

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Human Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 6 September 2007**

Present

Councillors Dr Drummond (Vice-Chair), Groom, Mrs Holyoak (Chair) and Hurst-Knight

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight and seconded by Councillor Drummond

That Councillor Holyoak be elected Chair of the Human Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Holyoak was duly elected Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight and seconded by Councillor Holyoak

That Councillor Drummond be appointed Vice-Chair of the Human Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Drummond was duly appointed Vice-Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Davies and Hartin.

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 June 2007.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 June 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

6 The Well Managed Organisation

This report informed Members of the Human Resources Committee about the recently released report from the Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity, and the recommendations within it.

Councillor Drummond commented that she was looking forward to receiving the data outlined in the report.

Councillor Groom referred to the two elements of sickness absence, i.e. long-term (over 28 days) and short-term sickness, and asked if reports would be received on both. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that there is one absence policy, which takes account of both long and short-term sickness. Repeated short-term sickness can show problems with morale but at the moment there are very few repeated cases of short-term sickness. The Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the data brought before the Committee would be separated into long and short-term sickness.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked about the financial implications of introducing the new human resources system, as the report referred to there being no direct financial implications associated with it. The Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the main cost associated with the system was one of time. There is a financial cost associated with the new system but this is minimal.

Resolved that the Committee agree:

- a) The monitoring arrangements/statistics be adopted by the Fire Authority after the implementation of the new human resources system; and
- b) After the implementation of the new human resources system updates on sickness absence statistics be brought to the Human Resources Committee every six months.

7 Re-employment of Operational Employees following Retirement

This report requested the Human Resources Committee consider whether a policy of re-employment of operational employees following retirement should be introduced.



Councillor Drummond asked if a firefighter is re-employed after pensionable age, they can claim a lump sum but is their actual pension frozen. The Human Resources Manager explained that firefighters will still only receive the same take home pay as before their re-employment but they are also eligible to join the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Councillor Groom commented that recommendation a) – not adopting a policy of re-employment of operational employees following retirement in any circumstances - seems to be the only one that could be chosen.

Councillor Holyoak asked if the decision needed to be made today or if it could be deferred and made after the results of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's review of the issue were known. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that all authorities are currently grappling with the same issue and there would probably be no benefit to delaying the decision.

Councillor Holyoak asked if re-employment would be advantageous to the Authority or if it would prohibit 'new blood' coming into the Service. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that due to the low recruitment levels in the Service, re-employment of firefighters would make it difficult to meet targets.

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented on the Service's training programme and explained that he feared vital skills being lost if firefighters were not re-employed. Councillor Groom accepted that Councillor Hurst-Knight's concerns were valid but felt that there should not be a concentration of skills. Councillor Groom also felt that delaying making the decision would not be productive and that choosing any option other than recommendation a) would create an "administrative nightmare" for the Service.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that choosing any recommendation other than a) may leave the Service open to legal challenge. This may still be the case even if recommendation a) is chosen.

Councillor Drummond felt that cutting off availability, even for part-time employees, at the age of 50 seems unfair to the Fire Authority, as their skills could be used by the Fire Service. It may also cause frustration for employees.

Councillor Holyoak asked if recommendation c) – adopting a policy of re-employment of those who can fill a skills shortage and/or comply with other specified criteria - was a 'safe' option for the Fire Authority. The Human Resources Manager explained there is a high demand for positions with the Service. 700 application packs were sent out for eight vacancies during the last period of whole-time recruitment.

Councillor Groom proposed that recommendation a) be adopted and this was seconded by Councillor Holyoak. The Fire Authority's solicitor suggested that the wording of recommendation a) be altered slightly so that it read:

'To adopt a policy of no re-employment of operational employees following retirement in any circumstances'.



The meeting agreed this change and on a vote, with 3 Members voting for and 1 Member voting against, it was

Resolved that, having considered the contents of this report, the Human Resources Committee recommend that the Fire Authority agree option a), namely, that it adopt a policy of no re-employment of operational employees following retirement in any circumstances

8 Second Contracts of Employment

This report informed the Human Resources Committee of Firefighters' Pension Scheme Circular 6/2007 and the guidance therein relating to second contracts of employment, the relationship with pension entitlement, and the action that will be taken to address the matter.

The Assistant Chief Officer informed the meeting that c) on page 2 should read 'staff who are RDS (retained duty system) elsewhere and WT (wholetime) with SFRS (Shropshire fire and Rescue Service)'.

Resolved that the Human Resources Committee note the report

9 Investors in People Re-accreditation

This report provided feedback on the findings of the most recent Investors in People audit, which took place in July 2007.

Councillor Hurst-Knight offered his congratulations to all involved in helping achieve the re-accreditation. These sentiments were echoed by all the Members present.

Councillor Holyoak asked about the comment in the 'Opportunities for Improvement' section that 'Community Fire Safety skills have been introduced at the expense of firefighting skills'. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that there is a feeling that the drive to meet fire safety targets has reduced drill time. Measures have been taken to address this issue with watches now controlling a patch and identifying the vulnerable areas within that patch. Also, any watches, which have a new recruit, have had their fire safety targets reduced, so that they can spend more time on training. The Chief Fire Officer added that this a national issue, not just one that is particular to Shropshire, especially as there have been several recent firefighter deaths, which have caused concerns over maintaining competencies.

Councillor Groom asked about the financing of the re-accreditation and also if the comment that there was a 'need to increase the number of Individual Personal Development Reviews (IPDR) completed across the Service' referred to increasing the frequency of IPDRs or to widening the span of staff who undertake IPDRs. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that with regard to the latter issue, IPDR uptake has been increasing with operational staff and there is currently good uptake with support staff. The IPDR process has also been modified for Retained Duty System staff, so that it is less time-



consuming to complete. The Assistant Chief Officer advised that Investors in People re-accreditation costs £3,000 - £3,500, once every three years.

Resolved that the Human Resources Committee note the report

10 Introduction of Childcare Vouchers

This report informed the Human Resources Committee of the decision by Policy Group to introduce Childcare Vouchers for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service employees.

Resolved that the Committee notes the content of the report

11 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following 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 paragraphs 1 and 2

12a Applications to undertake Outside Employment (Approved Provisionally) (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

This report informed Members of applications from Fire Authority employees to undertake outside employment, which had been approved provisionally by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Resolved that Members confirm the provisional approval given by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee

12b Applications to undertake Outside Employment (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

This report informed Members of five applications to undertake outside employment.

Resolved that Members approve the applications made for outside employment

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....



**Definitions of Exempt Information
Local Government Act 1972 – Schedule 12A**

**Part 1
Descriptions of Exempt Information: England**

Paragraph 1

Information relating to any individual

Paragraph 2

Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual

Paragraph 3

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information)

Paragraph 4

Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority

Paragraph 5

Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

Paragraph 6

Information which reveals that the authority proposes:

- (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
- (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment

Paragraph 7

Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

