

Strengthening Positive Employee Relations

Report of the Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer

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1 Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the proposals for refined Trade Union engagement with the Fire Authority as part of the wider review on the Employee Relations Framework.

Fire Authority Members are asked to consider and approve a proposal to include Trade Union representatives as special observers. This will support continued effective employee relations and will be formally supported through the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) co-produced with Trade Union representatives.

2 Recommendations

Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the report.
- b) Approve the attendance of local Trade Union Representatives at Fire Authority meetings as special observers as part of the Employee Relations Framework.
- c) Delegate authority for the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to the Clerk / Monitoring Officer.

3 Background

Positive employee relations are crucial to the effective running of any organisation. Notwithstanding the need to ensure a robust performance management culture within an organisation, it is important that work takes place to build a positive employer / employee relationship underpinned by a positive culture and healthy work environment in which trade unions are empowered to advocate for colleagues and support them to address any concerns and conflicts.

The Service's Industrial Relations Policy supports this process, and its Joint Trade Union meeting provides a forum for any changes impacting on employees to be discussed through engagement, consultation and / or negotiation processes. This Policy and the meeting currently form part of the Service's Employee Relations Framework.

In December 2024, the then ACFO Corporate Services, as Chair of the Joint Trade Union meeting, commenced a review of the Service's Employee Relations Framework. This has included a review of the Industrial Relations Policy and the current approaches in place that allow for informal and formal engagement with trade union representatives, including the Joint Trade Union meeting itself.

Three workshops have been undertaken since December 2024 to support this review in full collaboration with trade union representatives. These have considered:

- The appropriateness of the Industrial Relations Policy and any areas for improvement, for example providing greater clarity regarding the consultation process and trade union arrangements
- The approach to communication and engagement between trade union representatives, the Service and the Fire Authority
- The approach to meetings between trade union representatives, officers and the Fire Authority

Whilst some small improvements have been made to enable a clearer approach to the Joint Trade Union meeting and regular informal meetings scheduled between officers and trade union representatives, the review is ongoing. Discussions continued in December 2025. Due to a change in chair, it was agreed that a further meeting of the joint trade unions is required to finalise any changes. Recommendations for the finalised Employee Relations Framework will be presented to Fire Authority in July 2026.

4 Recommendations

The review carried out to date has identified two potential opportunities to improve engagement between trade unions and Fire Authority members. The first was to develop and implement an Employee Relations Framework. The second is set out in more detail below.

Trade Union Attendance at Fire Authority meetings:

Trade Unions representing Service employees already have the opportunity to attend Fire Authority meetings. The second proposed change is that local trade union representatives are reserved a seat at Fire Authority meetings whereby contribution to discussion of Fire Authority papers will be encouraged.

This is a relationship that is developing across Fire and Rescue Authorities and one that the Fire Brigades Union has national support for. It is often referred to as a 'special observer' role.

It is proposed that a local representative from all Service employee trade unions would have a place: Unison, Fire and Rescue Services Association, the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire Leaders Association.

A Memorandum of Understanding would need to be developed between all parties to support this approach to set clear parameters that are understood, to reflect interdependencies between different roles and to ensure that the Fire Authority continues to meet its legal obligations.

Subject to approval, a Memorandum of Understanding will be developed between the Fire Authority (through the Clerk) and trade unions with support from the ACFO Corporate Services.

Finally, it is proposed that this arrangement would be subject to an annual review, with an initial review after 6 months to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is adding value to all parties. To ensure a consistent approach, the Service Evaluation Framework Policy will be used to conduct the review.

5 Conclusions

As identified throughout the report and aligned to the recommendations set out in section 2, the ongoing review of the Service's Employee Relations Framework has identified opportunities to strengthen the overall engagement and assurance of employee relations.

6 Capacity

The progression of these proposals and the implementation of the outcomes of the ongoing review have required joint working of officers, trade union representatives and Human Resources. This has been planned to support the contribution of all relevant parties and as such has taken place over a number of months,

The ongoing management of these arrangements, once implemented, should not have a significant impact on the capacity of officers, however additional meetings will have a greater impact, on the capacity of trade union representatives and this will need to be managed in a flexible way to minimise the impact on service delivery.

7 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working

Whilst this work at this stage is not being undertaken in collaboration with other organisations, there is learning and best practice that can be sought from other Fire and Rescue Services in drafting both the Memorandum of Understanding and terms of reference for the Joint Trade Union Forum.

8 Financial Implications

The proposals within this report may lead to increased financial commitment from the Service to support trade union representative attendance at Fire Authority meetings. The impact will be monitored in line with current processes.

9 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, the Fire Authority members will need to ensure that any proposals contained in this report are implemented in accordance with employment law including (but not limited to) the Equality Act 2010, Employment Rights Act 2025, Trade Union and Labour Relations Consolidation Act 1992 and Trade Union Act 2016. Legal advice will be provided throughout the implementation of any proposals, if approved.

10 HMICFRS Areas For Improvement, Cause of Concern, External Audit Recommendations

The approval of this report will support Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in addressing the range of Areas for Improvement aligned to the People pillar during our 2024 inspection process. As well as set the context for the delivery of other areas for improvement as an environment of engagement, openness and collaboration changes our ways of working.

11 Communications

This report presents the opportunity for positive communications to employees and the public. Strengthening of employee relations should be seen as an improvement. Officers will work with the Service Comms team to ensure that all stakeholders are made aware of the positive actions being taken by the Fire Authority.

12 Community Safety

Strengthening employee relations will support delivery of strategic objectives aligned to prevention, protection and response.

13 Equality Impact Assessment

A completed EQIA can be viewed via: [Special Observer Role - Fire Authority](#)

14 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety of employees is a fundamental responsibility of the Fire Authority, the Service and representative bodies. Strengthening employee relations will improve oversight and provide assurance that legislative duties are being complied with.

15 Fire Standard Core Code of Ethics and Human Rights (including Data Protection)

This report has direct links to some of the Fire Standards. If the recommendations are approved, the Fire Authority can evidence good practice in relation to the following Fire Standards: Communication and Engagement Standard, Leading the Service, and Leading and Developing People. Specifically, the Service can demonstrate good employee relations through employee engagement, consultation, communication, leadership culture, and internal relationships.

16 ICT

There are no ICT impacts arising from this report.

17 Insurance

There are no insurance impacts arising from this report.

18 The On-call Service

This report seeks to strengthen employee relations. The recommendations within this report will have a positive impact on how the Fire Authority engages with On-Call employees.

19 Public Value / Service Delivery

The report sets out broadly the public value impacts arising from this report. A more cohesive culture where direction of travel is clear, leaders are trusted and staff experience consistency in approach and process, will support a healthy working environment and reduce the negative impacts that can exist in the workplace.

19 Training

There will be no training impacts for members at this stage but as the review of the employee relations framework concludes and reports its outcomes this will be reviewed.

20 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

21 Background Papers

There are no background papers to this report