

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

12 November 2010

Present:-

Councillors Cann (Chairman), Bown, Boyd, Burrige-Clayton and Manning.

Apologies:-

Councillors Mrs. Nicholson and Turner.

***HRMDC/18. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2010 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/19. 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.

***HRMDC/20. The Equality Act 2010 and Progress Report against the Single Equality Scheme "Making the Connections"**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/16) that gave a summary of the expected position in respect of the extended legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, together with details of the progress made against the Single Equality Scheme – Making the Connections" which was approved by the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority in May 2009.

The new Equality Act 2010 consolidated nine pieces of legislation and put into place a cross cutting legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Act created nine legally protected characteristics namely, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and finally, sexual orientation. The Act also created General Duties within the new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The General Duty to be implemented from April 2011 is:

"A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- Advance equality of opportunity (remove or minimise disadvantage, meet people's needs, take account of disabilities, encourage participation in public life;
- Foster good relations between people (tackle prejudice and promote understanding).

Within the General Duty, a number of specific duties were also set out surrounding transparency, engagement and equality impact assessment. The Act did not, however, prescribe the need for a specific equality scheme and therefore a decision will need to be taken in the future once the new equality objectives have been set and guidance has been issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

***HRMDC/21. Absence Management**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/10/17) that set out the overall performance of the Service in relation to sickness absence management in 2010/11 and which highlighted the position in relation to long term absence levels in particular.

The Committee noted that, at this point in time, performance in 2009/10 was at an average of 3.83 days absence per person compared with the actual level of 3.64 days/shifts lost per person in 2010/11. This was an improvement of 15.4% on the target level for 2010/11. Whilst this was on track to meet the year end target of 9.0 days/shifts lost per person, the figures for August and September 2010 had shown an increase and the trend was for sickness to increase in the second half of the year with winter illnesses. The increase was linked to the point that the long terms sickness rate for non uniformed staff had increased since August 2010. There were two members of staff that had been off sick for over 2 months and this had impacted on the performance in this area. In terms of type of sickness, the incidence of mental health issues was showing an increase in the current year compared with 2009/10, although musculoskeletal injury was still the most significant cause of absence for the Service. Work was being undertaken in this area to determine whether musculoskeletal injuries were occurring as on or off duty and what action could be undertaken to mitigate this position.

Reference was made to the measures that were being taken to reduce the levels of absence, including Wellbeing at Work initiatives, a guide to assist staff to cope with stress and further work in respect of return to work interviews. The Chairman referred to the position in respect of the return to work interviews and enquired as to whether any progress had been made with this. The Human Resources Manager advised that he had not been able to progress the training for Line Managers that had been proposed previously but that this would be pursued.

The Chairman moved (and was seconded by Councillor Boyd) that:

“in addition to noting the report, an update on the progress made in respect of return to work interviews be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting”.

This was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

- (a) That an update on the progress made in respect of return to work interviews be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting;
- (b) That, subject to (a) above, report HRMDC/10/17 be noted.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.00hours