

MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 15 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillors C Atkins, M Ayub, J Mingay (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and M Riaz

ACO Z Evans, SOC A Peckham, Mr J Atkinson, Ms D Clarke, Ms S Green and Mr R Jones

15-16/HR/039 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P Downing.

15-16/HR/040 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

15-16HR/041 Communications

Councillor Atkins reported that, in her capacity as Vice Chair of the Authority, she received a number of communications from national employer's organisations and wondered if these should be circulated to all Members of the Authority.

ACO Evans advised that communications were generally not circulated if they related to workforce or operational issues. These would only be circulated to all Members if they related to strategic issues; however, she was happy to circulate any communications which it was felt would be beneficial for Members to receive.

15-16/HR/042 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2015 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

15-16/HR/043 Human Resources Performance Monitoring 2015/16 Quarter 3 and Programmes to Date

ACO Evans submitted the report on Human Resources programme, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets for the third quarter of 2015/16.

The Business Systems Improvement programme was on target following the approval of additional funding at the meeting of the full Authority in October 2015. The contract with the new system provider had been signed the previous week.

In relation to the performance indicators, EQ2 (recruitment of ethnic minority staff across the whole organisation) had not reached the target as only 2 ethnic minority staff had been appointed from a total of 36 recruited. It was hoped that performance against this indicator would improve by year-end as the recruitment process was ongoing.

In response to a question, ACO Evans advised that the target was based on a 5 year average. The Service had implemented a positive action policy and events such as positive action days were reported regularly to the Policy and Challenge Group.

It was suggested that the Service provide recruitment information at local community events such as the Polish Festival in Bedford and that opportunities for frontline staff to liaise with BME communities should be maximised.

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, confirmed that the Service would have a presence at key significant cultural events. The Service also worked closely with schools through the Cadet Scheme and was using social media to reach out to other groups.

ACO Evans drew Members' attention to performance against indicator HR1 (the percentage of working time lost due to sickness) as this was a stretching target and the Service was currently performing 8% above the 3.60% target.

The training indicators T1-T5 were now all meeting target where in the past they have been reported as amber or red. The one training indicator that was missing target was T8b (percentage of safety critical maintenance training programme completed by RDS operational personnel via PDRPro within last 12 months). This equated to 6 people not completing the training programme in the required time period.

Performance against H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees (excluding Retained Duty System employees)) and H3 (number of 24 hour cover periods lost to accidents per 1000 Retained Duty System (full time equivalent employees) were both RAG rated as red for the reporting period. The target for H2 had been missed by 14% and it was hoped that performance against the indicator would improve so that the target would be met by the year-end.

H3 had missed target by 156% as the result of one employee having over 250 days sick and yet to return to work.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/HR/044 Proposed Human Resources and Organisational Development Indicators and Targets for 2016/17

ACO Evans introduced the proposed suite of Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets for 2016/17.

Improvement targets of 1% above the average performance rate over the last 5 years were being proposed for EQ1A (percentage of new entrants to the Retained Duty System to be women) (6%) and EQ2 (recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff across the whole organisation) (13%).

A new indicator, EQ1B, had been introduced to measure the percentage of wholetime operational staff to be women. The proposed target of 5% would bring the Service in line with the best performers across the Eastern Region.

The target for EQ3 (parity in retention rates between BME and white employees (all staff) was proposed to be set at 14% which was consistent with the 5 year average.

It was recommended that there be no change to the target of 4% in relation to EQ4 (parity in retention rates between men and women (operational staff)).

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, reported on the proposed indicators relating to Human Resources and Occupational Health.

The target for HR1 (the percentage of working time lost due to sickness) was proposed at 3.9%. This was under the mean average public sector absence of 4.1% as reported in the CIPD annual survey for 2015 given the strong performance against this indicator in the current year. 3.9% was also the trigger point for the Service to take action under the Service's current policy.

The proposed target for HR2a (turnover excluding retirement or dismissals – excluding retained) was set at 6%, the average performance over the last 3 years plus 2%. For HR2b (turnover excluding retirement or dismissals – retained only) the target was set at 10%, based on the average performance over 5 years.

A 90% target for the indicators measuring the percentage of returned appraisal documents for both support staff and Station Managers and above (HR3a) and firefighters and Crew and Watch Managers (HR3b) was proposed.

No changes were proposed to the Occupational Health indicators or targets.

SOC Peckham reported on the proposed targets for the Training and Development performance indicators. The only change related to T6 (percentage of station based operational Working at Height Operators that have attended at Working at Height recertification assessment within the last three years). It was proposed that the target be increased from 70% to 98% in line with the other safety critical training indicators as this had previously been a new indicator and by the 2016/17 performance year all relevant staff would have received the training.

Members recognised the high levels of performance against the training and development indicators and that as stretching targets had been set staff had been motivated to achieve these targets.

In relation to the health and safety indicators, the target for H1 (number of serious accidents (over 28 days) per 1000 employees) had been set at 4.78%, which was a 20% reduction on the 5 year average. The target for H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees) had been set at 372.20 following the same rationale.

ACO Evans proposed a change to the targets for H1 - H3 (number of serious accidents, number of working days/shifts lost and number of 24 hour - cover periods lost to accidents per 1000 Retained Duty System employees) to achieve a 10% reduction on the 5 year average rather than the 20% reduction as set out in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed suite of Human Resources performance indicators and targets for 2016/17 be endorsed, with amendments to the targets for H1 to H3 to a 10% reduction on the 5 year average.
2. That the high levels of performance against the current performance indicators and targets be acknowledged.

15-16/HR/045 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced her report on progress made to date against the current action plan arising from the internal audit report on Training and Development.

Significant progress had been made against the action plan, with a number of the actions already completed in advance of the completion date. A follow up audit was being undertaken later in the month.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/HR/046 Discretions – Fire Pensions Schemes

Ms S Green, the Human Resources Section Manager, presented the policy statements in relation to the scheme discretions for the 1992, 2006 and 2015 Firefighter Pension Schemes and the 2006 Firefighter Compensation Scheme.

It was recommended that a Service Panel consider the application of the discretionary powers, as was currently the case for discretions under the Local Government Pension Scheme, and that this be managed under the existing delegations to the Chief Fire Officer.

RESOLVED:

That the Firefighter Pensions Schemes Scheme of Discretions, attached at Appendix A to the report be recommended for adoption by the Fire and Rescue Authority to be managed on a day-to-day basis by the Chief Fire Officer under existing delegations.

15-16/HR/047 Introduction of National Living Wage

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, submitted her report on the introduction of the National Living Wage, following comments made at a meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee on 24 September 2015 supporting an increase in the hourly rate of the one employee currently receiving a salary under the forecast National Living Wage for 2020.

The Head of Human Resources reported that, from 1 April 2016, the Government would introduce a compulsory living wage for all working people aged 25 and over. This was set at £7.20 per hour. The rate was expected to rise on an incremental basis and was estimated to reach £9.35 by 2020.

The Policy and Challenge Group was advised that the salary and remuneration levels for support staff roles were determined in accordance with the National Joint Council and that the Service was currently part of the national pay bargaining agreement.

The Head of Human Resources reminded Members that an uplift in the salary of one post would result in increases having to be made throughout the organisation to maintain the pay differentials between the various spinal column points and would lead to the Service having to remove itself from the national pay bargaining structure for Green Book staff.

Members were assured that the Service would comply with the National Living Wage and that the lowest wage in the organisation already complied with and significantly exceeded the rate proposed for implementation on 1 April 2016. The Service would also comply with the National Living Wage for 2020 at that time.

RESOLVED:

That the report be considered and that the existing national pay bargaining arrangements for Green Book employees be maintained.

15-16/HR/048 Equality Duty Report

Mr R Jones, the Diversity Adviser, presented the 2014/15 Annual Workforce Data Report. This was the fourth such annual report produced by the Service.

He reported that as at 31 March 2015, the Service employed 592 people, with 57 people having left the Service and 41 new appointments during the year. There were no significant changes to the workforce during the reporting period. 6.9% of the workforce had declared themselves as being of a black or ethnic minority background. 4.1% had not declared an ethnicity. There was a high percentage of employees who had not declared their sexual orientation.

It was noted that the Service would need to work with its staff to encourage individuals to feel comfortable in disclosing information.

In response to a comment, the Diversity Adviser reported that, as he had only recently commenced in the role, the majority of his work to date had been office-based but that he would now be focusing on more outward-focused, engagement work with Bedfordshire's diverse communities.

Although the percentage of grievances from those declaring themselves as having a black and minority ethnic background appeared to be high at 14.3%, ACO Evans advised that this must be considered in light of the small number of grievances (7) that had been received during the year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be approved.

15-16/HR/049 Corporate Risk Register

ACO Evans provided an update on CRR40: If there is a retirement of a large number of operational officers over a short period of time then we lost significant operational and managerial experience within the Service which could ultimately affect our Service Delivery and wider corporate functionality in the shorter term.

She reported that the number of recruits from the current recruitment campaign had been increased from 16 to 24 to accommodate predicted projection shortfalls.

RESOLVED:

That the review by the Service of the Corporate Risk Register in relation to Human Resources be received.

15-16/HR/050 Work Programme 2015/16

Members received the Work Programme for 2015/16.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2015/16 be received and the cyclical agenda items be noted.

The meeting finished at 11.07am.