

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

24 March 2017

Present:-

Councillors Bown (Chair), Burridge-Clayton, Chugg (Vice-Chair), Hill, Julian, Knight and Coles (sub Thomas)

* **HRMDC/20 Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2016 be signed as a correct record.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Service Improvement – (HRMDC/17/1) that set out the performance in respect of absence management within the organisation together with an update in respect of the wider initiatives being undertaken that contributed to the health of the organisation.

The key points highlighted were that sickness absence was currently 6.36 days lost (April to December 2017) as compared with 6.61 days for the same period in 2015/16 which was a slight improvement in performance. Reference was made to the new ME app that was displayed at the meeting which would enable staff to update their personal records on the system without needing to go through the HR department.

The Head of Human Resources also drew attention to the sickness absence app which indicated that there were 79 positions showing as off sick with 77 people absent as at 24 March 2017. Of these, 20 staff were absent due to long term sickness.

In terms of benchmarking information provided by the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) for 2015-16, the position for the Service was 9.2 days absent as compared with 9.8 days for the public sector as a whole and 6.5 days for the private sector. For all organisations, the average number of days absent was 7.5 days. The Committee expressed concern that the Service was still not achieving the improvement in sickness absence that was required given that the National Office for Statistics – labour market statistics for 2016 showed a rate equivalent to 4.3 days per worker. The Head of Human Resources replied that the Service had implemented a range of measures aimed at reducing sickness absence, particularly for musculoskeletal injuries and mental health. Councillor Julian referred to work undertaken by Devon & Cornwall Police in this area to reduce sickness absence and he enquired as to whether the Service had instigated similar actions in terms of diffusing straight after difficult incidents had occurred. He also stated that the Service should ensure that its staff were physically fit. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Improvement) replied that the Service was already redesigning its operational training and that there would be more emphasis on physical fitness in the future which would include staff undertaking training on their drill nights.

It was noted that the Service had established a Working Group that was looking at the levels of fitness and whether there was any direct impact to gender and age profiles so that it was able to provide the right levels of support to its staff. The Service was also looking at its equipment to see if any redesign was necessary for health and wellbeing purposes.

The Committee enquired if there was comparable sickness absence data available from Devon & Cornwall Police so that it could benchmark against another emergency service that would have similar issues. Information was also requested on the cost of sickness absence to the Service and it was requested that this be included within future reports to the Committee. It was felt that an improvement needed to be made to the performance on sickness absence so that this culture did not continue to be replicated with future new recruits.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Service continues to progress with developing a working environment that was conducive to a high performing, motivated and healthy workforce, and
- (b) That as part of the performance measures for People and Resources, this report be noted.

* **HRMDC/22 Workforce Culture, Diversity and Inclusion**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Service Improvement - (HRMD/17/2) that set out the progress that had been made by the Service in respect of changing its workforce culture, diversity and inclusive working practices, together with an outline of work that was being undertaken following receipt of the report from the Local Government Association (LGA) on “an inclusive service – the twenty-first century fire and rescue service”. Attention was drawn to the point that Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service was cited within this report as an example of good practice for its work undertaken in providing support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees through the development of the Fire Pride network.

The Committee noted that there was a significantly increased political expectation for fire & rescue services nationally with regard to workforce reform and reference was made in particular to a recent speech made by Brandon Lewis MP, Minister of State for Policing & Fire setting this out. The Government was expecting real and purposeful change and recognised that the roles of culture and inclusion were key to making positive transformational change in the fire & rescue service. There was a number of questions posed at the back of the LGA document and it was intended that a report covering the points raised therein would be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.

* **HRMDC/23 Strategic Workforce Planning**

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Improvement – (HRMDC/17/3) that set out the current position for wholetime staff together with the Service’s forecast for potential turnover for 2017/18 to 2019/20.

It was noted that the Service was currently 9.5 wholetime firefighters down on establishment with this forecast to be 98 by 2019/20. A campaign had been undertaken recently to recruit 16 new firefighters though. Work was also being undertaken in respect of on call firefighter recruitment and retention where the turnover was higher. A number of pilots had been undertaken, the results of which would be analysed and fed into the process for the new Integrated Risk Management Plan. Additional work was also being undertaken into what the expectations of a modern on call firefighter might be.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Service considers its Strategic Workforce Planning on a quarterly basis to facilitate the forecasting of its medium to long term staffing requirements;
- (b) That the Committee be informed and contributes to the Strategic Workforce planning process.

*NB. Minute *HRMDC/24 below also refers.*

* **HRMDC/24 Retirement & Re-employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Improvement – (HRMDC/17/4) that set out details of two applications that had been received for retirement and/or re-employment for approval in accordance with the Authority's Pay Policy Statement for 2017/18.

RESOLVED that the requests for retirement & re-employment as identified in paragraph 2.5 of this report be approved.

* **HRMDC/25 On Call Availability Pilots**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Improvement – (HRMDC/17/5) that set out the position in respect of the evaluation of On Call pilots that had been running within Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service.

It was noted that the full evaluation of these pilots, once completed would, along with other evidence, form the basis of a business case to be developed in line with the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

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