

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

15 April 2009

Present:-

Councillors Cann, Mrs. Parsons and Viney

Apologies:-

Councillors Manning and Shadrick.

***HRMDC/37. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2009 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/38. Declarations of Interest**

Members of the Committee were invited to consider whether they had any **personal/personal and prejudicial interests** in items as set out on the agenda for the current meeting and declare any such interests at this time.

No interests were declared.

HRMDC/39. "Making The Connections" - Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority Single Equality Scheme 2009/10 To 2011/12

The Committee considered a final draft of "Making the Connections" – a single equality scheme for both the Authority and the Service. The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework required the Authority to implement the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy and production of a single Equality Scheme was fundamental to this. Additionally, guidelines produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission recommended the production of a single Equality Scheme encompassing all six strands of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion/belief. These guidelines had been followed in developing the draft scheme – initially considered by the full Authority at its meeting on 23 October 2008 (Minute DSFRA/51 refers) - which would link to the Authority's Corporate Plan, Service Area and Departmental Plans and the corporate response and improvement plans from the recent staff survey.

The Head of Human Resources Management and Development also reported on:

- production by the Local Government Association (LGA) of a five-point Equality and Diversity Charter which complemented Authority and Service activities and commitment to equality and diversity and which the LGA was commending for signature by all fire and rescue authority Members nationally; and
- confirmation from the Department for Communities and Local Government of additional funding (a minimum of £42,000) to be used in ensuring delivery against "stretch" recruitment targets adopted by the Service for women and minority ethnic staff.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority be recommended:
 - (i) to approve the final draft of “Making the Connections” – Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority Single Equality Scheme 2009/10 to 2011/12 as considered at the meeting;
 - (ii) to encourage each Member individually to sign the LGA Equality and Diversity Charter for fire and rescue authority Members;
- (b) that confirmation of receipt of funding for use in achieving “stretch” recruitment targets for women and minority ethnic staff be welcomed;
- (c) that, subject to (a) and (b) above, the report be noted.

***HRMDC/40. Absence Management**

The Committee received for information a report of the Head Of Human Resources Management And Development (HRMDC/09/6) on performance by the Service in relation to absence management. The Service had a corporate target to reduce levels of sickness absence to the regional average of 9 days/shifts lost per person per year by 2010/11; and to 11.6 days/shifts per person for 2008/09.

Although all sickness rates had increased to 9.1% above target in December 2008, this had subsequently reduced to 9.6% below target in January 2009 and overall – to January 2009 – there had been a 16% decrease in absence when compared to the same period last year.

The report provided a statistical breakdown of absences in terms of short- and long-term absences; and absences for uniformed and non-uniformed staff. Control Staff sickness rates had been considerably improved, with both a reduction in long-term sickness and successful management intervention to address short-term sickness issues.

The Committee also received, for information, a copy of the revised Absence Management Policy. This had been subject to consultation with representative bodies and was in the process of being implemented by the Service, with managers receiving briefings on its implementation and use. The revised policy contained a number of more robust measures designed to enhance absence management and secure improvements in sickness levels.

Members expressed concern that the cost of absence, as indicated in the report, was increasing. This was, in part, explained by the increased absences recorded in December 2009. It was hoped, however, that progressive implementation of the new Absence Management Policy would secure reductions in levels of sickness absence and, correspondingly, reductions in costs associated with this.

***HRMDC/41. Staff Survey - Update**

The Head of Human Resources Management and Development reported on progress to date addressing those issues highlighted in the recently undertaken staff survey. A second staff survey newsletter had been produced and widely circulated, a copy of which was provided to the Committee.

The newsletter contained information on the Staff Survey Steering Group which comprised representation from the Service, representative bodies and Councillor Pat Parker, the Authority's Equality and Diversity Member Champion and which was focussing on initiatives to address the following themes as identified in the survey:

- communications;
- fair treatment and values;
- work-life balance and managing pressure and stress at work;
- recruitment, selection and promotion; and
- training, development and leadership.

***HRMDC/42. Reduction In The Number Of Area Manager Positions**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operations) And Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Safety) (HRMDC/09/7) on a reduction of Area Manager posts from nine to six providing for a redistribution of existing resources to enhance service delivery for community safety, operations and resilience and service planning and review. The six Area Managers would also be subject to a new rota to maximise their ability to promote the strategic objectives of the organisation.

***HRMDC/43. The Working Time Directive And Proposed Changes To Legislation**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Human Resources Management and Development (HRMDC/09/8) on proposed legislative changes – largely relating to the proposed removal of the opt-out clause from a maximum 48 hour working week and the proposed definitions of “working time” and “compensatory rest” – that, if implemented, could have impact significantly on the availability of employees on the Retained Duty System (RDS), wholtime employees with secondary RDS contracts and other employees with secondary contracts supporting service delivery (e.g. the Community Safety Action Team).

The report highlighted the stance being taken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in relation to these issues (retention of the opt-out; that inactive on-call time should not be classified as working time; and that a more flexible approach should be adopted for resting periods to allow for operational factors and staffing levels) and lobbying action already taken and to be taken by the LGA to support its stance.

Appended to the report was a schedule of further changes to employment law (e.g. increase in minimum statutory holiday entitlement; right to request flexible working; revised ACAS Discipline and Grievance Code of Practice) with indicative implementation dates and a brief commentary on the implications of each for the Service.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the potential impact on the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service of changes in the opt out clause, as set out in report HRMD/09/8, be noted;

- (b) that the stance taken by the LGA in relation to the proposed revisions to the Working Time Directive, as detailed in the report and indicated above, be supported and that the constituent authorities to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority together with other south west fire and rescue authorities, Members of Parliament and Members of European Parliament be lobbied to support this stance;
- (c) that the areas of forthcoming legislation as set out within Appendix A to the report be noted.

***HRMDC/44. European Union Directive 561/2006: Driving Time Regulations And Their Effect On Fire And Rescue Services Personnel**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Safety) (HRMDC/09/9) on the implications for the Service of the introduction – on 11 April 2007 – of the EU Drivers hours and Tacograph Rules for Goods Vehicles. The regulations applied to anyone driving an “in scope” vehicle and were designed to promote a reduction in road traffic collisions by ensuring that proper rest periods were taken.

The report identified that there were some 62 existing personnel caught by the regulations and detailed measures currently implemented by the Service to minimise the impact of this. The Chief Fire Officers Association, Retained Firefighters Union and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) were currently undertaking work to assess, nationally, the impact of this issue with a view ultimately to CLG issuing guidance to affected authorities. The current Service position would be further reviewed in light of any guidance so received.

***HRMDC/45. Pay Settlement For Non-Uniform Staff - Update**

The Head of Human Resources Management and Development reported for information that, following arbitration, the non-uniformed pay settlement for 2008/09 had been agreed at a level of 2.75%. This was 0.25% greater than budgeted for but would be contained from within existing resources.

*** DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.25hours.