

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Policy and Challenge
Group
20 September 2017
Item No. 5**

**MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP
MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2017**

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

ACO Z Evans, SOC A Peckham, GC D Cook, Ms R Barker and Mr R Jones

17-18/HR/001 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T Khan and Councillor R Saleem.

SOC G Jeffery and Ms D Clarke were not able to attend the meeting due to other commitments. Ms R Barker attending on Ms D Clarke's behalf.

17-18/HR/002 Election of Vice Chair 2017/18

Members requested that the election of Vice Chair for 2017/18 be postponed as two of the members of the Policy and Challenge Group were not present at the meeting.

Following a comment about the number of Members appointed to the Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee, the Chair of the Authority advised that she would consider this matter prior to the next meeting of the full Authority.

RESOLVED:

1. That the election of Vice-Chair for 2017/18 be postponed to the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.
2. That Councillor Downing be elected Vice Chair of the Policy and Challenge Group for the period until a permanent Vice Chair is elected at the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

17-18/HR/003 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

16-17/HR/004 Communications

Councillor P Downing reported on the meeting of the National Joint Council that he had recently attended with the Chief Fire Officer. This was one of three regional meetings taking place throughout the country, which would inform the decisions around the 2017 pay award.

The expanding role of firefighters had been discussed, with the following five areas being highlighted: environmental challenges; youth and social engagement; inspection and enforcement; multi-agency emergency response and emergency medical response.

17-18/HR/005 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17-18/HR/006 Terms of Reference

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

The Chair suggested that an additional point be added to the Terms of Reference "to approve the annual corporate health and safety objectives" which the Policy and Challenge Group did on an annual basis.

It was noted that, following the discussions earlier in the meeting, the Authority should review the membership of the Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee to ensure that a sufficient number of Members was appointed to each Group/Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to include "to approve the annual corporate health and safety objectives" to the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group's terms of reference.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to review the membership of the Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee to ensure that a sufficient number of Members is appointed to each Group/Committee.

17-18/HR/007 Human Resources Performance Monitoring Year End Report and Programmes to date

ACO Evans submitted the 2016/17 year-end report on the Human Resources programme, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.

The HR and Payroll System Project went live in February 2017. Integration between the old system and the new system was still ongoing and the final

budget status was pending completion of analysis. As such, the project was rated amber awaiting completion of this work.

ACO Evans introduced the end of year performance report. All of the equality indicators had met target, with the exception of EQ2 (recruitment of minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation), which had missed its target by 4%.

Members asked for the number of staff, as well as the percentage, to be included in the next performance report for that indicator.

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, advised that, although the target had not been met, there was a significant amount of work around positive action being undertaken. He referred to a recent meeting with mosques in Luton that had been very successful and had resulted in a number of positive connections being made with the local community.

He added that the Service was working closely with the Police to learn lessons from their recent successful recruitment of Police officers from ethnic minority backgrounds and a new positive action plan, which would be submitted to Members upon its completion, was currently being developed. A positive action group focused on the forthcoming wholetime recruitment campaign had been constituted.

In relation to a comment on promoting careers in the fire service to young people in schools, the Diversity Adviser reported that information was being included in an educational career guide called Futures that particularly targeted young people from Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds and would be circulated during the first week of July.

Opportunities to develop literature to distribute during prevention visits and visits to Key Stage 2 pupils were also being explored.

ACO Evans added that the Home Office was currently considering supporting a project similar to "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Careers" that encouraged women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds to consider careers, such in the fire service.

Members commented on the diversity of the Service's Fire Cadets and that these young people should be encouraged to consider a career in the fire service.

In relation to HR1 (the percentage of working time lost due to sickness), this indicator had missed its target by 13% as the year-end target was 4.39% against a target of 3.9%. Long-term absence had been identified as the main challenge, with 28 employees having an absence of 21 or more days, mainly as a result of musculoskeletal or mental health issues. During the period, 51 employees had been given an informal warning for their attendance levels, with 8 given a formal warning. The sickness absence rate continued to be monitored and it was hoped that the performance against this target would

improve in the next reporting year. The presentation later on the agenda will provide more detail on the position.

In response to a question, Ms R Barker, Senior HR Adviser, reported that the Service employed circa 630 individuals and explained that the process set out in the absence management policy was that an informal warning and a monitoring period was followed by two formal warnings before a final disciplinary meeting was held.

A Member requested the number of employees who had been given an informal written warning for attendance levels in 2015/16 for comparative purposes.

ACO Evans reminded Members that, as part of the target-setting process for 2017/18, the target for HR1 had been increased to 4.3% in line with the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) average.

ACO Evans drew Members' attention to the excellent performance against HR3a (percentage of returned appraisal documents to HR within 3 months of reporting year (end September) Support staff & Station Managers and above) and HR3b (percentage of returned appraisal documents to HR within 3 months of reporting year (end September) firefighters/ Crew & Watch Managers), which had achieved 91% and 100% in Quarter 4 respectively.

SOC A Peckham reported on the training indicators. All had met target with the exception of 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) and T8b (percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programme completed by RDS operational personnel via PDRPro within last 12 months).

T5 had been red in Quarter 3 of 2016/17 and had improved by 7% to reach amber levels for year end. The target was for 60% of staff at each station and in each Watch to have the relevant training and performance was subject to fluctuations caused by one or two individuals. Two RDS stations and two Watches were currently not achieving 60%. Further training would continue to be targeted to pursue improvement against this indicator.

Performance against T8b was in line with the five-year average of 90% and 92% was a very stretching target. There was a small number of RDS staff affecting the performance against this target and these individuals would be identified and supported.

Overall, in comparison to the five-year average, significant improvements in performance had been made, including increases of 17% on T3 (percentage of station based operational staff that have attended Water First Responder course within the last three years) and T8c (percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programme completed by Control personnel via PDRPro within last 12 months). PDRPro was recognised as a major improvement to the management control of training records.

In response to a question about the compartment fire behaviour course, SOC A Peckham explained that this consisted of a series of training activities based at London Luton Airport that provided a fire experience in a controlled environment. This allowed firefighters to experience how fires developed and could be controlled, and also how human behaviour could influence fire. This experience allowed firefighters to react appropriately when they attended operational incidents.

The view was expressed that members of the public would find it reassuring that this type of training was regularly undertaken, given the recent incident at Grenfell Tower.

SOC A Peckham reassured the Policy and Challenge Group that after any serious incident the Service sought to learn practical and technical lessons from the investigation reports.

GC D Cook reported on the health and safety indicators. H1 (number of serious accidents per 1000 employees) and H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees (excluding Retained Duty System employees)) had exceeded their targets, whilst H3 (number of 24 hour cover periods lost to accidents per 1000 Retained Duty System (Full Time Equivalent employees) had missed target due to one case of long-term sickness. The individual concerned had now returned to work and with the periods lost from the incident removed, the indicator would have achieved its target.

As a result of this, ACO Evans advised that the Policy and Challenge Group had agreed that the indicator should report on actual time lost and not the 24 hour equivalent, which would provide more accurate information.

RESOLVED:

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

17-18/HR/008 New Internal Audit Reports Completed to date

ACO Evans introduced the audit of Retained Recruitment. This had received an audit opinion of reasonable assurance with one medium and five low priority actions identified. The medium priority action had already been completed and all the low priority actions were either completed or in progress.

In response to a comment, ACO Evans confirmed that the Service, in collaboration with Cambridgeshire, had adopted an electronic application procedure that would allow applicants to make and monitor their applications online.

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.

17-18/HR/009 Audit and Governance Action Plans Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced the report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. No extensions had been requested and both actions in the current monitoring report had been completed and confirmed by follow-up audit.

The actions arising from the audit of Retained Recruitment would be included in the report to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

17-18/HR/010 Absence Year End Report

Ms R Barker, Senior HR Adviser, gave a presentation on Employee Absence Year End 2016/17. Against the target of 3.9% of working time lost to sickness, the Service absence rate had been 4.42% at year-end. This was below the CIPD average for public sector.

The main causes of absence for the year were gastrointestinal (21.8%), coughs, colds and flu (19.2%) and musculoskeletal (17.2%). These were the same three groups as the previous year, just in a different order. The top three reasons given for working days lost were musculoskeletal (42.3%), injury/fractures (14%) and mental health (8.9%). There had been a marked decrease in the percentage of working days lost due to mental health from 14% in 2015/16 to 8.9% in 2016/17. This was against the national trend of an increase in working days lost due to mental health.

This could be attributed to a greater awareness of mental health throughout the Service, with a mental health awareness roadshow and training based on MIND guidance run during the year. This had resulted in more employees accessing information through the Employee Assistance Programme.

The Service provided a high level of support to its employees. It employed an in-house Occupational Health Practitioner, a full-time Fitness Adviser and access to a contracted Medical advisor. Employees also had access to a wide range of services in addition to the Employee Assistance Programme.

The Fitness Adviser also provided nutrition advice and information.

The Senior HR Adviser also reported on the critical incident support provided by the Service. The provision of this support had recently been reviewed in light of the additional responsibilities undertaken by firefighters, such as co-responding.

The Service had adopted a Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) process and the Occupational Health Practitioner had received additional training to take on the role of TRiM Co-ordinator. There were 10 employees throughout the Service that were trained as TRiM practitioners and were able to carry out TRiM assessments. The assessments were undertaken between 3-14 days following the incident and would enable the relevant signposting to occur and follow-up support to be provided. Individuals could self-refer to TRiM or be referred by others.

Ms R Barker reported that actions planned for 2016/17 to reduce employee absence included ongoing mental health awareness promotion, continuing support of the workforce and ongoing training and HR support. The Sickness and Attendance Management Procedure would be reviewed and a Service-wide stress survey would be undertaken during the year. This would enable the Service to compare current stress levels to those recorded in previous years.

The view was expressed that, given the percentage of days lost as a result of coughs, colds and flu, the Service could consider reimbursing employees for costs incurred for those who wished to obtain flu jabs privately.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

17-18/HR/011 Occupational Accidents Year End Report

GC D Cook presented a report on Service occupational accidents from 1 April 2016- 31 March 2017. There had been a total of 52 accidents in the year, which was a significant reduction from the 84 accidents that were recorded in 2015/16. It was also 32% below the five year average.

The number of days lost to workplace accidents reported during 2016/17 had also reduced to 388 from 501 days in 2015/16. Retained employees had accounted for 86% of the days lost and 316 of the days were attributed to the one accident referred to earlier in the meeting.

There had been an increase in manual handling injuries from 10 in 2015/16 to 21 in 2016/17. Some of this increase was attributable to "Method of Entry" training that had been conducted during the year.

GC D Cook reported that the Health and Safety Support Team closely scrutinised completed safety event investigations and the Health and Safety Steering Committee tracked any recommendations or actions arising to ensure their completion.

RESOLVED:

That the report be endorsed.

17-18/HR/012 Corporate Risk Register

GC D Cook presented his 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.

The risk rating for CRR32 (if there is a serious vehicle collision involving a vehicle being driven by Service personnel for work purposes then there is the potential for serious injury or even death to our staff members, a negative reputational impact and the potential for legal action) had been reduced as the inherent likelihood had reduced from 3 to 2 as a result of the control measures and training that had been put in place.

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 updated as skills certification reporting was now in place through PDRPro for operational training courses. In April 2017, the Service had been subject to a peer review of the Safe Work at Height operational policy and procedures against the CFOA national toolkit. Initial feedback had been positive and the Service was awaiting the final peer review report. A number of areas of notable practice had been identified that would be cascaded to other Fire and Rescue Services.

RESOLVED:

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

16-17/HR/013 Work Programme 2017/18

Members received the Work Programme for 2017/18.

It was noted that a report on positive action would be submitted to the Policy and Challenge Group's next meeting, as requested by Members. The Annual Report on the Provision of External Training and the Public Sector Equality Scheme Review would also be considered at that meeting.

An election for the Vice Chair for 2017/18 would also be held at that meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Work programme be agreed.

The meeting finished at 11.40am