

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards and Human Resources Committee
held on Tuesday, 8 April 2014 at 2.00 pm
in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Mrs Bould, Mellings and Price

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Corporate Services, Human Resources Manager, Corporate Support Manager (for items 1 – 13), Equality and Diversity Officer (for items 16 – 19), Fire Crime Officer (for item 19) and Executive Support Officer

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Price and seconded by Councillor Mellings

That Councillor Adams be elected Chair of the Standards and Human Resources Committee to hold office until the next Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

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

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Price

That Councillor Mrs Bould be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards and Human Resources Committee to hold office until the next Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Mrs Bould was duly appointed Chair.

The Chair congratulated Councillor Mrs Bould on her appointment.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Kiernan.

4 Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

No Disclosable Pecuniary Interests were declared.

5 Minutes

Members were asked to agree the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 4 September 2013, and that they be signed as a correct record.

The Corporate Support Manager advised that she had been in contact with Councillors Bennett, Carter and Dr Jones, who had attended that meeting of the Standards Committee and who had confirmed in writing that the minutes were a correct record of the meeting.

It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 4 September 2013, be signed as a correct record

Members were asked to agree the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013, and that they be signed as a correct record.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Adams, and

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013, be agreed and signed as a correct record

6 Public Questions

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

7 Committee Constitution and Training Needs

This report brought the constitution of the merged 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.

Councillor Price was supportive of training prior to meetings, as had been undertaken previously. He suggested refresher training on Standards. The Corporate Support Manager replied that Standards for England had been abolished and the current framework was less onerous and less formal. Breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct could now be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer. A training package could be compiled by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy for inclusion in the proposed Member Conference Day (see item 10).

Councillor Adams referred to the Standards constitution and paragraph three "*To assist Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct*". He advised that he had recently become aware of a list of phrases in everyday language that should be avoided due to their potential to cause offence because of their origins. Members concurred that knowledge of these would be helpful. The Corporate Support Manager undertook to obtain a copy of this phrase list.

Councillor Adams queried the source of the five possible sanctions that could be made against Members in breach of the Code of Conduct. The Corporate Support Manager advised that these sanctions were prescribed in legislation, if not the exact wording. She commented that the sanctions were less substantial than previously.

Councillor Adams was keen to ensure that a Member would be notified in a timely fashion of a complaint against them. The Corporate Support Manager assured him that a Member would be notified without delay of a complaint, once it had been determined by the Monitoring Officer, in discussion with the Independent Person, that an investigation was required.

In the interests of further development, the Human Resources Manager notified Members of the opportunity to attend a mock employment tribunal on 15 May 2014 at West Bromwich Town Hall. Officers would also have the opportunity to attend.

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

Resolved that the Committee, having reviewed the constitution of the merged Standards and Human Resources Committee,

- a) Had no recommendations for the Fire Authority regarding required changes to the constitution, and
- b) Agree that any training or development, which should be undertaken by the Committee in order to fulfil its role, would be addressed at a later date

8 Role Descriptions and Skills and Competencies

This report asked the Committee to consider and agree the Role Descriptions for its Chair and Vice-Chair and the Role Description and Skills and Competencies for the Fire Authority's Independent Person, in order for the Committee to make recommendations to the Fire Authority regarding any amendments required.

Councillor Adams queried the requirement for the Chair to sit on the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel, given that he had not been included when the Panel recently convened. The Corporate Support Manager advised that this was a requirement of long standing and the Committee were in agreement that this remain.

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

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Agree the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards and Human Resources Committee, following the merger of the two Committees, and
- b) Recommend to the Fire Authority that no changes were required to the Role Description and Skills and Competencies for the Fire Authority's Independent Person

9 Committee Work Plan 2014/15

This report reviewed progress against the 2013/14 Work Plans for both the Standards and Human Resources Committees and put forward a 2014/15 Work Plan for the merged Committee for consideration and approval by Members.

Officers proposed to conduct an annual review of certain documents as normal and suggested that these documents would be brought before the Committee only if material changes were proposed. Councillor Adams asked that reference was made to any review by officers in subsequent reports. The Corporate Support Manager assured him that this was the intention.

Councillor Adams requested that in addition to the draft Work Plan, a report on the implications of the Wholetime Recruitment Freeze be brought to the Committee's October meeting. He expressed concerns about a resultant imbalance in the age profile.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the issue was more around skills and development than age. New recruits were not necessarily of a very young age. Her concerns were that, with no new joiners since 2010, watches were not training new people and, therefore, not repeating fundamental skills. In addition, Crew Manager promotions were coming from the same pool of candidates.

Councillor Price asked about the current situation and when the Service might want to recruit. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that six secondees from Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service would join the Service in May 2014 for 12 months, with the possibility of more in December. This initiative would both help the Service and support Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, which was looking to shed 50 Wholetime posts by 2018.

It was difficult to ascertain future personnel requirements, given that the Service was looking to make wholetime post reductions by April 2018 and was currently running ahead of the retirement profile. There were internal discussions concerning the acceptance of transferees in the short term. However, there were diversity issues, which were not addressed with transferees. A recruitment campaign might be necessary, if more wholetime personnel were required but this would need to be cost effective.

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

Resolved that Members agree the proposed 2014/15 Work Plan with the addition of a report on the Wholetime Recruitment Freeze, reasons and implications, to the October 2014 Committee meeting

10 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 2014 to March 2015.

Provision of an update on Fire Pensions had not been possible due to ongoing amendments to the Pension Schemes and to changes in the Pensions Department at Shropshire Council. Councillor Price praised previous pensions training provided by Staffordshire Council. Councillor Adams suggested that this training be deferred until the situation stabilised.

Dyslexia awareness training had been postponed due to a full Fire Authority agenda in December 2013.

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

Resolved that Members note the backward-looking report and agree the proposed training and development activity for the year April 2014 to March 2015 with the addition of training in Standards, Treasury Management and Value for Money

11 Review of Protocol on Member / Officer Relations

This report asked the Committee to review the Fire Authority's Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and to make recommendation to the Authority regarding any changes required.

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

Resolved that the Committee having reviewed the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and considered whether any amendments were necessary, recommend the Protocol to the Fire Authority without amendment

12 Review of Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality

This report asked the Committee to review the Fire Authority's Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and to make recommendations to the Authority regarding any changes to be made.

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

Resolved that the Committee, having reviewed the Draft Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality, recommend the Protocol to the Fire Authority without amendment

13 Update on Ethical Framework Issues

This report updated the Committee on issues relating to the Ethical Framework and brought the following procedures and documents to the notice of its Members:

- Members' Code of Conduct
- Code of Conduct Complaints' Procedure
- Complaints Procedure
- Disclosable Pecuniary Interest form, and
- Dispensations Procedure.

The Corporate Support Manager advised that no Code of Conduct complaints had been received in 2013/14; indeed none had ever been received.

Councillor Mellings queried the lack of a Disposable Pecuniary Interest form return by one Member. The Corporate Support Manager advised that Members were not required to renew the form each year but that it was best practice to write and confirm that there was no change. The Committee directed the Corporate Support Manager to write to this one Member to ask that they make a return, as applicable. The Committee was not aware of the identity of the Member.

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

Resolved that the Committee note:

- a) The update on matters relating to the Ethical Framework, and
- b) The procedures and documents listed in section one

The Corporate Support Manager left the meeting at this point (2.50 pm).

14 Pension Scheme Auto Enrolment

This report advised of the work that had been done regarding auto enrolment and the effect the legislation had had on Shropshire Fire and Rescue.

The Human Resources Manager referred to the Grey Book and Green Book personnel, who had been eligible for auto enrolment, and advised on the numbers, who had subsequently opted out. Provision had been made from existing budgets for the Employers contributions.

Councillor Price expressed surprise that Grey Book personnel would choose to opt out. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer suggested that an individual's RDS salary was more likely to be used as disposable income, with pension provision being provided through their primary employment.

Given that Retained Duty System (RDS) employees' salaries fluctuated, Councillor Adams asked whether auto enrolment pension deductions would continue until the three yearly review, even if their salary dropped below the qualifying amount. The Human Resource Manager confirmed that this was the case, unless the individual chose to opt out.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

The Equality and Diversity Officer and the Fire Crime Officer joined the meeting at this point (2.55 pm).

15 Retained Duty System Settlement Scheme

This report provided an update on the progress of the Retained Duty System Settlement Scheme.

The Human Resources Manager advised that 229 current employees and 102 leavers had been identified as eligible and would be written to within the following two weeks. She assured Councillor Adams that this would be a single piece of work. It was envisaged that a significant number of people would request a calculation to inform their decision but that the cost might prove prohibitive to many.

Councillor Mrs Bould asked whether the Government was providing additional funds to the Fire Authority to cover the costs of the Employer contribution. The Human Resources Manager advised that this was not the case. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that the Government had indicated that the financial impact on authorities would be considered when the extent of this impact was known. However, the Service was sceptical that any financial help would be forthcoming.

In answer to Councillor Mellings, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer stated that the Employer contributions would come from the Pensions Reserve. It was difficult to know how much cost would be entailed, as this would be influenced by individual uptake. An exercise had been conducted some years ago on the basis of a 25% uptake to establish an approximate figure.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

16 Progress on Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan

This report updated Members on implementation of changes in the structure of the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan 2015 and progress on the main actions, identified in the Plan from March 2012 to March 2014.

The Equality and Diversity Officer advised that there had been a change in structure to the Plan since the last report and that its emphasis had become more outward-facing. There were some new actions and completion dates. Other actions remained a work in progress with additional columns to help monitor progress.

The Gypsy and Traveller Awareness sessions for operational personnel had now been completed but there had been requests for the training from other areas in the Service.

The Women's Taster Days at Oswestry and Craven Arms Fire Stations had been a great success and there had been two applications for employment from each of the sessions. Councillor Price expressed his pleasure at the success of the Women's Taster Days but enquired whether similar events were planned at stations with recruitment issues, such as Much Wenlock and Albrighton. The Equality and Diversity Officer advised that these events were not station centric but targeted at the wider community; one of the Taster Days had resulted in application for employment at Much Wenlock.

There had been closer working with the Prevention Department, resulting in the provision of Fire Safety letters and leaflets translated into other languages, especially Polish, and driven by the identification of commercial 'hot-spots.'



Councillor Adams queried the listing of Equal Pay Review, as he perceived the provision of equal pay as automatic for the Service. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that this activity originated in 2007, comparing male / female Grey / Green Book posts on the introduction of a new job evaluation system for Green Book employees. It remained on the list as the work was not concluded and subject to audit.

Councillor Adams commented that the use of Plain Language should also be audited. He was advised that employees were attending a Plain English course in the adjacent room at that moment.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

17 Equality Monitoring Statistics

This report provides elected Members with an overview of the Service's Equality Monitoring statistics.

The Equality and Diversity Officer advised that in addition to meeting legal requirements, the Service used the statistics to inform activities, such as Women's Taster Days. However, many employees chose not to provide information on their ethnic origins and sexuality and the low reporting numbers made the results virtually meaningless. It was hoped to encourage under-represented groups to complete the Monitoring Form by raising awareness. The introduction of MyView in the next couple of months would allow employees to complete their details online, in confidence.

The Equality and Diversity Steering Group were referring the issue of whether to measure by post or employee back to the Service Management Team for decision.

Councillor Adams queried the absence of the category 'White – English', inclusion of which the Committee had previously requested to mirror reference to other indigenous nations. This request was prior to the employment of the current Equality and Diversity Officer. He advised that in the Service's drive to achieve greater alignment with Census data, and subject to Service Management Team discussion, these references would disappear, leaving the one category 'White'.

Councillor Adams referred to the long-term project of addressing the disparity between male and female employees and asked whether the Service was retaining female employees. The Equality and Diversity Officer assured him this was the case.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

18 Reasonable Adjustments Update

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

The Committee were advised that the report figures were slightly out of date, as they had been based on the position at the end of February.

The Equality and Diversity Officer referred to the excellent reputation of the Service in this area. He had given a presentation on Dyslexia Awareness and the Service's work at a recent Human Resources Regional Forum and the Service was clearly working far in advance of other brigades in the region.

There were currently 46 reasonable adjustment cases, which were predominately related to operational personnel with dyslexia. There had been extremely positive feedback from employees. One individual gave a presentation to the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and it was hoped that this presentation could also be given to the Service Management Team and the Committee.

Councillor Adams enquired whether there was financial recoupment through improved efficiencies. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that the provision of reasonable adjustments was a statutory duty, which the Service could comply to with a reduced response. However, there were benefits to an individual's performance in their role, their training, their confidence and the reputation of the Service.

Councillor Price praised the excellent work and expressed his confidence that it represented value for money.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Price and

Resolved that the Committee note the report

19 Hate Crime Presentation

The Hate Crime presentation provided an overview of incidences of Hate Crime in the County.

The Fire Crime Officer gave examples of incidents and explained the involvement of the Service.

There were photographs in the presentation from a dramatisation by Shrewsbury Sixth Form College, based on actual incidents in Shropshire. The Equality and Diversity Officer suggested that he provide a link to the video for inclusion in the minutes, which the Committee welcomed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPcunPzmmsA>

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

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the presentation

The Equality and Diversity Officer and the Fire Crime Officer left the meeting at this point (3.40 pm).

20 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded for the following agenda items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, by virtue of paragraph 1, 2 and 3

21 Exempt Minutes

Members were asked to agree the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013, and that they be signed as a correct record.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013, be agreed and signed as a correct record

22 Appeals Panel Decisions

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer gave a verbal report on the decision made in each of the three cases listed.

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

Resolved that Committee note the verbal report on the Appeals Panel decisions

The meeting closed at 3.46 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....