

Internal Review of Human Resources Services

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report informs the Human Resources Committee of the high level findings of a recent internal review of the Human Resources (HR) function

2 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the report

3 Background

Building upon the work in 2010, the ACFO has undertaken a review of the HR function within the Service. This has involved discussions with departmental staff and their customers and also conversations with some of our neighbours to compare provision and function. Three key conclusions have resulted which will focus our plans for future development of, and provision from the department.

4 Detail

Overview of process and findings

The review involved talking to our internal staff, both within the HR department and their customers, about what was working well within the department and what they felt required improvement.

As part of the process, the ACFO HR also spent some time with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service discussing with them their HR provision as they were going through a similar review process at the same time.

Our HR team will be receiving detailed feedback on the overall review but it will be of interest to Members to note that, in summary, there are three key areas affecting the performance of the department:

1. The team is under resourced

The team consists of 1 full time HR Manager, two full-time equivalent HR Officers (comprising of three part time staff) and two full-time equivalent HR Assistants. This team serve approximately 640 - 650 employees, taking into account the reduction in the workforce we are currently seeing as part of the cuts. This gives a ratio of qualified HR staff to employees of 1:130, which will marginally improve to 1:128 following the reductions. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development the effective ratio in the public sector is 1:103 and the optimum across the public and private sector is 1:85.

Whilst payroll, pensions and occupational health services are out-sourced to some extent (eg occupational health appointments are still made by the department), the team deal with all internal employee recruitment, starters and leavers, case work and transactional paperwork relating to pay, employee administration and absence. This means that the team has a largely transactional focus and is unable to concentrate resources on providing management information or coaching, and development support to managers in dealing with casework eg disciplinary, grievance, performance and health issues.

2. Management information is lacking

The HR Information System used by the department does not easily provide the HR team or the managers with the information they need to monitor issues in real time eg absence reports, which can be time consuming to produce.

3. Some work should be re-directed elsewhere

During the review, the Service also used the business systems analysis process to look at the work of the department, in relation to payroll in particular, as that formed a significant element of the work undertaken by the department on a monthly basis. It became clear to the review team that some of the work would better sit with the Finance department or could be done directly between the employee and our contracted payroll/pensions service provider, if internal systems were amended. This would remove several days' worth of processing each month from the department.

Learning from Hereford and Worcester FRS, it seems we are not alone in struggling to adequately resource the function. However, we may be able to learn and benefit from some changes they have recently started to make to their systems, in order to free up the capacity of their HR function. This has involved a significant investment in a new HR Information System, which aims to alleviate the transactional work of the team by allowing common transactions to be conducted, approved and recorded electronically rather than via bureaucratic, paper based processes.

5 Conclusions

The review has concluded that given that so much is out-sourced, it is not possible or practical to further outsource any element of the HR provision that remain. The terms and conditions applicable to our staff are specific to the fire and rescue service and could not easily be provided from any other source. Our team, although small, has more than 40 years' experience of delivering human resources support to the fire service in Shropshire and has the cultural and procedural understanding which could not be outsourced.

Change is required however, and in response to the issues identified above, the next steps will be that we will look to alleviate the issue of resources in three ways.

First of all, we will look to see whether there are any opportunities to use the existing directorate budget in a different way by utilising opportunities to change staffing arrangements, without increasing the over cost across the directorate.

In addition, we will look at the HR Information Systems, especially in the context of the developing Fire Control project, and closer working on that with Hereford and Worcester FRS, to see whether there may be an opportunity for us to implement a system which is user friendly and meets the information demands of a modern fire and rescue service.

Finally, HR have worked with the Finance team to support them in making arrangements to receive some of the transaction payroll related work from the HR department. This enables them to easily access and record relevant information for financial monitoring purposes, providing better management information for the Service, and speedier query resolution for staff.

6 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

7 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report, though the Human Resources Committee should be aware, and note the contents, in accordance with its duty to ensure the continued application of good employee relations and HR procedures and practices, ensuring compliance with the provisions of all employment protection and related legislation.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

This report presents the findings of an internal review of existing provision and as such does not require an equality impact assessment.

9 Appendix

There are no appendices attached to this report.

10 Background Papers

There are no background papers to this report.