

**MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP
MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2015**

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

ACO Z Evans, SOC A Peckham, SOC T Rogers, Ms J Burnett,
Ms D Clarke and Mr R Jones

15-16/HR/029 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Atkins.

The Chair wished it to be recorded that the thoughts of the Members of the Policy and Challenge Group were with Councillor Atkins at this difficult time.

15-16/HR/030 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

15-16HR/031 Communications

ACO Evans advised that the Audit and Standards Committee had referred an item to this Policy and Challenge Group on the consideration of pay bands in relation to the aspiration of a £9 Living Wage by 2020. A report would be provided to the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

The Chair welcomed Mr Robert Jones, the newly appointed Service Diversity Adviser, to the meeting.

15-16/HR/032 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2015 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

15-16/HR/033 Human Resources Performance Monitoring 2015/16 Quarter 1 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 second quarter of 2015/16. The only project on the programme, relating to Business Systems Improvement, was on target.

In relation to the performance indicators, an exception report had been prepared for EQ1 (percentage of new entrants to the operational sector to be women) as there had been no women firefighters recruited to the RDS in the first two quarters. Three females had started the RDS course on 9 November 2015 and this would be captured in the performance report for quarter three.

ACO Evans reported that Members would be provided with the correct figures for the number of male firefighters recruited during the reporting period, as the report stated that only one had been recruited in the second quarter.

ACO Evans drew Members' attention to performance against HR1 (percentage of working time lost due to sickness) which was 13% higher than target. It was recognised that was a good indicator of organisational health.

Members discussed the targets for HR3a (percentage of returned appraisal documents to HR within 3 months – support staff and Station Managers and above) and HR3b (percentage of returned appraisal documents to HR within 3 months – firefighters/ crew and watch managers) and it was suggested that the targets for these indicators be increased at the target setting meeting in March 2016.

SOC A Peckham reported on the staff development performance indicators. Performance against the whole suite of indicators was very strong and performance against all the indicators had improved from that recorded for the first quarter. Significant work had been undertaken to improve performance and SOC Peckham gave examples of the improvement over the last 12 month period, including a 19% improvement against T8c (percentage of safety critical maintenance training programme completed by Control personnel via PDRPro within the last 12 months) and an improvement from amber to green for T4 (percentage of station based operational staff that have attended Compartment Fire Behaviour course within the last three years).

In relation to T1 (percentage of station based operational staff that have attended an assessed BA course within the last two years), which had missed the target by 8%, there were 6 personnel who required nomination and attendance on an assessed course.

In response to a question, SOC Peckham assured Members that the 6 personnel would receive the training by the end of January 2016. However, as it was a rolling programme of training, there may be another small cohort of individuals who had just fallen outside of the timescales by the end of the next reporting period.

Safety critical training was recorded on both the PDR and MIS systems so it could be monitored at a corporate and individual level. A four year forward plan of training was being developed and the Service was now planning training more proactively to identify individuals requiring reassessment at an earlier stage.

H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees) was reporting as amber as the performance was still being affected by an incident in the first quarter of the year which had resulted in the loss of 27 working days. Performance against this indicator had improved from 36% off target in the first quarter to 9% off target in the second quarter.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/HR/034 New Internal Audit Reports Completed to Date

SOC A Peckham presented the final internal audit report on the Training and Development of Operational Staff. The audit opinion was amber/red and the auditors had concluded that the Service had comprehensive systems in place for monitoring the compliance of operational staff in meetings national competencies and training objectives.

The auditors had looked at both the PDRPro and MIS systems; however, the majority of the detail in the report related to PDRPro. This was reliant on individuals recording the details of their training onto the system. The audit highlighted that there should be greater verification and challenge of these recorded details.

SOC Peckham reported that all safety critical training was recorded on the Service MIS system which was maintained by the Training and Development Centre. The Training and Development Team was providing support to operational staff to encourage greater engagement with PDRPro and an action plan had been developed to address the issues identified in the audit report, particularly in relation to verification of competencies.

Follow up was planned in 6 months' time.

RESOLVED:

That the attached 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.

15-16/HR/035 Corporate Risk Register

SOC T Rogers introduced the review of the Corporate Risk Register in relation to Human Resources. He reported that there had been no changes to individual risk ratings.

The update to 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, then there is the potential to cause significant injury or even deaths to our staff) had previously been considered during the discussion on the audit of training and development.

There was also an update to 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). Following a review of the establishment, a campaign to recruit 16 whole-time firefighters had commenced.

ACO Evans added that the Service maintained a comprehensive workforce development plan process. One of the factors which was considered was the level of unpredicted turnover. Whilst this was lower than in Service areas closer to London, there had been a higher level recently as a result of recruitment campaigns targeting firefighters for recruitment into another sector with higher rates of pay. The role of a modern day firefighter had also changed significantly and there was now a greater focus on prevention and protection.

The improved economy and greater number of alternative opportunities, as well as changes to the pension arrangements, were also contributing factors.

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, confirmed that exit interviews were conducted with leavers and that pay was identified as the main reason for leaving the Service.

The Service was still viewed positively, and the recent recruitment campaign had generated 665 applications (reduced to 469 (70%) when applying the essential criteria) for the 16 posts. This had now been narrowed down to 228 applicants and it was envisaged that the 16 successful applicants would be selected for training between April-June 2016 so that they would be operationally available by September 2016.

Interest was also generated when request for transfers-in were made. 33 firefighters had transferred into the Service during the last five years. This was another indicator that the Service was considered a good place to work.

Ms J Burnett, the outgoing Diversity Adviser, reported on the two positive action days that had recently been held to generate interest among women and those from minority ethnic communities to consider a career in the Fire and Rescue Service.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/HR/036 Service Gyms and Equipment

SOC T Rogers presented his report on the provision and use of fire station gyms across the Service. This was only one of the support mechanisms provided by the Authority to assist operational staff to maintain their fitness in accordance with the National Occupational Standards.

It was noted that although the Service provided access and time for fitness training for operational staff, personal fitness was a personal obligation and there was no requirement to use the station gyms. There was a requirement to maintain the required level of fitness.

Refurbishment of Kempston and Bedford Fire Station gyms had recently been completed as part of the Capital Programme and a refurbishment of Luton Fire Station gym was planned for 2017/18.

A site survey of all station gyms was conducted in September 2015 and remedial works were required at Ampthill Fire Station gym. None of these had been reported previously as defects to the Property Team and this highlighted the importance of undertaking a full annual conditions survey. The flat roof areas of Luton and Toddington Fire Station gym areas were due to be inspected imminently as they were projected to be approaching the end of their lives.

RESOLVED:

That the report be acknowledged.

15-16/HR/037 Review of Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group Effectiveness 2015/16

Members who had not already done so were asked to complete the questionnaire on the effectiveness of the Policy and Challenge Group at the conclusion of the meeting. The responses would be considered at the Members' Budget Workshop on 27 January 2016.

RESOLVED:

1. That the effectiveness of the Group be considered.
2. That the recorded Minutes of the meeting be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 27 January 2016 to review the Fire Authority's effectiveness in 2015/16.

15-16/HR/038 Work Programme 2015/16

Members received the Work Programme for 2015/16. As noted earlier in the meeting, a report on the impact of increasing the one remaining pay band in the Service under the aspirational Living Wage for 2020 of £9 and the potential impact on the pay bill and the Service's pay strategy would be submitted to the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, commented that the review of the Employee Assistance Programme would be incorporated into the Absence Year End Report and a separate report for the June 2016 meeting would not be required.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved with the addition of a report on the Living Wage in March 2016 and the removal of an item on the review of the Employee Assistance Programme in June 2016 as this would be incorporated in the Absence Year End Report which would be submitted to the same meeting.

The meeting finished at 10.56am.