

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards and Human Resources Committee
held on Tuesday, 15 May 2018, at 2.00 pm
in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Hosken, Murray, and Mellings

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Dave Myers	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lisa Vickers	Human Resources Manager (Contracts)	HMRC
Muhammad Younis	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer	EDIO
Zoe Gittins	Human Resources Officer	HRO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Dee and Jones. Councillor Milner did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 16 November 2017, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Pension Board Minutes

The DCFO explained that the Pension Board had been in place since 2015 but a recent review of Pension Board activity showed that there was no demonstrable link between it and the Fire Authority.

The minutes of the Pension Board evidence the activities it undertakes to ensure correct administration of pensions and that the administration is conducted in an appropriate manner. It also gives the Standards and Human Resources Committee the opportunity to request the Pension Board to carry out specific tasks to provide assurance regarding pension administration.

The Committee noted that the minutes at 5a have been agreed by the Pension Board but those at item 5b have not yet been ratified.

Resolved that the Committee note the minutes of the Pension Board meetings held on 16 June 2017 and 24 April 2018.

6 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.

Members suggested that a training session on the function of the Pension Board would be useful for Committee members. It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Murray and agreed by the Committee that an additional recommendation be included to take into account future changes in governance and the scheduling of Member training.

In response to a query as to whether the change in governance would have any effect on pensions, the CFO explained that the Fire Authority will be replaced with the Shropshire and Telford Fire Commissioner Authority and the mechanisms for transfer are being developed at present. The Police and Crime Commissioner will become the owner of the Pension Schemes and there should be no impact on pensions as a result.

Members also commented that a suitable alternative for the Appeals Hearings process would need to be considered. The CFO advised that officers are reviewing policies and procedures with any forthcoming transfer in mind.

Resolved that:

- a) Having reviewed the constitution of the Standards and Human Resources Committee, it does not recommend any changes to the Fire Authority;
- b) There are no training and development needs identified at present; and
- c) Appropriate training should be delivered to Members as necessary.

7 Committee Work Plan 2018/19

This report reviewed progress against the 2017/18 Work Plan for the Standards and Human Resources Committee and put forward a 2018/19 Work Plan for the Committee's consideration and approval.

Resolved that the Committee approve the 2018/19 Work Plan without amendment.

8 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 ESO reported that, during the period 2017/18, the Fire Authority had received no complaints that any of its Members had breached its Code of Conduct

Resolved that the Committee note the update regarding Code of Conduct complaints.

9 Wholetime Recruitment

This report provided the Committee with an update on the recent recruitment programme for wholetime firefighters.

The HRO presented this report and highlighted that there had been a significant percentage loss of female candidates at the Job Related Tests (JRT) stage of the process. This was possibly due to the way that the taster sessions were run for this recruitment process. The taster sessions had a different format for the 2016 process, which possibly prepared the candidates better for the JRTs. The HRO also reported that using the Fire Service College for the administration of the online process worked well and reduced the burden on the Human Resources Department. The targeted recruitment area also had a positive impact with only two of the successful candidates being from outside Shropshire. Two existing Retained Duty System employees were also successful in gaining wholetime roles.

Members queried how mock physical tests would help candidates. The HRO explained that mock tests give candidates a better understanding of what is physically required to complete the tests and enables them to identify areas for improvement. The HMRC explained that this is the first time that mock tests have not been done at the taster days. This was due to the time intensive nature of the recruitment process on this occasion. The HHRA further explained that whilst numbers of female candidates have increased, more resources are needed to support them through the recruitment process. The JRTs require technique as well as physicality to pass.

Members asked for clarification of the geographical area that was targeted. The CFO replied that the area covered Shropshire, West Midland, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Wrexham and Powys.

With regard to BME recruitment, the Committee expressed the view that the Service should not be unduly worried if it is not getting the numbers of applications that it feels it should be. The Police and the judiciary system are in a similar situation and Members felt that it would take time for numbers of BME applicants to increase.

The CFO agreed with the comments from Members regarding this and stated that the Service need to try different techniques such as attraction campaigns and marketing solutions to address the issue. This will require investment but should broaden knowledge about the fire service and improve its attractiveness to potential employees.

The Committee thanked officers for the feedback and statistics included in the report and queried if the quality of the final 40 interview candidates met expectations and the cost of running the process. In response to the first question, the HRO commented that she believed that there had been a good quality of candidate. The HHRA further commented that there had been some feedback given to candidates with regard to how they had presented and conducted themselves at interview. In relation to the cost of running the process, the HRO explained that the cost of the Fire Service College setting up the system and providing support during the process had been approximately £13,500. This cost does not however include, for example officer time, which is difficult to quantify financially.

Members queried if the Service used Job Centres for recruitment as these are often the first point of contact for people seeking employment. The HMRC responded that many people do apply on-line and therefore the Service had tended to stick to this recruitment method. The CFO commented that there is something in what the Member had said as it may provide an opportunity to improve diversity as a whole.

In relation to table at paragraph 6 of the report that showed the split between male and female employees, Members commented that there appeared be difficulty in getting females into firefighter roles. The Service seems to receive many applications but these are not converted into employment. Members queried if the proposed recommendations for JRTs etc. will improve the conversion rate. The CFO responded that it is hoped that they will and clarified that previously the Service would have discarded applicants who failed at the JRT stage. However, this time of limited number of those applicants, who were successful at the online assessments will be invited back to undertake a further recruitment campaign from the JRT stage in early 2019.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Having considered the contents of the report;
- b) Agree the recommendations for the next steps, as set out in section 8 of the report.

10 People Strategy Annual Report

This report provided an update on the actions taken against all elements of the People Strategy.

The HHRA presented this report and explained that the People Strategy is reviewed on a six monthly basis with a mid-year exception report on progress being taken to the Service Management Team (SMT). The Strategy has been given RAG status to aid review.

The HHRA also advised the item on page 2 of the Strategy relating to organisational training needs analysis has been actioned so this will now change from a red to amber status. The HMRC reported that she has taken on the work related to the Individual Performance and Development Review process. The Service is looking to implement these changes by January 2019.

The HHRA advised that in relation to the item on page 10 of the Strategy relating to creating a benefits offering, the HHRA and the HMRC have met to discuss a possible health care cash plan. This was taken to SMT in April for consideration but the decision regarding it has been pushed back to allow possible collaborative work with the Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to be investigated.

In response to a question from Members, the HMRC clarified that Beneden are a not for profit organisation who run health cash plans for employees. The Service needs to assess if there are any possible occupational health savings that could be made in relation to this.

With regard to the first item on page 1 of the Strategy, Members queried if the differences between the levels of the Strategic Leadership Programme were linked to levels of management. The CFO explained that the Strategic Leadership Programme is an academic managerial qualification with Level 7 qualifications, which lead to a Masters qualification, being undertaken by senior middle management. This qualification is not compulsory nationally but it is internally as it is linked to development and competent rates of pay. The HHRA clarified that the Strategic Leadership Programme is not currently linked to Green Book terms and conditions.

Members commented that they liked the RAG system as it made the report easier to understand.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Note the work in progress to address any areas of shortfall

11 Executive Officer Contract Amendments

This report provided the Committee with information regarding the Brigade Manager leave allowance and the Gold Book vehicle allowances. Changes are small points of technicality in relation to leave and public holiday allowances. Gold Book vehicle allowances agreed remove reference to lease cars.

Resolved that the Committee note the content of the report with regard to Brigade Manager leave allowance and Gold Book vehicle allowances.

12 Reasonable Adjustments Update

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

Members commented that the proportion of dyslexic employees within the Service is higher than the proportion within the general population. The CFO commented that there are identified benefits from employing people with dyslexia such as enhanced problem solving and decision making skills.

The EDIO explained that the Service is no longer required to meet a disability quota but it is required to make reasonable adjustments to support employees. This Service is especially pro-active in supporting employees with dyslexia.

The CFO explained that there are little marginal gains that add up to creating a dyslexic friendly work environment, for example changing the colour of paper for printing to cream.

Members identified from the report that there appeared to have been an increase in reasonable adjustment spending two to three years ago and asked if this was likely to be repeated in future. The HMRC explained that there may increases in the future dependent but it is dependent on what adjustments are required, for example specific types of furniture.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....