

**Non-Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee
on Thursday, 28 May 2009, at 2.00 pm
at Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

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

1 Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 26 February 2009.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009, 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 Grievance Procedure

This report notified the Human Resources (HR) Committee of a review of the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) grievance procedure.

Councillor Drummond commented that she was pleased that the procedure had been tightened up, as it had seemed 'wishy washy' before. Councillor Drummond also asked about officer training in the new procedures. The Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) explained that the Watch Managers' course for newly promoted staff had been updated to incorporate the revised procedure.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked how letters were delivered to the people concerned. The ACO explained that they are generally sent out by post but in special circumstances they will be sent via special or recorded delivery. There have been some cases where letters have not arrived, in these circumstances, the letters have been sent again either by recorded delivery or have been delivered by hand.

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

Resolved that the Human Resources Committee agree the revised Grievance Brigade Order

6 Proposed Introduction of a Capability Policy

This report informed the Human Resources Committee of the progress to date on the introduction of a Capability Policy.

The Equality and Diversity (E&D) Officer reported that not all Union responses have been positive and that the issue will be raised at the Union meeting on 16 June 2009.

Councillor Holyoak asked if further consultation would be done or if the policy would be taken further as it stands. The ACO explained that there were two possible outcomes. The first being that the policy could be adopted as it is however if it was used it would be disputed straightaway. The second is that the policy could be converted to managers' guidance instead of policy. The Unions would prefer it if the sickness or disciplinary policies were used instead of the capability policy however capability is not always an issue of sickness or will.

Councillor Holyoak asked if the reason for the union's reaction was known. The ACO said that it was not but that this needs to be explored. There could be an employee issue as disciplinary records can cause future problems, e.g. with references. It was anticipated that one of the unions would object to the policy but the objections from another union had come as a surprise.

Councillor Picken thought that issues relating to New Dimensions should also be covered by the capability policy. The ACO commented that this perspective would be explained to the unions rather than being written into the policy itself.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the timescales in the policy referred to working days. The ACO explained that these were actually calendar days. Councillor Drummond commented that the options contained within the policy were all helpful. The ACO explained that the policy should be viewed as an investment in staff.

Councillor Williams felt that the policy should help to improve the wellbeing of staff as everybody needs to feel fully confident and capable both in their own abilities and those of their colleagues. Councillor Holyoak commented that it was a supportive document and Councillor Drummond commented that this type of policy was not peculiar to the fire and rescue service, as she had seen similar policies in the academic world.

Councillor Holyoak proposed that the policy be accepted, as it is and be taken forward to the Unions for further negotiation. This was seconded by Councillor Drummond and it was

Resolved that the Human Resources Committee approve the revised Capability Policy and that it be taken forward to the Unions for further negotiation

7 Member Development 2009/10

This report requested consideration of future elected Member development proposals in preparation for the upcoming elections and potential changes to the Fire Authority.

Councillor Holyoak asked about the issue of Members not attending training. The ACO explained that the training is not mandatory but Group Leaders are asked to help ensure that as many Members as possible attend training when it is provided. Councillor Holyoak felt that Group Leaders' liaison should be considered within the Member Development process.

Councillor Williams felt that Member attendance at training should be expressed as desirable. Councillor Drummond felt that it was important that the interests and experience of Members should be considered with regard to Committee appointments and Member training. The ACO explained that the results of the development needs questionnaire would be used to prioritise the Members involved in training and to ensure that the training provides the most benefit to the most Members.

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight that the recommendations in the report be agreed with the addition of another recommendation as follows:

- e) That Group Leaders be approached to ensure attendance at Member training.

This was seconded by Councillor Picken and it was

Resolved that the Human Resources Committee agree:

- a) That a Member induction session be planned for July 2009;
- b) That the Member Development Needs Questionnaire be refreshed in readiness for new Fire Authority membership being confirmed;
- c) That Officers plan to undertake a development needs review process;

- d) That Officers liaise with the constituent authorities regarding Member development to ensure joined-up delivery and minimise duplication; and
- e) That Group Leaders be approached to ensure attendance at Member training

8 Mediation Review - Update

This report provided the Committee with an update on progress regarding the agreed actions to implement an external mediation provider.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

9 Affiliation to Skills for Justice

This report informed the Committee of the national arrangements in place to align the Fire and Rescue Service to the Skills for Justice Sector Skills Council.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

10 Ill-Health Pension Case Outcome

This report informed the Committee of the outcome of the ill-health pensions Court of Appeal case, which has moved towards resolving the issue of contested guidance for ill-health retirements.

The ACO informed the meeting that there is one Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service individual, who is affected by this issue, and that the Service is awaiting further guidance from Communities and Local Government.

Councillor Hurst-Knight expressed concern for the individual, who is waiting. The ACO explained that the individual concerned will receive a copy of the Committee report and that the Fire Brigades Union is working closely with the individual to provide support.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

11 Cultural Audit Benchmarking Results

This report informed Members of the Committee about the final Cultural Audit benchmarking report from Opinion Research Services.

The ACO explained that in the table on page 2 of the report, there were two fire and rescue services referred to as A and B, because the services concerned have changed some of the questions in the cultural audit survey.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked where similar fire and rescue services (FRSs) to Shropshire had come in the table. The ACO explained that this was not known. Although it is known, which FRSs are on the list, their final position on the list is not known.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

12 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.

13 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

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

This report informed Members of one application from a Fire Authority employee to undertake outside employment, which has been approved provisionally by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee, having considered the application for outside employment on its merits, with regard to all the circumstances and the health and safety of employees and the public, confirm the provisional approval given by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Human Resources Committee

Before the meeting closed, Councillor Holyoak advised the Committee that this would be the last meeting to be attended by Councillor Drummond, as she was retiring. Councillor Holyoak thanked Councillor Drummond for her work on the Authority and for the active role she had played in the work of its various committees. Councillor Holyoak presented Councillor Drummond with a Fire Authority plaque and a bouquet of flowers and the Members and officers present wished her a happy and healthy retirement.

The meeting closed at 2.55 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....