

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

17 June 2010

Present:-

Councillors Bown, Boyd, Burridge-Clayton, Cann, Healey (vice Mrs Nicholson) and Turner

Apologies:-

Councillors Manning and Mrs. Nicholson

***HRMDC/1. Election of Chair**

RESOLVED that Councillor Cann be elected Chair of the Committee until its first meeting after the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2011.

***HRMDC/2. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2010 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/3. Declarations of Interest**

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

No interests were declared.

***HRMDC/4. Election of Vice Chair**

RESOLVED that Councillor Burridge-Clayton be elected Vice Chair of the Committee until its first meeting after the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2011.

***HRMDC/5. Absence Management**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/10) that set out the overall performance of the Service in relation to sickness absence management in 2009/10 and how this compared with performance to date in 2010/11 and which highlighted the position in respect of long term sickness in particular.

The report drew attention to the decrease in sickness rates from 10.18 days lost per person per year in 2008/09 to 8.02 days lost in 2009/10, a decrease of 21.2%. This significant reduction enabled the Service to achieve its target for the year of 9.55 days lost per person as well as its long term target to reduce the regional average rate of 9.0 days lost by 2010/11.

The Director of People and Organisational Development added that a decrease in sickness absence had been achieved across the region with an average of 7.9 days. This compared well to the average across the private sector of 7.4 days. It was noted that, as a result,, the Committee would be asked to consider revised targets for the Service on sickness absence in conjunction with the Corporate Plan for 2011/12, a report on which would be submitted for consideration later in 2010.

The Director of People and Organisational Development commented upon the reduction of mental health related sickness which had decreased from 24% of all sickness in 2008/09 to 14% in 2009/10. Long term absences were monitored on a monthly basis and Members of the Committee requested that, in future reports, information presented in respect of long term absence should highlight any absences which had been ongoing for a period longer than 12, 18 and 24 months to give greater clarity.

Reference was made to the point that there had been an increase in sickness absence for retained staff, however, and the position would be monitored in the future. It was noted that the Gartan system for retained staff which was being piloted in some areas in the Service currently included an availability component. This would also assist the Service in monitoring sickness absence.

Overall, the Committee welcomed the reduction in sickness absence and the action being taken to continue to achieve improvements in the future.

***HRMDC/6. Staff Survey**

The Committee received for information an update from the Director of People and Organisational Development in respect of the progress made to date with the Staff Survey in 2010.

Reference was made to the rate of return of the Surveys, which at 38%, had risen by 8% since 2008. This was largely due to the action which had been taken to increase participation, such as the payment of time for retained staff to complete the survey and the point that it had been demonstrated to staff that the Service did listen to points raised ("You talk, We listen" poster campaign) and acted upon them.

The Director of People and Organisational Development commented on a number of policies and interventions which had been implemented following the 2008 survey and made particular reference to the success of the Well@Work scheme in promoting health in the workplace. It was added that similar questions had been used to enable effective benchmarking of the surveys undertaken in 2008 and 2010. The results of the survey were being analysed by ORS and a report detailing the outcomes would be submitted to the Committee later in 2010.

Members of the Committee welcomed the report and the proactive approach taken to increase staff participation/engagement & involvement.

***HRMDC/7. The Working Time Directive and Proposed Changes to Legislation**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/11) that set out the potential impact of the proposed changes to legislation in relation to the Working Time Directive on the ability of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) to support service delivery.

The Director of People and Organisational Development emphasised the point that the Fire and Rescue Service needed a flexible workforce to deliver effective 24 hour emergency cover, and, in many Services across the UK, this was dependant on cover being supplied by a combination of both wholetime and retained employees. If the opt-out clause was rescinded, then Fire and Rescue Services would not be able to continue working in the same way and core functions may not be deliverable. This was particularly pertinent for Devon and Somerset which employed the largest number of retained staff in the country.

Members of the Committee shared the concerns expressed by the Service and suggested that a letter be drafted to be sent to constituent authorities and MPs to highlight the impact of the removal of the opt out clause.

Councillor Bown moved (and was seconded by Councillor Burridge-Clayton) that the recommendation in the report be amended as follows:

- (a) “that the deep concern at the potential impact on DSFRA of changes in the opt out clause be highlighted, and;
- (b) that a letter be sent to constituent authorities, MPs and MEPs to seek support for the stance taken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in respect of the opt out clause and highlighting the impact on the fire and rescue service of any changes in this legislation”.

Reference was made in addition to the point that ACFO Smith was the current lead officer for the National RDS Steering Group and that, via links with the Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CFOA), he was feeding information to the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services to identify the full impact of any change in this legislation on the delivery of front line services. Every opportunity was being taken to keep this issue on the agenda

RESOLVED

- (a) that the deep concern at the potential impact on DSFRA of changes in the opt out clause be highlighted, and;
- (b) that a letter be sent to constituent authorities, MPs and MEPs to seek support for the stance taken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in respect of the opt out clause and highlighting the impact on the fire and rescue service of any changes in this legislation.

***HRMDC/8. Goal 2 Corporate Plan Targets**

The Committee received for information a copy of report previously considered by the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority (ref. DSFRA/10/16) in respect of the performance of the Service in 2009/10 as measured against the targets for Goal 2 “to be an employer of choice” as included within the Corporate Plan 2010/11 to 2012/13. The Director of People and Organisational Development circulated the paper to highlight to the Committee the progress that was being made towards meeting the targets set.

Members of the Committee raised a concern that, whilst a labour force survey had indicated that the local minority ethnic working age population across Devon and Somerset was 5.29%, the Service had committed itself to a specific recruitment target, stating that, by 2013, 7.29% of all new joiners to the organisation would be from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The Director of People and Organisation Development reported that the Service had received a £35,000 grant from the Government as an incentive to assist with achieving the recruitment targets set. She referred to the positive action strategy “Stairway” which had been developed, amongst other things, as a tool to address the recruitment targets set within the Corporate Plan and highlighted the action that had been taken to date towards achievement of the targets. She added that it was accepted that this was a challenge, bearing in mind the current position of the service on recruitment, but she commented that every effort would be made to improve the attraction rate and appointment to vacancies with women and people from the minority ethnic groups.

***HRMDC/9. Health of the Organisation**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/12) that set out details of a new measure that had been developed as a means of monitoring “people” aspects of the organisation, which it was felt was inextricably linked with the overall health of the organisation. The measures included levels of discipline and grievance cases, trend analysis in bullying and harassment and for the turnover of staff, levels of stress and referrals to counselling and the collective relationships with Trade Unions.

The Director of People and Organisational Development stated that the introduction of this measure went beyond the absence management monitoring and was regarded as a means of contributing to the EFQM (Model of Excellence), for which a baseline assessment had already been undertaken. It was envisaged that this would also assist the organisation in achieving excellence in the future. Reference was made to the reduction in sickness absence due to mental health issues as reported within the Absence Management report (Minute HRMDC/x above refers) and it was suggested this was due largely to the efforts of the Service’s Welfare section, the Staff Supporter Network and the Counselling Services offered in both Devon and Somerset. It was noted that different recording practices were undertaken within Devon and Somerset and it was therefore suggested, that, for consistency, future statistics should be recorded in the same way.

Members of the Committee commented on the level of staff turnover and requested that additional information be included within future reports to the Committee to identify trends, particularly in the turnover of staff such as retained employees. The Director of People and Organisational Development added that the Service had also developed an Exit Interviews policy which would be piloted in due course.

NB. Minute HRMDC/10 below also refers.

***HRMDC/10. Achieving Excellence against the Equality Framework**

The Committee received for information a presentation given by the Director of People and Organisational Development which highlighted the results of the self assessment against the Equality Framework for Fire and Rescue Services which included, amongst other things:

- An overview of the Equality Framework for Fire and Rescue Services: Self Assessment document;
- The advantages of undertaking the self assessment with other Fire and Rescue Services regionally;
- The strengths of the organisation in respect of equality issues;
- The areas for improvement
- The proposal for the development of an action plan to address the areas for improvement that had been identified..

The Committee commended the Service on this excellent work and enquired as to how Members could engage with this. The Director of People and Organisational Development replied that it was envisaged that the Equality and Diversity Champion would lead the way forward with Member involvement in the future.

NB. Minute HRMDC/11 below refers.

HRMDC/11. Member Champion for Equality and Diversity - Role Profile

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/13) that set out a role profile for the Member Champion for Equality and Diversity and which sought the views of the Committee prior to its adoption..

The Committee commended the Service on the development of this role profile.

Councillor Healey indicated that Councillor Turner had indicated a willingness to undertake this role, the appointment to which would be confirmed by the full Authority at its next meeting.

RESOLVED that the Authority be recommended to approve the Role Profile for the Member Champion for Equality and Diversity as appended to report HRMDC/10/13.

***HRMDC/12. Determination of Membership of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure Stage 2 Panel**

At its extraordinary meeting on 25 March 2010, the Authority approved revisions to this Committee's Terms of Reference to enable it to establish a small panel of Members to determine issues under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Internal Dispute Resolution Procedures Stage 2. In view of the need to deal with one outstanding case as a matter of urgency, appointments to the Panel were initially made by the Authority but were subsequently reviewed by this Committee at its previous meeting (Minute HRMDC/18 refers).

Since that time, the membership of this Committee changed (upon the resignation of Councillor Wallace) and consequently, the Committee was recommended to appoint (from amongst its membership) 3 members to serve on the Panel until the first meeting of the Committee following the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2011.

RESOLVED that Councillors Bown, Boyd and Manning be appointed to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure Stage 2 Panel until the first meeting of this Committee following the Authority Annual Meeting in 2011 and that any substitutes (in accordance with Standing Order 36) should be taken from the membership of the Human Resources Management and Development Committee in the first instance..

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and concluded at 12.10hours.