

**Non-Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee
held on Thursday, 29 September 2011 at 2.00 pm
at Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Mrs Blundell, Kiernan, Murray, Picken and Price

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources), Human Resources Manager, Equality and Diversity Officer and Executive Support Officer

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan and seconded by Councillor Picken:

That Councillor Adams be elected Chair of the Human Resources Committee to hold office for the ensuing year.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Adams was duly elected Chair.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow and seconded by Councillor Kiernan:

That Councillor Price be appointed Vice-Chair of the Human Resources Committee to hold office for the ensuing year.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Price was duly elected Vice-Chair.

3 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence had been received.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 April 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 April 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

6 Public Questions

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

7 Human Resources Committee Constitution and Training

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members and requested them to consider any training or development to be undertaken by the Committee to fulfil its role.

Councillor Mrs Barrow suggested training on pensions. Councillor Mrs Blundell asked for timely, induction training for new Members to provide an overview of the Authority and the national picture. Councillor Mrs Blundell also suggested a session on The Equality Act 2010, with accompanying slides sourced from Telford & Wrekin Council.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) undertook the provision of training on technical aspects of the fire service. She reminded Members that a briefing on The Equality Act 2010 had taken place on 4 November 2010.

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

Resolved that the Committee be provided with training on fire service pensions' provision and timely, induction training, where applicable

8 Member Development

The Committee was asked to consider the proposals for future elected Member development:

a) Citizen champion / non executive director

Councillor Mrs Barrow expressed concerns that duplication may occur between Councils' Localism Bill training and Fire Authority Member development. The ACFO assured her that Authority Member development would either enhance knowledge in some areas or be just from the fire service perspective.

Councillor Adams enquired what the distinction was between the two roles. The ACFO acknowledged that the citizen champion was an evolving position. She likened the non-executive director role with that of a board member in private business, with responsibility for scrutiny and governance. Councillor Adams then asked where non-executive directors would sit; the ACFO replied that there would be no change to the current structure and that all Members would be approached.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Picken, and

Resolved that Members be invited to a facilitated development session, focusing on the role of the citizen champion and non-executive director, as set out above

b) Further development plan

The ACFO assured Members that this would be funded out of existing budgets and that the Service was not looking to incur any additional costs.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Picken, and

Resolved that Ashridge Business School be approached to produce an outline method for defining and delivering relevant development for Members, reflecting the changing political environment and commencing in April 2012 for delivery in the financial year 2012/13

c) Member development questionnaire

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Picken, and

Resolved that on receipt of b) above, the existing Member development questionnaire be refreshed to reflect current local technical need, and the overarching political and managerial leadership competencies, as defined by Ashridge in conjunction with Local Government Improvement and Development

Member training sessions have been planned through to February 2012, prior to Authority meetings, with the exception of 12 October 2011, where the previously scheduled Authority meeting has been replaced by an operational overview training session.

d) Revision of training plan

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Picken, and

Resolved that the current training plan is revised, and then re-issued to all Members of the Authority

9 Amended Internal Disputes Resolution

The purpose of this paper was to recommend an amendment to Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Procedures (IDRP), following the consolidation of the Appeals Committee into the Human Resources Committee in July 2011. This amendment remains in line with the requirements of The Pension Act 1995, and subsequent amendments, and in accordance with the recommendations contained within Fire Service Pensions Scheme Circular 1/2009.

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

Resolved that the Committee agree the amended procedure at Stage 2, Internal Dispute Resolution

10 Internal Review of Human Resources Services

This report informed the Committee of the high level findings of a recent internal review of the HR function in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The ACFO reported that it was found that the HR function to employee ratio was below the industry recommended levels and was a not dissimilar picture to Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. It had been identified that some work sat better in other departments and this had been relocated. The lack of a satisfactory HR Management Information System had been recognised and was being looked at under the ICT review.

Councillor Mrs Blundell queried access to Service procedures. The ACFO cited Brigade Orders, which are available to staff through the Intranet and to a wider audience on the Service's website. The ACFO acknowledged that some HR Orders were overdue for review, largely as a result of the HR team's focus on case work and resulting managerial support requirements.

Councillor Adams asked what the level of investment was likely to be in an upgraded HR Management Information System and if there existed any plans to roll this out. The ACFO replied that the type of system to reduce transactional work and allow employees self-service access would come at a cost. However, funds had been set aside to upgrade the Service's ICT and the benefits to the organisation of an HR System upgrade would be looked at in due course.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

11 New Public Sector Equality Duties

This report informed the Human Resources Committee of the requirements placed on the public sector under Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010. S149 replaced similar, separate public sector equality duties relating to race, gender and disability discrimination, and extends coverage of the duty to the other protected characteristics of age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.

The Equality and Diversity Officer (EDO) highlighted the requirements to publish an annual review and additional nine reporting areas for organisations of the Service's size. Such detailed reporting would be greatly facilitated by an upgraded HR Management Information System.

It will not be possible to move this forward until detailed guidance is available from Government.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

12 Response to the Consultation on the 'Red Tape Challenge'

This report provided elected Members with the response presented to the Government, on behalf of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, with regard to the consultation on equalities and the Government challenge to cut bureaucracy.

The response to Government supports the current situation, as The Equality Act is more outcome focused than process driven and is, therefore, less burdensome than previous legislation.

Councillor Adams enquired whether anyone is not protected under The Act. The EDO clarified that everyone is protected in some way against discriminatory or detrimental treatment.

Councillor Adams wished to know how The Act applies, when recruiting from ethnic minorities. The EDO replied that the Government sets targets to be achieved rather than quotas to be filled. The Service is revisiting its recruitment process to ensure a lack of discrimination and to look for opportunities to take positive action. The Human Resources Manager emphasised that appointment would continue to be on merit.

In answer to Councillor Adams concerns regarding the treatment of data, the EDO assured him that the Service was mindful of the possibility of identifying an individual and would avoid drilling down too far and would, if necessary, group roles together.

Councillor Picken expressed concerns that those suffering from mental health problems had previously been discriminated against in the workplace and asked whether The Act addressed this. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that employment legislation has removed the requirement for an applicant to state their medical history. The Service is signed up to 'Positive about Disability' and any candidate, with a disability, who met the required criteria for a vacancy would be interviewed.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

13 Annual Report on the Work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group

This report provided the Committee with a summary of the work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group from September 2010 to August 2011.

The Committee was especially interested in plans to hold a Holocaust Memorial Day event in partnership with Shropshire Council and Shropshire Action Against Racism.

Councillor Price asked that the dyslexia awareness and gypsy and traveller cultural awareness training be shared with Members.

In response to a question from the Chair, the EDO stated that the Service's Vulnerable Persons Officers were active in rural areas, in support of station crews' community fire safety work. Councillor Mrs Barrow had concerns that changes to Retained Duty System pay meant that more remote locations could be overlooked. The ACFO acknowledged the advantage of properties closer to fire stations. However, more remote locations were being focused on under a fire cover review with the realigning of Retained Support Officers to keep appliances on the run and the use of those on modified duties or advocate staff to deliver targeted fire safety advice.

The ACFO also addressed Members' concerns about high risk, remote properties, such as hostels, and those with restricted access for pumps. The ACFO advised them that pumps can get to most places, and there were four-wheel drive vehicles to carry hose, where this was a problem. There is active risk monitoring, with crews having access to operational intelligence regarding the high-risk properties in their station area. This acts as mitigation against the impact of restricted access.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

14 Shropshire Partnership Equalities Forum Progress during 2010 – 11

This report informed the Committee of the progress of the Shropshire Equality and Diversity Forum, as requested by the Fire Authority.

The Shropshire College of Arts and Technology has now run the Forum, in place of Shropshire Council, since 1 April 2011 and has succeeded in increasing the Forum's membership. The focus for this year is to address 'Hate Crime.' To maximise the diversity of projects supported, a cap of £300 per project has been initiated.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked who attends events from the Service. The EDO advised that it was either the on-duty Watch from the relevant station, the Outreach Vehicle or herself.

Councillor Adams requested to see what Service information was going into the Forum and what was being received to raise awareness of risk to determine the effectiveness of the Service's involvement.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

15 Rights and Fairness Telford Progress Report (formerly Telford Race, Equality and Diversity Partnership)

This report informed the Committee of the progress of Rights and Fairness Telford, as requested by the Authority, in light of its £5k contribution for the year 2010/11 and Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the provision of research activities in the Telford and Wrekin area.

The EDO informed the Committee that the SLA work is ongoing.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

16 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to The Act, by virtue of paragraphs 1 and 2

17 Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 April 2011.

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

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 April 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

The meeting closed at 3.12 pm and was followed by an Appeals Hearing at 3.30 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....