

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Human Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
at 2.00 pm on Thursday 1 March 2007**

Present: Councillors Davies, Hartin, Mrs Holyoak (Chair), Picken (Vice-Chair) and Mrs Swift

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Dr Drummond.

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 21 November 2006.

Resolved: *that the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 21 November 2006, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.*

4 Recruitment Activity Feedback

This report detailed the feedback from the Human Resources and Training Department on their experience of implementing the new recruitment tests and procedures for wholetime firefighter recruitment, which are likely to become mandatory from April 2007.

Councillor Hartin asked why so many of the application forms had been rejected during the initial sift of forms and if a prescriptive method of marking was used. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that there was a prescriptive marking scheme, in which the Human Resources officers had been trained. Applicants needed to have answered all the questions properly in order to get through the initial sift.

Councillor Hartin asked what the fallback position would be, if the national application form is not adopted for the Retained Duty System. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the Service would continue to use its own standard application form. The vast majority of applicants go through on the first sift of the standard application form.



The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the Service does support the standardisation nationally of the application process. The application form is currently being worked on at a national level, with officers being given the opportunity to give feedback on developments.

Councillor Holyoak asked if there had been feedback from applicants about the form. There has not been.

Resolved: *that the Committee recommends the Fire Authority to agree that it:*

- a) **Does not** adopt the national application form for retained duty system recruitment;
- b) **Does** adopt the job related tests for retained duty system recruitment; and
- c) Agrees that the findings within the report are copied to the new National Assessment Unit to inform decisions about future use.

At this point Councillor Holyoak welcomed Councillor Swift, who arrived at 2.05pm, to the meeting.

5 Update on the Progress of the Gender Equality Scheme

The purpose of this report was to make the Committee aware of the progress of the Gender Equality Scheme and the proposed arrangements for adoption of the completed Scheme.

Members questioned why the Gender Equality Scheme was to go the June meeting of the Fire Authority rather than to the Fire Authority meeting on 25 April 2007. The Equality and Diversity Officer confirmed that the Gender Equality Scheme would be ready for 25 April 2007. It was, therefore,

Resolved: *that the Human Resources Committee agree the proposal for the progression and publication of the Gender Equality Scheme on 30 April 2007, for approval at the next meeting of the Fire Authority on 25 April 2007.*

6 Policy relating to Requests made under Regulation 31 (The 85 Year Rule) of the Local Government Pension Scheme

This report presented the proposed policy for individuals to make a request under Regulation 31 (The 85 year Rule) of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Councillor Hartin urged Members to agree the recommendations.

Resolved: *that the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority that it approve the policy to enable eligible individuals to make a request under Regulation 31 (The 85 year Rule) of the Local Government Pension Scheme to retire early.*



7 Local Government Pension Scheme Transfers and Appeals Policy

This report requested a policy decision by the Committee on two issues related to the efficient administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) within Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority:

firstly, the administration of the transference of pension rights from a non-local government pension scheme into the LGPS after 12 months of service; and secondly, the nomination of a referee to act in first stage appeals against decisions relating to pension benefits made by officers of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Holyoak asked how many staff were likely to be affected by this decision. The Human Resources Manager was not able to provide an immediate answer but will endeavour to find out.

Councillor Swift asked if new employees were provided with information about the transfer of pensions from their previous employment. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that employees are given this information when they commence their employment with the Service.

Councillor Hartin asked what approach was taken in neighbouring Fire Authorities. The Human Resources Manager had been unable to find any real detail on what other Authorities did.

Councillor Hartin asked about the financial impacts on the Fire Authority of each of the options in recommendation a). Members agreed that the first option would have the least financial impact on the Authority. Members also felt that the first option was the most clear cut for both employers and employees.

It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Swift, seconded by Councillor Picken and

Resolved: *that the Human Resources Committee:*

- a) *Proposes the following option with regard to transference of benefits: That a transfer is permitted during the first 12 months of membership of the scheme only;*
- b) *Agrees the nomination of the Assistant Chief Officer, as the local referee under the Internal Disputes Resolution Procedure for the Local Government Pension Scheme; and*
- c) *Makes the appropriate recommendations to the Fire Authority.*

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer then asked Members to consider an addition to the agreed option to take account of those existing employees, who had not yet made a decision about the transfer of any previous pensions. The Human Resources Manager raised concerns about this and the fact that it may set a precedent.



The Committee then resolved to adopt the first option in recommendation a but with the following addition:

That a transfer is permitted during the first 12 months of membership of the scheme only for new employees and, in the case of existing employees, within 12 months from the date of approval by the Fire Authority.

8 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Options Exercise

This report updated Members of the Committee on the recent communication and activity of staff regarding the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

The Human Resources Manager informed Members that Martin Griffiths, of the Pensions Department, Shropshire County Council, has been invited to speak to Members at the Members' Conference in May.

Councillor Hartin felt that this was a significant decision and asked if the Human Resources Department had been recommending employees to contact financial advisors. The Human Resources staff are unable to give advice regarding pensions to staff but employees have received appropriate literature and have been offered the chance to speak to the Pensions Department at Shirehall. Questions have also been gathered and sent to Shirehall for response.

The Human Resources Manager reported that, so far, 103 responses had been received from wholetime employees, which equates to 52% of wholetime employees. None of these had chosen to change to the new Scheme. 27 responses have been received from Retained Duty staff, which equates to 9% of the Retained staff.

It was also reported that the Unions have been supportive of staff and have been offering advice on this issue.

Resolved: *that the Committee note the contents of the report.*

9 Outcome of National Negotiations on the Continuing Professional Development Scheme

This report updated the Committee on the recent conclusion of the negotiations in respect of the Continuing Professional Development Scheme.

Resolved: *that the Committee note the content of the report.*

10 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.*



11 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 21 November 2006.

Resolved: *that the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 21 November 2006 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.*

The meeting closed at 2.40 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....



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

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

Paragraph

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

