

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

7 December 2015

Present:-

Councillors Bown (Chair), Burrridge-Clayton, Chugg, Dyke (vice Thomas), Radford (vice Horsfall), Redman (vice Knight) and Wheeler

***HRMDC/14. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2015 be signed as a correct record.

***HRMDC/15. Equalities Strategy - 'Safer Lives, Brighter Futures' Monitoring Report June 2015 to November 2015**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Operations (HRMDC/15/9) that provided an update in respect of the work undertaken in accordance with the Equalities Strategy 'Safer Lives, Brighter Futures' during the period June to November 2015.

The report covered:

- The progress made to date in terms of performance against the Equalities Strategy;
- Proposals for a new Equalities Strategy for 2016 to 2020;
- An overview of the results of the employee survey undertaken in 2015;
- Work undertaken to promote dyslexia awareness;
- A review of the bullying and harassment policy which would include retitling this to 'Respect and Dignity in the Workplace';
- The recruitment of community advocates in the Plymouth area with appropriate language skills.

***HRMDC/16. Absence Management**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People & Commercial Services (HRMDC/15/10) that set out the sickness absence levels for staff to date since combination in 2007, together with comparisons against the 2014/15 performance and benchmarking data for other fire and rescue services nationally.

It was noted that the current level of sickness absence was 5.57 days/shifts lost per person for the period April to October 2015 as opposed to 5.16 days/shifts lost in the same period in 2014/15. Since the previous meeting of the Committee in September 2015, long term sickness absence had increased, particularly within the support staff category with 10 employees absent in October 2015 although this number had reduced subsequently. In Fire Control, 2 employees were absent due to long term sickness although there had been none up to August 2015. For wholetime uniformed staff, there was an increase to 17 employees currently off sick when typically, there would be between 10 to 20 employees off at any one time.

The Human Resources Manager drew attention to the point that the Service had provided information for inclusion within a National Fire & Rescue Service Occupational Health Performance Report along with 26 other fire & rescue services. This report was published each quarter and for Quarter 2, the results showed that the main causes of sickness (nationally) for both wholetime and on call staff were musculoskeletal and mental health issues. The Committee noted that the report for Quarter 2 identified that the Service was in the higher quartile for sickness absence rates.

Attention was drawn to the work that was being undertaken by the Service to alleviate sickness absence within the organisation. Discussions were being held with the Service's Occupational Health providers to ascertain how they could assist the Service in encouraging a quicker return to work for staff who were long term sick. Other work being undertaken with staff who were long term sick included monthly reviews and more contact and discussion with employees, better access to restricted duties and the analysis of data to inform the development of programmes and actions to help prevent sickness.

Reference was made to the audit undertaken by the Devon Audit Partnership that had identified some control issues with the sickness recording systems. The Director of Corporate Services advised that the Service's new Information Technology Strategy was working towards changing the architecture of the existing systems to make the reporting of performance management information (including sickness absence) more dynamic and that it would take time and resources to achieve the desired outcomes. , It was emphasised, however, that the reduction of sickness absence was a priority for the Service and the Action Plan that had been instigated was working towards this aim.

RESOLVED that the Service continues with the Action Plan directed towards reducing down sickness absence.

***HRMDC/17. Retirement & Re-Employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of People & Commercial Services (HRMDC/15/11) that set out requests that had been received by uniformed members of staff for retirement and re-employment in accordance with the requirements of the Authority's Pay Policy statement.

It was noted that three requests for retirement and re-employment had been received since the previous meeting of the Committee in September 2015 but that the expressions of interest made by a Watch Manager and Station Manager in Western Command were not supported by senior management. The only request that was supported was that of a Firefighter in Western Command.

RESOLVED that the request for retirement & re-employment of the Firefighter identified in paragraph 2.4 of report HRMDC/15/11 be approved.

***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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in:

- Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act, namely information relating to individuals;

- Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act, namely information likely to reveal the identity of individuals; and
- Paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act, namely information relating to consultations or negotiations or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with a labour relations matter between the Authority and representative bodies currently recognised by the Authority.

***HRMDC/19. Working with Trade Unions**

(An item considered in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded from the meeting).

The Committee received an oral report given by the Director of People and Commercial Services that provided an update on the Trade Unions Facilities arrangements and the background to this. It was noted that the Service had been notified recently of an impending change to the existing arrangements for union officials for the Fire Brigades' Union. One of the officials of the Devon and Somerset branch of the Fire Brigades' Union had indicated a desire to step down from the local branch role.

A discussion ensued on this matter whereupon Councillor Chugg **MOVED**, seconded by Councillor Dyke:

“that the Director of People and Commercial Services enters into negotiations with the National Fire Brigades' Union as directed at the meeting”.

Upon a vote (6 for, 0 against, 1 abstention), the motion was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that the Director of People and Commercial Services enters into negotiations with the National Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) as directed at the meeting.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.32hours