

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards and Human Resources Committee
held on Tuesday, 15 March 2016, at 2.00 pm in the
Oak Room at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Mrs Barrow, Mellings, Price, Reynolds and Turley

Officers

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Area Manager Prevention Protection Response, Corporate Support Manager, Human Resources Manager, Group Commander and Development Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Kiernan, the Fire Authority's Independent Person Mr Humphries and the Service's Equality and Diversity Officer.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair reminded Members that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter, in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate on that matter.

No Disclosable Pecuniary Interests were declared.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 October 2015.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Price and

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 October 2015, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

The Chair commented that, given the population of the area covered by Fire Authority, it was interesting that the Committee, and indeed other committees and the Fire Authority itself, had not received any public questions at meetings for some considerable time. He asked whether there was some way, in which the public could be made aware of the process. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that officers could look into the issue. There was now, however, a wide variety of social media platforms, which the public used regularly to raise issues and enter into dialogue with the Service.

5 Committee Constitution and Training Needs

This report brought the constitution of the Standards and Human Resources Committee to its Members for review. The report also asked Members to consider whether there was any training or development, which should be undertaken by the Committee in order to fulfil its role.

The Committee discussed training needs and, in particular, whether Code of Conduct should be provided, as it was some time since any had been arranged specifically for Fire Authority Members. It was noted that Shropshire Council was currently holding a number of sessions on the Code and that Telford & Wrekin Council had provided training for its Members the previous year. The Corporate Support Manager added that most Fire Authority Members would have received training through the constituent authorities and officers wished to avoid any duplication. She would, however, raise the matter with the Clerk and Monitoring Officer. The Chair suggested that officers ascertain what training in the Code Fire Authority Members had attended recently to see whether there was any training need.

Councillor Mellings asked that a briefing session be provided on the establishment scheme and human resource policies, as considering and monitoring these formed part of the Committee's terms of reference. Such a session would provide an understanding of the wider framework. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer undertook to add these to the Member Development Programme.

Referring to the Appeals Panel, Councillor Mrs Barrow asked whether it would be worth providing training for all Fire Authority Members, particularly as there would be elections the following year, which could result in changes to Authority membership. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that officers could provide a generic session but anything specific would be difficult. As each case raised different, complex issues, it was the practice to give topic-specific training immediately before appeals hearings. The disciplinary, grievance and independent disputes resolution procedures could, however, form part of a generic session. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer added that this could perhaps be included in the programme for the Member Conference.

Turning to the section on 'Complaints relating to Members' in the terms of reference of the Appeals Panel, the Chair asked about the removal of a non-aligned Member from membership of committees and sub-committees (point 2 under sanctions in respect of a breach of the Code of Conduct). He assumed that 'non-aligned' meant an independent Member and queried why they should be treated differently from other Members, aligned to a party. The Corporate Support Manager replied that she would take the matter up with the Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

It was proposed by Councillor Reynolds, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that:

- a) No changes to the terms of reference of the Committee be recommended to the Fire Authority; and
- b) Officers provide the training and development for Members, as outlined above.

Committee Clerk's Note

Since the meeting took place the Monitoring Officer has confirmed that a non-aligned Member is one, who is not aligned to any particular party. In such cases there is no Political Group Leader, to whom recommendations could be made regarding membership of committees and sub-committees. It would, therefore, be necessary for the Fire Authority to consider the recommendations.

6 Committee Work Plan 2016/17

This report reviewed progress against the 2015/16 Work Plan for the Standards and Human Resources Committee and put forward a 2016/17 Work Plan for the Committee's consideration and approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Turley, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow and

Resolved that the Committee approve the 2016/17 Work Plan without amendment.

7 Member Development

This report updated the Committee on Member development activity over the past year and proposed training and development activity for the year April 2016 to March 2017.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer highlighted that, in 2025/16, only 7 out of 17 Members had completed and returned the training needs analysis form. Recognising the need to improve the response rate, officers were considering a more interactive process. Councillor Mellings asked whether any issues had arisen from the responses received. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer replied that she could not recall anything specific but she would provide this information at a later date. When drawing up the programme for the Member Conference, officers did, however, take the responses into account and attempted to cover the greatest need. She confirmed that the topics discussed at item 5 would now be included in the Member Development Programme for the coming year.

Councillor Mellings observed that, although the Audit and Performance Management Committee had been quite active with training, the Strategy and Resources Committee had not.

Subject to the above, it was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow and

Resolved that the Committee note the backward-looking report and agree the proposed training and development activity for the year April 2016 to March 2017.

8 Review of Role Descriptions and Skills and Competencies

The Corporate Support Manager advised that, in accordance with the Committee's Work Plan, officers had carried out a review of the Role Descriptions of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee; and Role Description and Skills and Competencies of the Independent Person.

As officers did not recommend any amendments, only a paragraph on the agenda and a web link to the documents had been provided, rather than a report with appendices. The Committee confirmed that it was happy with this 'light-touch' approach and that it did not propose any amendments.

Resolved that the Committee note the officer review of role descriptions and skills and competencies.

9 Review of Protocols

The Corporate Support Manager advised that officers had carried out a review of the Protocols on Member / Officer Relations and Gifts and Hospitality.

The Committee noted that officers did not recommend any amendments to these documents. No amendments were proposed by Members.

Resolved that Committee note the officer review of Protocols on Member / Officer Relations and Gifts and Hospitality.

10 Code of Conduct Complaints

The Committee noted that, whilst not a legal requirement, it was good practice for Members to receive regular updates on Code of Conduct complaints, even if there had been none. The Corporate Support Manager reported that, during the period 2015/16, the Fire Authority had received no complaints that any of its Members had breached its Code of Conduct. She added that the Authority had not received any such complaints since the ethical framework had first been introduced in 2002.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal report of the Corporate Support Manager.

11 People Strategy 2016 to 2020

The Committee noted that officers had developed a new People Strategy to direct the focus of the Service's resources in the Human Resources and Development; Training and Assurance; and Service Development Teams. The final draft of the Strategy was currently out for consultation with the Management Team.

Before giving her presentation the Assistant Chief Fire Officer circulated the draft Strategy, a copy of this and a copy of the presentation slides are attached to the signed minutes.

Following the presentation, a discussion took place regarding the 43 actions within the Strategy. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that these were to be achieved during the period 2016 to 2020, not in one year.

In relation to mental health issues the Committee noted the procedures followed and, specifically, how the Service ensured employee confidentiality.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Reynolds and

Resolved that the Committee endorse the People Strategy 2016 to 2020.

12 Employee Engagement Survey

The Chair welcomed Development Officer Donna Trowsdale to her first meeting of the Committee since joining the Service.

The Development Officer then gave a presentation on the Employee Engagement Survey. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to the signed minutes. She explained why the Service was conducting the survey at that time, gave the background to the company commissioned to carry it out and outlined the process to be followed. She also emphasised that employees' responses would be anonymous. It was noted that the unions had endorsed the Survey and that they and managers would be actively encouraging employees to complete it.

A discussion took place as to whether a member of the Committee should be present, as an observer, at the meeting in May, at which the results would be presented to senior management. The Chair asked the Assistant Chief Fire Officer to consider this outside the meeting and respond to the Committee in due course. In any event, the Committee agreed that the survey questions, analysis of the responses and resulting action plan should be presented to the Committee at its next meeting in October.

It was noted that the return rate for the last survey had been 69%, which was excellent. As the response rate for this survey would be monitored continuously, it would be possible to take appropriate action to increase returns, if necessary. Furthermore, Retained Duty System employees would be paid for 30 minutes of their time to complete the survey. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer hoped, therefore, that the return rate this time would be even higher than previously.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Reynolds and

Resolved that the presentation on the Employee Engagement Survey be noted.

13 Corporate Health – Recruitment

This report informed Members of the Senior Management Team's intention to recruit in the context of previous corporate health discussions.

The Area Manager reported that only three of the ten secondees from Hereford and Worcester had taken up the offer of permanent employment and he explained the reasons why. As there were now three, vacant establishment posts, the Service had embarked on a recruitment process for transfers in from around the Country.

Councillor Mellings asked how much overtime there had been and its cost. He also wished to know what the retirement profile was for the next three years. Although the Area Manager was not able to provide a breakdown of overtime in hours, he reported that the annual overtime budget was £150,000. This was not, however, just for staffing deficiencies. In terms of retirements, it was not possible to provide an exact figure but, based on age and length of service, there would be a minimum of 22 between now and 2020.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

14 Retained Duty System Working Group

This report provided an understanding of the current work streams targeted by members of the Retained Duty System Working Group, which had been established in June 2015.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer credited Group Commander Mark Donnelly for the leadership he had shown in bringing the Working Group together. It had been an excellent piece of engagement and the Group had met all expectations. Demonstrating trust and interest in Retained Duty System employees was extremely important, as the Service was so reliant upon them. In light of this he wished to continue to bring reports about the Group to the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The Chair advised that Group Commander Mark Donnelly would be retiring in May. He thanked him for all of his work throughout his years with the Service and for his reports to committees. He hoped that he would not lose contact with the Service and wished him a happy retirement.

15 Progress on Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan

This report updated Members on progress on the main actions identified in the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan from March 2015 to February 2016.

The Human Resources (HR) Manager reported that considerable work had been done and progress made in respect of the Action Plan, for which credit was due to the Equality and Diversity Team.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

16 Equality Monitoring Statistics

This report provided an overview of the Service's Equality Monitoring Statistics.

Councillor Price commented on the fact that representation of black and other minority ethnic groups in the Service did not seem to have improved, despite all of the activities undertaken to address the issue. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer replied that recruitment of Retained Duty System employees was restricted to those living within a 5-minute journey from their retained station. Most people of minority ethnic groups lived in the Telford and Wellington areas, which made it difficult to resolve the problem.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

17 Reasonable Adjustments Update

This report provided Members with an overview of the reasonable adjustments made to support employees in their work roles.

The HR Manager highlighted the fact that to date the cost per employee of implementing reasonable adjustments had been only £157.

Councillor Price was pleased with the update and felt that this work was extremely cost-effective. Referring to dyslexia, he asked how this Service compared to other organisations in terms of the number of dyslexic employees. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that in the general population the figure was 10%, whereas in the Fire and Rescue Service as a whole it was 15 to 16%. She explained that, as firefighting was a practical career, it tended to attract a disproportionate number of dyslexic employees. The higher figure might also be attributed to the fact that this Service actively encouraged dyslexic employees to come forward, so that they could be provided with support to carry out their roles effectively.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The Chair advised that HR Manager Ingrid Jones would be retiring at the end of March. He thanked her for her work over the years with the Service and for her reports to the Committee. He hoped that she would keep in touch and wished her a happy retirement.

The meeting closed at 3.35 p.m.

Chair.....

Date.....