

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

11 November 2011

Present:-

Councillor Cann (Chair), Bown, Boyd, Brooksbank and Wright

Apologies:-

Councillors Burridge-Clayton and Horsfall

The Chairman indicated that, at 11.00hours, the Committee would be joining with staff by the Flag Pole in front of Devon House for the two minute silence to mark the Armistice Day Remembrance.

***HRMDC/19. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2011 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/20. 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 declare any such interests at this time.

No interests were declared.

***HRMDC/21. Absence Management and Health of the Organisation**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/11/12) that set out details of the Service performance in respect of sickness absence and which also highlighted aspects linked to the Health of the Organisation. The areas covered included:

- 2011/12 sickness absence performance – the current level for 2011/12 was 3.89 days/shifts lost per person compared with the year when it was at an average of 3.67 days. This showed performance had declined by 5.8% for the same period in 2010/11, albeit that this was still an improvement to the position reported to the Committee at the previous meeting..
- Breakdown of long term sickness absence – there had been a significant increase in long term sickness absence over the period March to May 2011 which represented the highest levels since April 2008 but this dropped from June 2011 and is now more stable. The number of staff on long term sickness over 6 months had been 8 for six months but had increased to 10 staff in September 2011.
- Safety events – the number of safety events resulting in personal injury had decreased from 79 to 60 during the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 representing a decrease of 24%. Conversely, the number of days lost due to personal injury had increased from 341 to 368 over the same period.

- Mental health - it was recognised that stress was now the most common cause of long term sickness absence in the UK, with over half of public sector organisations reporting an increase in stress related absence over the last year. Within DSFRS, mental health has been second only to musculoskeletal as the highest cause of absence. It was noted that the level of counselling had increased dramatically in Somerset from 145 sessions in 2009/10 to 304 sessions in 2010/11 (an average of 4.6 sessions per person) but work was to be undertaken with the Counselling Service to see if any trends could be identified. The Well@Work Group was continuing to make strides in its work on stress management.
- Staff turnover – the level of staff turnover had dropped in 2011/12 in line with expectations as a result of the economic climate. The Service had lost 98 retained staff in 2010/11, however, due to a variety of reasons but notably personal reasons (32%) and no reason (20%). Exit interviews were carried out but the need to probe into these reasons more deeply was acknowledged.
- Discipline and grievance – there was no real trend to report in respect of discipline and grievance cases, with around 30 cases a year typically.
- Collective relationships – despite the threat of national industrial action relating to proposed pension changes (Minute HRMDC/22 below also refers), collective relationships were generally good.

***HRMDC/22. Consultation on Changes to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development (HRMDC/11/13) that provided information in respect of a consultation being undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in respect of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) and which sought a response on a number of questions posed within the document.

At this point, the Chair agreed to circulate documentation put forward by the Fire Brigades' Union at the meeting which suggested that, following a survey of its members, there may be a 27% drop out rate from the Schemes which could cost £283million in lost contributions. Taking this against the increase in contributions, FBU had suggested that this would result in a net loss of £210million.

The Director of People and Organisational Development stated that the Government had announced changes to the proposals for the pension schemes after the consultation document had been issued and that the Service needed to consider this and to be cautious in its response as a result. It was suggested that, in the light of this, the draft response that had been circulated with the papers should be amended and that this could be circulated to Members of the Committee for information. Councillor Boyd proposed (and Councillor Bown seconded):

“that the Director of People and Organisational Development, in consultation with the Chair of the Human Resources Management and Development Committee, be authorised to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation on the changes to the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme”.

The motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Director of People and Organisational Development, in consultation with the Chairman of the Human Resources Management and Development Committee, be authorised to respond on behalf of the Authority to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation on the changes to the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 10.45hours