

**MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP
MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2017**

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

ACO Z Evans, Robert Jones, Pixley and SOC G Jeffery

16-17/HR/28 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Atkins. SOC T Rogers was also unable to attend the meeting.

16-17/HR/29 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

16-17/HR/30 Communications

There were no communications.

16-17/HR/31 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2016 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

16-17/HR/32 Human Resources Performance Monitoring 2016/17 Quarter 2 and Programmes to date

ACO Evans submitted the report for the second quarter of 2016/17 on Human Resources programmes, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.

No new projects had been added during the reporting period and there were no issues to report in relation to the existing projects.

ACO Evans presented the performance report for the quarter. She advised that the figure reported against EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the Retained Duty System to be women) would be clarified and an email would be sent to Members.

EQ1b (percentage of new entrants to the Wholetime Duty System to be women) had exceeded the target of 5%. 14.81% had been achieved against the indicator. Members were advised that four of the nineteen new recruits were female.

Performance against EQ2 (recruitment of minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) had also improved from the previous quarter. This indicator had missed its target for the first quarter. 16.22% had been achieved for the second quarter against a target of 13%.

HR1 (the percentage of working time lost due to sickness) was missing target for the quarter. This was the first time this indicator had not been reported as green for a number of years.

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, reported that data analysis had identified that there had been a spike in whole time long-term sickness during the quarter. A number of the individuals concerned had returned to work during the third quarter and two had left the employment of the Service. It was anticipated that performance should improve in the next quarter and the situation would continue to be monitored.

ACO Evans highlighted the strong performance against HR3a and HR3b which measured the percentage of returned appraisal documents to Human Resources within 3 months of the reporting year. This demonstrated the strong commitment of managers to the appraisal process.

SOC A Peckham reported on the training indicators. T1-T4, measuring safety critical training, had all achieved target levels for the quarter.

T5 (percentage of station based operational Emergency Care for Fire and Rescue trained personnel that have attended a requalification course within the last three years) was just under target. The Service requirement was 60% or more of personnel trained at each Station. Overall the level was 80% but qualified staff were not distributed evenly across the stations and two Retained Duty System stations were not achieving 60%. The target would not be met until all stations met the requirement. Work was ongoing with the relevant Station Commanders to improve performance against this indicator and improvement was expected by the end of the performance year.

T6 (the percentage of station based operational Working at Height Operators that have attended a Working at Height recertification assessment within the last three years) was also missing target, although Members were reminded that the target had been increased from 70% to 98% for this performance year. Ten courses were scheduled during the year and it was hoped that performance against the indicator would improve in the third quarter.

T8(b) and T8(c) which measured the percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programme completed by RDS operational personnel (b) and Control personnel (c) via PDRPro within the last 12 months were reporting as amber for the quarter. SOC Peckham expressed confidence that these indicators would meet their targets by the end of the performance year.

Mr A Pixley, the Service's Health and Safety Adviser, reported on H3 (number of 24 hour cover periods lost to accidents per 1000 Retained Duty System (Full Time Equivalent) employees). This indicator had missed its target as the result of one injury which had occurred in 2015/16 and had resulted in the affected individual having over a year off of work. The individual had only recently returned to work. It was noted that if the cover periods lost attributed to this individual were removed from the performance data, the actual figure would be zero and the target would have been met.

ACO Evans commented that consideration could be given at the target setting meeting so that exceptions such as this one could be highlighted and reported separately to enable Members to maintain an overview of overall performance.

The view was expressed that consideration should also be given to reporting the data in terms of 100 employees, rather than 1000 as was current practice. This would be reviewed for the next round of target setting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress made on Human Resources Programmes and Performance be acknowledged.
2. That Members be emailed with the confirmed quarter 2 performance figure for EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the Retained Duty System to be women).

16-17/HR/33 Audit and Governance Action Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced her report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. The two actions arising from the internal audit of Training and Development had been completed subject to follow up audit.

RESOLVED:

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

16-17/HR/34 Safety Climate Survey

Mr A Pixley, the Service's Health and Safety Adviser, gave a presentation on the safety climate survey that was taking place from 3 January to 13 February 2017. The undertaking of such a survey was one of the Service's health and safety objectives for 2016/17.

A safety climate survey was a tool that could be used to identify gaps and weaknesses in the management of health and safety in an organisation. The survey had been developed by the Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) and consisted of 40 statements related to 8 factors. Respondents were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. There were also a number of demographic questions and three free text questions, including one which asked for suggestions to improve health and safety within the Service.

A number of other fire and rescue services had undertaken the survey and this allowed the Service to benchmark the responses received against other fire and rescue services. There may also be an opportunity to benchmark against other emergency services, although this would have to be investigated further.

The Group was advised that reports could be run following the closure of the survey. There were also plans to conduct a health and safety roadshow to the stations to discuss the results.

In response to questions, the Health and Safety Adviser advised that the Service had purchased a five year licence from the HSL for £1500. The intention was to undertake another survey in two years' time to measure progress.

ACO Evans reported that the response rate for the employee survey was 42% and it was hoped that a similar return rate would be achieved for this survey. The challenges of engaging with RDS staff were recognised and efforts would be made to encourage RDS staff to respond to the survey.

The survey was completed anonymously and the results would be reported to this Group at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be acknowledged.
2. That Members of the Group be sent an electronic version of the survey for information.

16-17/HR/35 Public Sector Equality Duty Report

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, introduced the fifth Annual Workforce Data Report providing an overview of the Service's equality and diversity employment monitoring data as at 31 March 2016.

Members' attention was drawn to the Executive Summary. As at 31 March 2016, the Service employed 581 people. 61 employees left the Service during the year, 42.1% of these as a result of early/normal retirement. Only 17.8% of the 123 female employees were firefighters. There had been a decrease in the percentage of staff describing themselves as having a disability. The percentage of staff not declaring their religion or belief had decreased from 19.9% in 2014/15 to 11.7% in 2015/16. 6.3% of the workforce declared that they were from a minority ethnic group. This was a similar figure to previous years.

In response to a question on the 14.5% decrease in the number of wholetime firefighters referred to in the report, ACO Evans advised that the reduction in the establishment resulting from changes to the crewing arrangements at Toddington Community Fire Station and the introduction of 24 hour shifts which had been phased over a number of years so that the reduction in posts would be created by natural turnover. The reduction in the number of wholetime firefighters was similar to other fire and rescue services as published in the National Workforce data reviewed by Members at the last FRA meeting.

In relation to the percentage of customer satisfaction surveys that had been returned, SOC G Jeffery explained that there were a number of factors that had resulted in the reduction, including the decrease in the number of incidents attended. Work was ongoing to identify ways to increase the percentage of returned surveys in the context of reduced capacity within the Service. One of the possible solutions was to improve the interactivity of the Service's website to facilitate response via the website.

The Chair commented on the fact that the majority of employees who had been off on maternity leave had been supported to return to work and highlighted the number of Home Fire Safety Checks that had been completed in the homes of vulnerable residents.

A Member suggested that text be added to the introduction of the report to explain the inclusion of service delivery information. ACO Evans added that one of the Equality Act requirements was to provide information on the characteristics of the individuals receiving the service.

RESOLVED:

That the report be approved, subject to the inclusion of text explaining the reasons for the reduction in the number of whole time staff and an explanation for the inclusion of the service delivery element of the report.

16-17/HR/36 Equality Handbook

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, submitted the Service's Equality Handbook. This in-house document had been developed for staff and replaced the previous booklet that had been externally produced and was not service specific. The handbook demonstrated the Service's commitment to equality and diversity as well as setting out expected standards of behaviour and was available online for staff, with hard copies also being available.

It was suggested that the handbook be circulated to all Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority for information at its next meeting on 9 February 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the Equality Handbook be acknowledged.

16-17/HR/37 Corporate Risk Register

SOC A Peckham submitted the review of the Corporate Risk Register in relation to Human Resources. There had been no changes to risk ratings. Two risks in the Register had been updated.

CRR25 (if operational personnel either individually or collectively at any or all levels do not meet the minimum level of competence to safely deal with the full range of incidents which may be encountered, particularly areas of competencies relating to- Incident Command – Use of Breathing Apparatus – Compartment Fire Behaviour – Water Related Incidents – High-Rise incidents – Work at Height then there is the potential to cause significant injury or even deaths to our staff): nineteen new firefighters had been recruited and had recently completed a Skills for Justice accredited foundation course with the Fire Service College. They had now been posted to stations and would continue with their development programmes. Improvements had been made to PDRPro, including the ability for the individuals to monitor their own records and to the audit and review capabilities of the system.

CRR40 (if there is a retirement of a large number of operational officers over a short period of time then we lose significant operational and managerial experience within the Service which could ultimately affect our service delivery and wider corporate functionality in the shorter term): functional heads had met to consider a four year recruitment profile in line with the Service's Medium Term Financial Strategy. Two individuals had recently been appointed to Group Manager/Station Manager posts and there had been an increase in the number of employees applying for technical examinations.

RESOLVED:

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

16-17/HR/38 Review of HRPCGs Effectiveness

The Policy and Challenge Group considered the following overarching questions:

- I. Does the Group consider they have been effective and discharged their responsibility in regard to the Group's terms of reference?
- II. Considering the Group's terms of reference are there any areas that have not been considered and should be addressed?
- III. Does the Group consider any training and development would assist them with the areas of work of the Group?

Members agreed that the Group had been effective in discharging its responsibility in regard to its terms of reference and that there were no areas within the terms of reference that had not been considered and should be addressed. There were no requests for additional training and development.

The view was expressed that, given the high performance of the Service, the number of meetings of the Policy and Challenge Groups could be reduced to three times a year. It was acknowledged that this would have to be agreed by the full Fire and Rescue Authority.

RESOLVED:

1. That the discussion of the Group's effectiveness as set out in this Minute be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 17 January 2017 to review the Fire Authority's effectiveness in 2016/17.
2. That consideration be given to reducing the number of meetings of Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee given the high level of performance achieved by the Service.

16-17/HR/39 Review of Work Programme 2016/17

Members received the Group's updated Work Programme for 2016/17. It was noted that the targets for 2017/18 would be set at the Group's next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be received.

The meeting ended at 11.13 am