

## MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 7 JUNE 2016

Present: Councillors P Downing, C Atkins, M Ayub, Y Waheed (Chair) and  
J Mingay

ACO Z Evans

### 16-17/HR/1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

### 16-17/HR/2 Election of Vice Chair 2016/17

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Mingay be elected Vice Chair of the Policy and Challenge Group for 2016/17.

### 16-17/HR/3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

### 16-17/HR/4 Communications

There were no communications.

### 16-17/HR/5 Minutes

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2016 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

### 16-17/HR/6 Terms of Reference

Members were requested to review the Policy and Challenge Group's terms of reference.

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer referred to the proposed addition to the Group's terms of reference relating to the reporting mechanism from the Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee to the Fire and Rescue Authority arising from an internal audit. This set out that *'the Group has no delegated power to take decisions but its Minutes are submitted to the FRA under a covering report from the Group's Chair with any recommendations.'*

ACO Evans suggested that pensions, terms and conditions of service and fitness and wellbeing be added to the Group's terms of reference as these had not previously been included.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Terms of Reference for the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group be updated to include a statement that the Group reported to the Fire and Rescue Authority.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to include pensions, terms and conditions of service and fitness and wellbeing to the Group's terms of reference.

## 16-17/HR/7 Human Resources Performance Monitoring Year End Report and Programmes to date

ACO Evans submitted the 2015/16 year-end report on Human Resources programme, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets. No new Human Resources projects had been added in the period and the improvements to the HR and payroll system was reported to both this Group and the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group under the Business Systems Improvement project. The project was progressing well following the approval of additional funding by the FRA at its meeting on 21 October 2015 and no extensions to the project were being sought.

In relation to the year-end performance, an exception report had been submitted in relation to EQ2 (recruitment of minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) as the indicator was 15% under target. ACO Evans advised that the recruitment process and positive action initiatives would be reviewed during the current year.

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, confirmed that he would be undertaking this work and reporting back to the Group when this was completed.

Members were asked to feed in any information about any particular contacts/media outlets that should be used to reach the county's black and minority ethnic communities.

ACO Evans highlighted the performance against HR1 (the percentage of working time lost due to sickness), against which the Service had achieved 3.55% against a target of 3.6%, as an indicator of strong organisational health.

GC J Clayton reported on the training and development indicators that had not achieved their targets. He advised that T7 (percentage of Flexible Duty Officers that have attended an assessed Incident Command Assessment within the last 12 months) had missed target by 6%. This equated to two individuals who had not been assessed within the time period as the result of sickness and unforeseen personal circumstances. He confirmed that these individuals had now been assessed.

In relation to T8b and T8c (Percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programme completed by RDS operational (b) and Control (c) personnel via PDRPro within last 12 months), GC J Clayton advised that although the target for RDS personnel was 1.94% under target, performance had improved from the previous year and it was hoped that this upward trend would continue. One Control Watch had been performing under the expected level and this was being addressed through the performance management process.

Performance against H3 (number of 24 hour cover periods lost to accidents per 1000 Retained Duty System (Full time Equivalent) employees) had been adversely affected by an injury maintained in the second quarter of the year and the individual was still off work with a knee injury. This had equated to an additional 92 days/shifts lost during the fourth quarter.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the progress made on Human Resources Programmes and Performance be acknowledged.

### 16-17/HR/8 New Internal Audit Reports Completed to date

ACO Evans introduced the follow-up audit. It was the internal audit opinion that management had demonstrated reasonable progress in implementing the agreed management actions. Seven of the ten management actions had been fully implemented, with one superseded and replaced with a new management action. The remaining actions were in progress with one due to be completed by the end of the current month.

**RESOLVED:**

That the internal audit report be received and the associated management comments/actions which will be added to the Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring report be endorsed.

### 16-17/HR/9 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced her report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. No extensions had been requested and all the actions were on schedule for completion by the original deadline date.

**RESOLVED:**

That progress made to date against the action plans be acknowledged.

### 16-17/HR/10 Absence Year End Report

Ms R Barker, Senior HR Adviser, gave a presentation on Employee Absence Year End 2015-16. This included the performance for the year, support in place for managers and employees to reduce the level of sickness absence, and plans for 2016-17 to improve performance still further.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, the Service's performance was 3.55% against a target of 3.6%. The target was based on the CIPD public sector average.

In the reporting year, the majority of absence had been caused by musculoskeletal injuries, poor mental health and coughs, colds and flu. The cost of absence to the Service, not including agency and acting costs, in 2015/16 was £644,183. This was a reduction from 2011/12 of £119,497.

The Service had a Sickness Absence Management Policy in place as well as a range of support mechanisms for both managers and employees. This included training, access to the Employee Assistance Programme, hot spot and case management meetings and an in-house Occupational Health practitioner. The Policy was designed to be proactive and preventative, with ill-health retirement and dismissals considered as a last resort.

The Employee Assistance Programme was externally provided and was available to Service staff and Members of the Authority on a 24/7/365 basis. This provided practical and emotional support on a wide range of issues. The programme had provided face to face appointments and 19 helpline requests over the period, with 50 members of staff accessing information and support online.

The Programme continued to be promoted internally as it also provided a forum to develop skills and build resilience.

Ms Barker advised that plans for the future included the continuation of mental health awareness training and the introduction of a new HR and payroll system. The Sickness Absence Management Policy was due for review in the current year and the unions would be involved in this process.

She also referred to the Government's pledge to review absence management systems across the public sector to reduce the £4.5 billion national cost of sickness absence.

In response to a question, the Group was advised that the Service no longer provided in-house flu vaccinations as it had not been cost-effective in terms of take-up and impact on the number of working days lost to sickness. However, Members were assured that this situation was being kept under review.

Any issues regarding bullying or harassment in the workplace that were identified through the Occupation Health processes would be referred to HR for case management.

It was noted that an Employee Survey would be undertaken in 2017. One of the recommendations arising from the previous survey was the development of a staff network to provide a forum for members of staff to discuss their concerns.

**RESOLVED:**

That the presentation be noted.

16-17/HR/11 Draft 2016/17 Corporate Health and Safety Objectives

SOC T Rogers introduced his report on progress made on the health and safety objectives set for 2015/16 and the proposed health and safety objectives for 2016/17.

He reported on the campaign to reduce musculoskeletal injuries that had been undertaken in 2015/16 in recognition of the high percentage of sick days resulting from this type of injury.

Work continued to implement the actions arising from the RoSPA audit in January 2014, with all actions due for completion by April 2017.

SOC T Rogers highlighted the proposed health and safety objectives relating to the development of an in-house Accident Investigation Course and the replacement of the Service's Thermal Imaging Cameras. There were also a number of objectives that were continuing from 2015/16.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress made in relation to the Health and Safety Objectives set and approved for 2015/16 be acknowledged and the eight proposed Health and Safety Objectives for 2016/17 be endorsed.

16-17/HR/12 Occupational Accidents Year End Report

SOC T Rogers presented a report on Service occupational accidents from 1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016. There had been a total of 84 accidents in the year which was a slight increase from the 73 accidents recorded in 2014/15. The majority of these related to musculoskeletal injuries and slips, trips and falls. There had been 501 days lost to accidents during the year, although it was noted that 313 of these days related to one incident related to the use of the rural water tender.

The Group was assured that all accidents were investigated. 17 of the accidents had occurred during operational activities, 33 during training and 34 during routine activities.

In response to a comment, ACO Evans advised that the accidents were not broken down by age but conceded that the Service had an ageing workforce and that the accident statistics could be broken down by age if Members felt it would be useful to have this information.

GC J Clayton reported that the number of accidents occurring during training activities had increased as the number of training courses had increased significantly and not all of the required training, particularly the safety critical training, took place in a controlled training environment.

In response to a question, SOC T Rogers reported that the Service had responded to 46 fewer operational incidents in 2015/16 than 2014/15.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be endorsed.

2. That it be acknowledged that the total number of days lost due to workplace accidents had been significantly impacted by one accident which resulted in 313 of the total 501 days lost.

### 16-17/HR/13 Annual Report on Provision of External Training

GC J Clayton presented the annual report on the provision of external training. The report provided details of the cost and range of training provided as well as the suppliers used. The budget for training and development for 2015/16 had been £212,300 before earmarked reserves were applied. The total spend for the year was £269,012.

The budget for 2016/17 included provision for 18 new recruits to attend the foundation skills course provided by the Fire Services College.

GC J Clayton advised that savings had been made by developing and delivering Fire Investigation and Hazmat training internally. An e-learning module on Basic First Aid training had also been developed and would be provided internally from the current year. The provision of training was also regularly reviewed and cars used for training purposes were now being provided by a different company than in 2013/14 at a reduced cost to the Service.

Councillor Downing suggested that the Fire and Rescue Service approach Bedfordshire Police for use of cars confiscated through the Proceeds of Crime Act which should be able to be provided at no cost.

GC J Clayton drew Members' attention to the list of training courses provided through collaboration with other Fire and Rescue Services. Work to identify further collaborative opportunities with a wide range of partners continued.

The Service had recently received accreditation from Skills for Justice for the provision of 'blue light' driver training and this provided an income generation opportunity.

It was noted that all members of staff, in both operational and support roles, were able to access training through an FSRT35 written request. Of 158 applications submitted in 2015/16, 154 had been supported.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the report be acknowledged.

### 16-17/HR/14 Draft Public Sector Equality Scheme Review

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, submitted a report on the progress made against the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan 2012-16 and outlining a new set of objectives/actions for 2016-20 which would be submitted for internal and external consultation.

Out of the 25 objectives set for 2012-16, 23 had been completed and the two outstanding areas of work would be rolled over into the next four year period. These were a peer assessment under the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and further development of the website to exceed the requirements for accessibility contained within the World Wide Web Consortium.

The six objectives for 2016-17 were measuring performance against the equality framework, improve public access, equality and diversity training, improve equality monitoring, embed equality in commissioning and procurement activity and improving standards and develop new partnerships. There were 17 specific actions associated with those objectives.

It was suggested that Mr Jones contact Police Sergeant James Hart who was delivering Hate Crime training for Bedfordshire Police.

As discussed earlier in the meeting in relation to the employee survey, Mr Jones advised that a staff equalities group would be established.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be received and the significant progress made over the last four year period and the positive attitude of the Service in addressing equality issues be recognised.

16-17/HR/15 Fitness, Best Practice Guidance

Ms R Barker presented her report on the recently published Firefighter Fitness Best Practice Guide. This was not mandatory but a guide for fire and rescue services to have processes in place to assist firefighters in maintaining the necessary physical fitness levels to undertake their roles until normal pensionable age.

Members were advised that the Service had been identified as one in which notable practice was currently being undertaken in relation to firefighter fitness and that the organisation was in a good position to build on its current practice and make further improvements.

Ms Barker reported that there was ongoing work nationally to develop an occupational fireground assessment which may result in separate assessments to test for operational fitness that could enable firefighters to continue operational work, such as hose running, equipment carrying and casualty evacuation, until normal pensionable age.

Areas for improvement within the Service included female firefighter fitness and recommendations were set out in the report to address this.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the recommendations listed in Appendix A of the report be approved.
2. That it be acknowledged that Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was one of the services identified in the guidance as demonstrating notable practice.

16-17/HR/16 Firefighter Recruitment Selection and Training

GC J Clayton provided an update on the wholetime firefighter recruitment process. This was the first recruitment and selection process that the Service had undertaken since 2009. Since that time, vacancies had been filled through the transfer process, with 33 firefighters joining the Service in this way.

In 2016, the Service would be recruiting 26 firefighters as a result of identified operational need and succession planning. New recruits would be enrolled on an 8 week course at the Fire Services College, with transfers completing a 3 week transferee course.

The recruitment process began in 2015 with an online application. Out of 655 initial interest log-ins, 468 applications had been submitted. This was fewer than in previous recruitment campaigns as applicants were required to live within 10 miles of the Bedfordshire borders. In addition, all 136 individuals on the Positive Action list were contacted to invite them to Positive Action events and inform them of the recruitment campaign. 43 individuals on the list showed interest in applying for the posts, 26 of whom were successful at application stage.

Overall, 300 individuals were shortlisted for the four online tests, with 195 passing all 4 tests and progressing to the practical tests. After the practical tests, 142 were progressed to the interview stage. 133 individuals attended interviews with 73 successful.

18 new recruits were selected and 8 firefighters were brought in on transfer. Those successful at interview stage were put on a waiting list for any future recruitment campaigns.

In response to a question, GC J Clayton advised that the practical tests included equipment carry, ladder lifts and use of breathing apparatus (BA).

The Group recognised that the selection process had been developed to ensure that only the highest calibre of candidate were offered the available posts.

ACO Evans explained that new recruits progressed up pay categories from training firefighter, to firefighter in development to competent firefighter and it could take three years to reach the pay band for competent firefighter.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be acknowledged.

16-17/HR/17 Corporate Risk Register

SOC T Rogers presented his report on the Corporate Risk Register. He reported that there were no changes to individual risk ratings in the Corporate Risk Register and provided an update to CRR40.

**RESOLVED:**

That the development of the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Human Resources be noted and approved.

16-17/HR/18 Work Programme 2016/17

Members received the Work Programme for 2016/17.

In response to a question, ACO Evans advised that there was nothing to report at present in relation to joint working and collaboration and that this was reported to the full Fire and Rescue Authority meetings.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Work programme be agreed.
2. That the effort and time put into producing the reports for this meeting by Officers be acknowledged.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm