

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee Meeting
at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 21 March 2013 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Mrs Barrow (Vice-Chair), Kiernan, Price and Thompson

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources, Head of Human Resources, Equality and Diversity Officer, Corporate Services Manager (for items 1 to 7) and Executive Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Blundell.

Councillor Miss Reynolds did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair asked whether any Member had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest. No Pecuniary Interests were disclosed.

3 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee, held on 18 October 2012.

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

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee, held on 18 October 2012, 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.

5 Human Resources Committee Work Plan 2013/14

This report reviewed the progress against the Human Resources Committee Work Plan 2012/13 and put forward a 2013/14 Work Plan for consideration and approval by Members.

The Chair asked who should be approached, if Members subsequently wished to add to the Work Plan. The Corporate Services Manager replied that officers or the Chair should be contacted.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made against the Human Resources Committee Work Plan 2012/13 and approve the 2013/14 Work Plan without amendment

6 Human Resources Committee Terms of Reference and Procedure

This report provided details of the Terms of Reference of the Human Resources Committee and the Appeals Hearings Procedure for review by the Committee.

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

Resolved that the Committee agree:

- a) The Terms of Reference of the Human Resources Committee (attached at Appendix A to the report) for recommendation to the Fire Authority; and
- b) The Appeals Hearings Procedure (attached at Appendix B to the report)

7 Role Descriptions for Committee Chair and Vice-Chair

This report asked Members to review the existing Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Human Resources Committee and make recommendations regarding any additions and /or amendments required to the Fire Authority.

The Chair requested that an addition was made to the Role Description for the Vice-Chair to read *“To substitute on the Pensions Panel in the absence of the Chair”*. The Corporate Services Manager advised that this should incorporate the wording *“or inability to act”*.

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

Resolved that the Committee make recommendation to the Fire Authority that the wording *“To substitute on the Pensions Panel in the absence or the inability to act of the Chair”* be added to the Role Description of the Vice-Chair

The Corporate Services Manager left the meeting at this point (2.06 pm).

8 Member Development

This report updated the Committee on Member development activity over the past year and proposed a Training and Development Plan for the year April 2013 to March 2014.

Councillor Price expressed his appreciation of the Gypsy and Traveller Awareness training session that he had attended at Whitchurch Fire Station and congratulated the trainer, Jonathan Hyams. In addition, he stated that it was crucial that personnel were made aware of the work being undertaken by the Service to support its dyslexic employees.

Regarding Member training, Councillor Price recommended that Appeals Hearings refresher training take place directly before cases were heard. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) commented that officers would need to be careful that the training was not leading in any way but that such scheduling would be useful in ensuring Member availability.

The Chair noted that some Members may have attended Gypsy and Traveller Awareness training at the Shirehall. The ACFO stated that the Service did try to liaise with constituent councils. The Equality and Diversity Officer commented that there were 3 more sessions planned to provide training to the personnel of the 4 fire stations, which had not yet received it.

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

Resolved that the Committee agree the proposed Training and Development Plan 2013/14

9 Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations Agreement

Members received Fire and Rescue Services National Employers Circulars EMP/01/13 and EMP/02/13, which provided an update on the current position, where the majority of individuals have received compensatory offers and the final stage is underway. This stage extends offers to those, who are not union members but are nonetheless covered by the terms of the settlement agreement with the Fire Brigades Union, and those union members, where it has not been possible to match them against the membership data.

The ACFO provided the Committee with the following overview figures for the Service:

- 326 payments have been made
- There have been 109 recent acceptances
- 120 offers remain outstanding
- 2 offers have been rejected
- Totalling 557 offers

The next phase will be contacting those who have been previously employed by the Service. All associated costs have been budgeted for.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked why two individuals had refused offers. The Equality and Diversity Officer advised that this would either be because they were querying the amounts offered or their stated date of employment. These individuals would receive a payment, when any necessary recalculations had been completed.

Councillor Price enquired about the cost to the Service. The ACFO replied that the financial provision was more than sufficient. The Equality and Diversity Officer advised that payments ranged from a minimum of £150 to a maximum of £500.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the Circulars

10 Reasonable Adjustments Update

This report provided Members with an overview of reasonable adjustments that have been made for employees to support them whilst in the Service's employment.

Councillor Price commented that the benefits of reasonable adjustments should not be underestimated, both for individuals and the Service. He had anecdotal evidence of one individual with dyslexia, for whom the benefit had been sufficient for the individual to seek out Councillor Price and tell him that it had "*changed his life*". Councillor Price added that the reasonable adjustments work paid dividends and that the financial cost was a small sum, given what was achieved.

Councillor Kiernan remarked that the Service was to be commended for its work in supporting its employees and, while acknowledging the sensitivities involved, wondered whether the profile of this work could be raised through the Press. The Equality and Diversity Officer referred to the need to respect confidentiality but gave examples where one member of the Retained Duty Service (RDS) had placed an article in the internal newsletter and given school talks on dyslexia and reasonable adjustments. She emphasised that work with RDS personnel had benefits beyond their work with the Service, positively impacting on their primary employment and other family members, if they were similarly affected with the condition.

The ACFO mentioned an instance where one self-employed member of the RDS had done a television piece about how he had been able to work more effectively in his own business and become involved in further training as a result of reasonable adjustments for his dyslexia in his RDS role. The Equality and Diversity Officer remarked that the Service had progressed a long way and that many employees were now more open, which encouraged others to come forward.

Councillor Kiernan asked whether it was known if adjustments for those with bad backs had reduced absenteeism. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that this was difficult to quantify but effects could only be positive, which was supported by verbal feedback from affected individuals. Councillor Thompson concluded that the Service was setting an excellent example in the support of its staff and that the £3,000 was money well spent.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

11 Progress on Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan

This report updated Members on the progress of actions identified within the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan from March 2012 to February 2013.

Councillor Mrs Barrow noted the Service's attendance at differing cultural and religious events but queried the lack of contact with Christian centres. The Equality and Diversity Officer explained that this was because the focus was on establishing connections with cultural minorities. Councillor Mrs Barrow suggested that Christian centres should also be considered for this purpose and cited the eastern European community's strong links to the Catholic Church. The Equality and Diversity Officer agreed.

Councillor Price concurred with Councillor Mrs Barrow's viewpoint that in concentrating on minorities, the Service should be careful not to forget others. He queried the primary driver behind the work and, if this was recruitment from all sectors, whether the scale of work was required during the ongoing lack of wholetime recruitment. The Equality and Diversity Officer clarified that the Action Plan supported community fire safety initiatives with the elderly, the young, disabled and ethnic / cultural minorities. Recruitment was only a part of the focus on organisational needs.

She reported that concentrated awareness sessions were being held to aid RDS stations that found it hard to recruit. The ACFO echoed these sentiments, stating that the Action Plan was about general relationship building with the community. This relationship was now quite effective and the aim was to maintain it. Community fire safety work with vulnerable adults was well established.

The Chair commented that the freeze on recruitment would create a "*skewed workforce*". The ACFO replied that, with no wholetime recruitment since 2010, none likely until 2017 and limited resources making the utilisation of transferees more likely (given that it cost £25,000 to train a wholetime recruit), the main driver for diversity was RDS recruitment. This was not just an issue for Shropshire.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked what the Service was obliged to do under the Single Equality Scheme. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that it was required to set objectives against the Equality Strands to support its work, which was the nature of the Action Plan. She advised that the Plan was due for review this year and the contents would be evaluated against their support of the Service's future needs. The Plan would go before the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, which included Councillor Dr Jones, before coming back to the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Barrow enquired what evidence there was as to the effectiveness of the work. The Equality and Diversity Officer acknowledged that it was difficult to draw causal links and that some of the work was an investment in the future, for example the Bring Your Daughters to Work day. Other initiatives, for example the learning of sign language, had arisen out of operational scenarios.

Councillor Mrs Barrow commented that the work involved identifying vulnerable people, and queried this requirement, given that other public services did the same. The ACFO replied that there was a problem data sharing with other agencies and, while work was ongoing to improve this, currently a lack of access to information held by other public services necessitated the Service putting its own resources into this area. It was anticipated that Sir Ken Knight's upcoming review would identify this as an issue.

Councillor Thompson had visited a school that morning where a 'Be Cool Be Safe' quiz session was being held. He was very complimentary about the experience and praised both the quiz and the involvement of the Community Fire Safety Technical Officer, Charlie Cartwright. The Chair commented on a session he had attended, being most impressed that a class of 8 year olds had sat still for an hour.

Councillor Kiernan queried the £25,000 cost to train a firefighter. The ACFO said that this figure originated from the cost of the last 8 week wholetime training course. This was held in partnership with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and attended by 12 Shropshire recruits. It had resulted in a significant reduction in previous costs.

Councillor Price praised the Gypsy and Traveller Awareness training and commented that there should be a crossover between RDS and wholetime recruitment, citing West Mercia Police's current recruitment of officers from existing Community Support Officers and Special Constables. The ACFO agreed that this approach seems to be more common and gave the example of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, who are looking to obtain their next intake from existing community fire safety bank staff and volunteers; this will provide links to groups, from which historically recruitment has not taken place. She stated that the Service would hope to go outside, when it next recruits but this would not be for a number of years and there would only be a single figure number of posts available. Given that the Service would be likely to be inundated with applicants, previous costs of the process would have to be weighed against the benefits.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

12 Equality Monitoring Statistics

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

The Equality and Diversity Officer reported that the profiles had not changed since last year.

Up-to-date disability information is awaited from a data cleanse, which may show a change in the profile and reflect the numbers supported, as personnel become more confident to identify themselves as such. Information on grievances received and their outcome was included, as previously requested by Members.

Councillor Mrs Barrow questioned the value of the statistics, given the number of personnel, who were not declaring. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that non-declaration may in itself be an indicator. The ACFO added that the collection and publication of these statistics is a legal requirement.

The Chair enquired why there was no category for 'White English', now there are defined areas for Wales and Scotland. The Equality and Diversity Officer replied that the monitoring forms were formatted to match national census criteria. The ACFO said that the last census would be checked for the best use of criteria. It may be necessary to include both 'White British' and 'White English' on the monitoring form. The Chair agreed with this proposal.

The Chair commented that 'Prefer not to say' and 'Unknown' had been grouped together in the sexual orientation statistical breakdown. He also commented on the terminology used to identify the different categories of sexual orientation. The Equality and Diversity Officer clarified that this terminology was in line with Stonewall's best practice guide, as it was no longer acceptable to use the term 'homosexual'.

Councillor Thompson requested that 'Prefer not to say' and 'Unknown' were listed separately.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....