

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

26 November 2014

Present:-

Councillors Bown (Chair), Brooksbank, Horsfall, Knight and Smith.

Apologies:-

Received from Councillor Chugg.

***HRMDC/15. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2014 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/16. National Joint Council for Local Government Services 2014-16 Pay Settlement –Non- Consolidated Payments**

(An item taken in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972).

The Chairman decided that this item should be taken as an urgent matter to enable the Committee to make a decision at the earliest opportunity and should this be favourable for the staff concerned, to facilitate meeting the pay deadline for December 2014.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer (as circulated at the meeting) that advised upon the recently agreed 2014-16 pay settlement of 2.2% for staff conditioned to the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (the "Green Book") terms and conditions of employment.

It was noted that, in addition to the 2.2% cost of living increase applicable to all spinal column points, the award also featured one-off consolidated payments which, by virtue of the settlement, had only been applied to spinal column points 5 to 49 inclusive. The pay scales operated by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority for Green Book staff extended to spinal column point 61, however, and the Committee was asked to consider an extension of the one-off non-consolidated payments on a local agreement to incorporate the 24 staff affected, subject to a cap of £200 on each of these payments.

In response to a question, the Clerk advised that the non-consolidated payments had been awarded as the pay award had been instigated for a two year period with effect from 1 January 2015 (and not 1 April 2014 as would normally have been the case) with no backdating. The payments were to be made in two stages – a flat rate of £100 payable in December 2014 and a further payment due according to the spinal column point in April 2015. The Committee considered the position carefully in the light of the current economic climate and felt that the consolidated payments should be awarded to the additional 24 staff but that this should not be at a higher amount payable to the majority of staff on spinal column points 5 to 49. With this in mind, Councillor Knight **MOVED** (and was seconded by Councillor Brooksbank):

“that approval be given to extending, locally, the one off non-consolidated payments approved as part of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (“the Green Book”) 2014-16 pay settlement to Service staff on spinal column points 50 to 61 conditioned to the Green Book, subject to these payments being capped at a maximum of £150.00, with £100 payable in December 2014 and £50 payable in April 2015.

This was **CARRIED** unanimously, whereupon it was:

RESOLVED that approval be given to extending, locally, the one off non-consolidated payments approved as part of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (“the Green Book”) 2014-16 pay settlement to Service staff on spinal column points 50 to 61 conditioned to the Green Book, subject to these payments being capped at a maximum of £150.00, with £100 payable in December 2014 and £50 payable in April 2015.

***HRMDC/17. Absence Management and Health of the Organisation**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Commercial Services (HRMDC/14/12) that updated the Committee in respect of the level of sickness absence within the organisation as compared with the target set, which was to achieve year-on-year improvements in performance.

The Director of People and Commercial Services reported that between April and September 2014, service employees had taken 4.6 days sickness absence which represented a 33.3% increase on the same period in 2013/14. The statistics for August and September 2014 showed lower sickness levels than the previous four months but these were still higher than in the same period in 2013/14. This was attributable largely to increases in sickness, particularly within Fire Control which had seen an overall increase of 77.2%. There had also been an increase in the sickness rate for support staff of 33.8% which was compounded by an increase in long term sickness of 62.2%. Short term sickness rates overall had decreased, however, by 10.4%.

Reference was made to the reasons behind the increase which it was felt may be partly as a result of the introduction of the new electronic sickness absence reporting portal from 1 April 2014. This may have skewed the statistics in terms of the number of days that were recorded as absence and an audit was being undertaken to check the validity of the information recorded initially. Work was also being undertaken on long term sickness absence additionally as this may also have contributed to the increase overall. The Director of People and Commercial Services added that one of the difficulties with the new system was that staff did not always wish to release the nature of their illness, particularly if it related to very personal conditions, so this information was not recorded which caused difficulties when collating the statistics.

A discussion ensued in respect of the sickness absence portal and the reasons for the increase in the absence level. The Committee expressed the view that the sickness absence portal should be amended to avoid the issues that had occurred. Additionally, it was felt that staff should report the nature of their absence at all times and if this was not to their Line Manager, then a facility should be introduced for this to be via a second line manager so the information was collected. The Clerk advised that the issues in respect of the sickness absence portal were being investigated but, depending on the outcome, this could be fixed fairly quickly. If it involved software development, however, this may take a lot longer in view of the development timescales.

***HRMDC/18. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act, namely:

For item 6:

- 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 the Authority and other companies;
- 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 and its employees.

For item 7:

- 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 and its employees.

***HRMDC/19. Employee Relations Issues - Further Considerations**

(An item considered in accordance with Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded from the meeting).

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People and Commercial Services (HRMDC/14/13) that set out details of a request from the Fire Brigades' Union for full time release of an employee for regional trade union duties.

RESOLVED that the recommendations as set out within report HRMDC/14/13 be approved.

***HRMDC/20. Consultation on Amendments to the Fire & Rescue National Framework – Firefighter Fitness Standards and Assessment**

(An item considered in accordance with Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded from the meeting).

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People and Commercial Services (HRMDC/14/14) that set out details of a consultation document that had been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on a proposed amendment to the Fire & Rescue National Framework addressing fitness standards and assessments for firefighters.

The Director of People and Commercial Services gave an overview of the Service's position in respect of the proposals within the consultation at the meeting for the Committee to consider.

RESOLVED that the Director of People and Commercial Services be authorised to draft a response based on the views expressed by the Committee for submission to the DCLG by the deadline of 9 December 2014.

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

The meeting started at 14:00hours and finished at 15:40hours.