought had been given to how the older workforce could carry out more of a community support than operational role. ACFO Baines stated that great consideration had been given to this, however the organisational management review had led to non-operational posts being further compressed. Community roles were often carried out by staff who were injured and a lot of the older firefighters were still operationally fit.

It was asked if Impeller would have a role in this and ACFO Baines confirmed that the company did employ former firefighters. The service worked to get firefighters back to operational fitness and there was a low incidence of staff leaving due to capability. The Chief Fire Officer stated that work was being done to look at the Fire Service as a health asset and more information would be provided to Members at the training session following the Authority meeting on 17 October 2016.

Having considered the report it was: -

41. RESOLVED that: -

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

Organisational Development Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report presenting the draft Organisational Development Strategy.

The Organisational Development Strategy was intended to streamline the Authority's strategic planning framework in support of the Strategic Community Safety Plan (SCSP) and to appropriately support the new organisational structure, remove duplication, encourage leadership and innovation, promote collaborate working, striving for continuous improvement and further embedding equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Organisational Development Strategy was one of the three key strategies central to the Strategic Planning Framework together with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Community Safety strategies. The Strategic Community Safety Plan provided the direction of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and its people and the draft Organisational Development Strategy would provide the context of how the service was designed and how the leadership of employees would transfer this into action.

A number of strategies would be consolidated within the Organisational Development Strategy including the Human Resources Strategy, Equality Strategy and the Workforce Development Strategy. The full Organisational Development Strategy was attached as an appendix to the report and would set the Service on the right trajectory moving forward. Members would receive further detail at the training session on 17 October 2016.

Councillor Pickard highlighted that the encouragement of leadership and innovation was referenced in the strategy but there was no mention of enabling staff to make decisions.

ACFO Baines stated that there was a big push in terms of responsibility including leadership development programmes and there were a range of policies and

operational procedures which picked this up. District plans were able to be tailored to what staff wanted to be able to do. The proposed strategy was at a high level and it was intended for departmental heads to provide leadership based upon it.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that this was intended to be a simple strategic framework which would enable staff to have a continuous cycle of improvement and would lead to improvements for teams and the service.

42. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the content of the report be noted;
- (ii) the Organisational Development Strategy be endorsed; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

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

At the instance of the Chairman it was: -

43. 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.