

**MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP  
MEETING HELD ON 28 JUNE 2018**

Present: Councillors C Atkins, D Franks, T Khan and J Mingay

ACO Z Evans, SOC A Peckham, Ms D Clarke, Mr A Pixley and  
Mr R Jones

18-19/HR/1 Apologies

- 1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Y Waheed. In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Mingay was elected Chair for the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Mingay be elected Chair for the meeting.

18-19/HR/2 Election of Vice Chair

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Mingay be elected Vice Chair of the Policy and Challenge Group for 2018/19.

18-19/HR/3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interests.

18-19/HR/4 Communications

- 4.1 There were no communications.

18-19/HR/5 Minutes

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2018 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/HR/6 Review of Terms of Reference

- 6.1 Members received the Policy and Challenge Group's terms of reference for review.
- 6.2 ACO Evans advised that, arising from an internal audit, it had been suggested that the annual review of the terms of reference be set out in the document and that it be specified that the Policy and Challenge Group was not a decision making body but could make onward recommendations to the Full Authority.
- 6.3 It was noted that following the Authority's annual general meeting, there were no longer any Members from Central Bedfordshire Council on this Policy and Challenge Group.

**RESOLVED:**

That the terms of reference be updated to specify that they are reviewed annually and that the Policy and Challenge Group is not a decision making body but can make onward recommendations to the full Fire and Rescue Authority.

18-19/HR/7 Human Resources Programme and Performance Monitoring 2017/18 Quarter 4 and Programmes to date

- 7.1 ACO Evans submitted the 2017/18 year-end report on the Human Resources programme, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.
- 7.2 ACO Evans reported that, whilst the HR/Payroll System and Service Project was RAG rated as Amber, this was only due to cost overruns in Phase 1. The project had been very successful and the Service now had an integrated payroll and HR system that was fit for purpose. All synchronisations had now all been completed.
- 7.3 The Group's attention was drawn to the year-end performance report. Strong performance had been achieved against EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women) and EQ1b (percentage of new entrants to the whole time operational duty system to be women), with 4 female retained duty system fire fighters and 2 whole time female fire fighters starting with the Service during the year. Looking forward into the performance year 2018/19, 3 out of 9 potential candidates for recruitment to the retained duty system were female.
- 7.4 EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) had missed its target, with only 5 black and minority ethnic staff recruited out of a total 81 new staff. The Service continued to focus on improving performance in this area.
- 7.5 The Service had performed well against the indicators measuring parity in retention rates between both black and minority ethnic employees (EQ3) and men and women (operational staff) (EQ4).
- 7.6 It was noted that approximately 60% of staff took up the offer of an exit interview when leaving the employment of the Service. A number of individuals had cited work-life balance as the primary reason for leaving. Individuals were offered the opportunity to have their exit interviews conducted by someone who was not their line manager. All concerns raised in exit interviews were fully investigated.
- 7.7 In Quarter 3, of 49 leavers, 26 accepted an exit interview.
- 7.8 In response to a question, SOC A Peckham confirmed that the Service used a variety of recruitment methods, including social media campaigns and targeted positive action events, to encourage applications from underrepresented groups. Different methods of engagement had been considered and the Service was working with its colleagues in the Police to learn from their recent successful recruitment campaigns.
- 7.9 ACO Evans referred to the coffee mornings, "have a go" days and the all female fire crew that were some of the methods used to encourage applications from women and individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 7.10 Councillor T Khan volunteered to provide a list of organisations working with young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds so that these could be engaged with during positive action and recruitment campaigns.
- 7.11 Ms D Clarke, the Head of Human Resources, advised that the Service was recruiting to a new post of Positive Action Officer, and that part of this role was to identify further

groups to engage with in order to make recruitment more representative of the communities of Bedfordshire.

- 7.12 She also reported that the performance against HR1 (the percentage of working time lost to sickness) had achieved 3.73% against a target of 4.3%. This was an improvement upon the previous year's performance.
- 7.13 HR2b (turnover excluding retirement or dismissals – retained only) had missed its target by 87%. It was noted that turnover was high amongst on-call firefighters as it was a significant commitment for individuals for whom the Service was not their primary employer. A number of leavers had indicated that on call duties had an adverse impact on their work-life balance, and work was ongoing to produce more flexible employment contracts to improve retention rates.
- 7.14 Positive performance against HR3 (the percentage of returned appraisal documents (all staff)) was highlighted. 92.8% of appraisal documents had been returned.
- 7.15 The Head of Human Resources reported that, following the agreement of Members at the Group's last meeting, the Occupational Health indicators were not being reported on as new national guidance for fitness testing had been introduced in 2017, following which there had been a period of extensive consultation with the Fire Brigades Union. A new Policy had been introduced in 2018 and performance would be reported in the 2018/19 performance year.
- 7.16 SOC A Peckham reported on performance against the training indicators. These remained stretch targets. 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) had missed its target by 6%. This equated to only 3 Sections/Watches that were below target and an additional course had recently been run for nominees from 2 of those 3 Stations/Watches.
- 7.17 T6 (percentage of station based operational Working at Height Operators that have attended a Working at Height recertification assessment within the last three years) had only missed its target by 1%.
- 7.18 T8b (percentage of Retained Duty System personnel attainment in maintaining core, operational safety critical training modules within a rolling 12 month period) was only 2% under target but significant improvement had been demonstrated against the 5 year average. It was noted that around 30 tactical operational learning documents had been published during the year and that a full review of all learning materials was taking place.
- 7.19 In response to a question, the Group was advised that the Compartment Fire Behaviour course was run at London Luton Airport and allowed Service staff access to hot wear. This was primarily about fire cause, effect and behaviour, but may cover some elements of compartmentalisation of fires in high-rise properties.
- 7.20 ACO Evans commented that all the health and safety indicators were RAG rated green.

## 18-19/HR/8 Audit and Governance Action Plans Monitoring Report

- 8.1 ACO Evans introduced the report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. All actions had been completed.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## 18-19/HR/9 New Internal Audits Completed to date

- 9.1 ACO Evans introduced the audit of Payroll – Key Controls and New System Benefits. The auditors' opinion had been one of reasonable assurance.
- 9.2 Two low risk and two medium risk actions had been identified and these were being progressed.
- 9.3 It was suggested that the Audit and Standards Committee be asked to consider the effectiveness of the Authority's auditors, given the significant concerns raised nationally about the big four auditing firms in the United Kingdom.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. 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.
2. That the Audit and Standards Committee be asked to consider the effectiveness of the Authority's auditors.

## 18-19/HR/10 Absence Year End Report

- 10.1 Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, gave a detailed presentation on Employee Absence Year End 2017/18, including an analysis of employee absence, the performance targets, causes of absence, the methods the Service used to manage attendance and the support provided to employees and managers going through the sickness absence management process
- 10.2 During the presentation, the Group was advised that:
- The Service had achieved 3.73% of working time lost due to sickness. This was lower than the national public sector average of 8.5 working days lost per annum.
  - Percentages of absence were higher for Control staff, though it was noted that this was a very small group of staff who were working in a very pressurised environment.
  - The main causes of sickness absence were gastrointestinal (23.22%), coughs, colds and flu (21.69%) and musculoskeletal (17.47%).
  - 23.28% of hours lost were due to musculoskeletal issues, with 22.89% a result of mental health and 10.06% due to injuries. There had been a significant increase of individuals reporting mental health as the reason for their absence, with only 8.91% reported in 2016/17. This had been identified as a national trend.
  - Mental health was the top reason of absence for control and support staff, and the third reason for whole time staff absence.
  - There had also been an increase in employees citing mental health as the reason for both short and long term absence.
  - Benchmarking had been undertaken against other Fire and Rescue Services. Nationally, mental health was the fourth highest reason for absence. In Bedfordshire, it was the sixth.

- The Service provided a high level of support to its employees, including Occupational Health, a dedicated Fitness Adviser, the Employee Assistance Programme, mental health awareness training and Critical Incident Support.
- 30 calls had been handled by the Employee Assistance Programme, 24 of which had been referred for counselling, many for non-work related issues.
- Future areas of focus included the publication of a mental health action plan, a service wide stress survey using the HSE toolkit and a review of the Occupational Health provision, with collaborative opportunities being explored.

10.3 In response to questions, the Head of Human Resources reported that take up of Critical Incident Support was not high but a full debrief took place after incidents and individuals may feel they did not require additional support. No issues had been identified through the Employee Assistance Programme (red flagging) or through the sickness absence management process.

10.4 The Head of Human Resources emphasised that the Service sought to proactively support individuals.

**RESOLVED:**

That the presentation be noted.

18-19/HR/11 Occupational Accidents Year End Report

- 11.1 Mr A Pixley, the Service's Health and Safety Adviser, presented a report on Service occupational accidents from 1 April 2017- 31 March 2018. There had been a total of 58 workplace accidents in the year. This was a slight increase from the previous year, but carried on a downward trend over the previous 5 year period, with 134 accidents reported in 2010/11.
- 11.2 There had been a significant decrease in the number of days lost due to workplace accidents from 388 in 2017/18 to 104 in 2017/18. 58 of these days resulted from one incident of a fractured wrist.
- 11.3 The three main causes of workplace accidents were manual handling, musculoskeletal and slips, trips and falls. There appeared to be a downward trend in musculoskeletal incidents. There had been an increase in the number of slips, trips and falls reported and this was being investigated.
- 11.4 Whole time staff had reported the highest number of incidents as they were the largest employee group. There had been a large increase in the number of incidents reported by support staff and this was being investigated, although there did not appear to be any obvious trends.
- 11.5 In response to a comment, the Health and Safety Adviser confirmed that the Service did report near misses, with 32 reported during the year.
- 11.6 Routine activities were now the highest work activity resulting in accidents, with 23 of the 58. Following a significant amount of work to reduce accidents during training, there was a continuing reduction of percentage of time lost due to training activities, with 11% of time lost in 2017/18 compared with 16% of time lost in 2016/17.
- 11.7 The Group noted the positive performance driven forward by the Health and Safety Adviser and his small team.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be endorsed.

**18-19/HR/12 Single Equality Scheme Review**

- 12.1 Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, presented his report on progress made against the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan. The Action Plan had been approved in 2016 and identified within it were 6 objectives with 21 related actions to be achieved by 2020.
- 12.2 All actions were completed or ongoing and RAG rated as green with the exception of the provision of evidence showing how the procurement process was contributing to equality related priorities.
- 12.3 In relation to this action, the Diversity Adviser reported that a new Procurement Manager was now in post and he would be working closely with the Manager to ensure that the appropriate reporting and auditing systems were in place.
- 12.4 The Diversity Adviser confirmed that suppliers would not be offered contracts if they did not comply with the Service's equality and diversity requirements.
- 12.5 It was noted that, as part of the exploration week, the Service's Service Liaison Lead, Kathryn Bloomfield, would be engaging with staff around the Service's equality and diversity policies. This may or may not include an interview with the Diversity Adviser. The Service would be seeking to demonstrate that equality and diversity had been "mainstreamed" in the organisation.
- 12.6 Members recognised the excellent progress made against the Action Plan.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress report be received.
2. That the Group receive an update on progress against the action relating to evidence gathered through the procurement process at a future meeting.

**18-19/HR/13 Annual Report of Provision of External Training**

- 13.1 SOC A Peckham introduced the annual report providing an overview of the external training provision within the Service.
- 13.2 The budget for external training had been reduced significantly over a number of years, from £414,500 in 2010/11 to £222,300 in 2017/18. Despite this, SOC Peckham reassured Members that this had not had an adverse impact and that any necessary training would be funded, even if a special request for additional funding had to be requested from Principal Officers to ensure that any identified training needs were met.
- 13.3 The Service engaged over 50 external training providers, with the most frequently used being detailed within the report. The Fire Service College continued to be the most significant provider of training for the Service.
- 13.4 There had been an increase in costs relating to Specialist Operational Trainer courses to enable training to be provided internally.

- 13.5 The Service was involved in a number of collaborative training arrangements, including a Memorandum of Understanding with Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide driver training and the provision of “Aspire” training in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Services and some Police forces.
- 13.6 Opportunities to support staff through use of the National Apprenticeship Levy were being explored.
- 13.7 It was noted that some Members of the Authority had recently undertaken a visit to the Fire Service College and that a report on the visit would be prepared for submission to Members.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be considered.
2. That the report on the Member visit to the Fire Service College be submitted to a meeting of the full Fire and Rescue Authority when it is available.

18-19/HR/14 Corporate Risk Register

- 14.1 ACO Evans presented the report on the Corporate Risk Register. There had been one change and one update to risks within the Corporate Risk Register relating to Human Resources.
- 14.2 The risk rating for 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) had been reduced from 10 to 8 following a review of the risks and continued high performance against the training performance indicators.
- 14.3 CRR25 had also been updated to refer to the identification of individuals or groups requiring safety critical training that was monitored through the quarterly performance reports.

**RESOLVED:**

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

18-19/HR/15 Review of Work Programme 2018/19

- 15.1 Members received the Work Programme for 2018/19.
- 15.2 It was suggested that, following the recent visit to the Fire Service College, Members could be invited to visit other training providers or observe training exercises as appropriate.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work programme be agreed.

The meeting ended at 11.48 am