

MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2018

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

AC D Cook, ACO Z Evans, Ms D Clarke, SOC A Peckham, Mr R Jones
and SOC C Ball

17-18/HR/25 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C Atkins as she was unwell.

The Policy and Challenge Group wished Councillor Atkins a speedy recovery.

17-18/HR/26 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

17-18/HR/27 Communications

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, presented examples of the banners that were displayed at Service positive action events.

17-18/HR/28 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Downing's apologies.

17-18/HR/29 Human Resources Programme and Performance 2017/18 Quarter 2

ACO Evans submitted the performance for the second quarter of 2017/18 against the Human Resources programme, projects to date and Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.

She reported on the HR/Payroll System and Services project which was reporting as Amber due to delays in the application for non-sickness absence and the iTrent/MIS synchronisation.

SOC Peckham highlighted the positive performance against EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women) which had exceeded target levels. Another training course was being run in Quarter 3 with female recruits and it was anticipated that strong performance would be reported at year-end.

In relation to EQ1b (percentage of new entrants to the whole time operational duty system to be women), which had narrowly missed its target, SOC Peckham advised that performance was expected to improve by the end of quarter 4.

EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) had missed its target and SOC Peckham reported that 18 people were appointed in quarter 2, with only

one from a BAME background. The Service continued to run an ongoing positive action campaign in an attempt to become more representative of the communities that it served.

In response to a comment, Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, acknowledged that some minority ethnic communities may not consider firefighting as a career, however, this misperception was being addressed through the positive action campaign, recognising that there were a number of roles within the Service.

It was acknowledged that the Service was working with the Police to share good practice following the Police's recent success in recruiting a number of Police Officers that were more representative of the local community.

The Chair commented on the diversity of the Fire Cadets. It was hoped that this would eventually filter through to the Service itself.

It was acknowledged that, whilst the Service's percentage of black and minority ethnic employees was above the national average, much more work needed to be done.

Ms D Clarke, the Head of Human Resources, reported that HR3 (the percentage of returned appraisal documents (all staff)) was reported on annually following the conclusion of the appraisal process. Performance had exceeded target levels.

SOC Ball reported on the training indicators, four of which were RAG rated as Amber. He referred specifically to 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) as this had missed its target by 7%. The individuals requiring training had been identified and an additional trauma care course was being provided in quarter 4.

ACO Evans advised that all the health and safety indicators were reporting as Green.

RESOLVED:

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

17-18/HR/30 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.

Three actions, including the two actions which had been subject to extensions, were due for completion in March 2018. All the other actions were completed.

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, confirmed that the first action listed had been completed.

RESOLVED:

1. That progress made to date against the action plans be acknowledged.
2. That the requests for extensions to completion dates for actions arising from the audit of Governance, Transparency and Decision Making be approved.

17-18/HR/31 Equality Duty Report

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, submitted the Public Sector Equality Duty Report for 2016/17. This was the fifth annual report produced by the Service. The report included information on the local population, the Service's practice, its workforce and the services it provided and the Service's equality objectives for 2016 to 2020.

The Service employed 551 people, 389 of whom were fire fighters. 51 people left the Service during the year, the majority through retirement. 5.4% of wholetime and 7.8% of RDS firefighters were female. 7.6% of the workforce had declared they were from an ethnic minority group, an increase from the previous year.

In relation to services provided, there had been an increase in the total number of incidents attended. This was as a result of the increase in collaborative work, an increase in road traffic collisions and lift releases.

The Service continued to receive high levels of customer satisfaction. There had also been 14 complaints and 61 compliments during the year.

In response to questions, the Diversity Adviser reported that the majority of visitors to the Community Fire Safety House were from Luton or the immediate surrounding areas.

Station Open Days remained popular and provided opportunities for engagement with the local communities. A questionnaire for visitors to the Open Days had been developed which captured equality data. This had been trialled at 6 stations in 2017 and would be rolled out across all stations during 2018.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted report be approved.

17-18/HR/32 Single Equality Scheme Review

Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, introduced the progress report against the objectives set out in the 2016-2020 Single Equality Scheme. There were 20 actions related to the six objectives.

He reported that the Equality Framework Assessment had been postponed due to capacity issues allowing the Service to focus on the forthcoming HMICFRS inspections and actions to support the Employee Survey.

The action relating to developing an accessible website with translation audio and large print facilities was currently in progress and was scheduled for completion in March 2018.

The other action which had not yet been completed related to the provision of evidence demonstrating how the procurement process was contributing to equality related priorities. An equality audit against key suppliers was scheduled for March 2018.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in meeting the Service's Equality Objectives be acknowledged.

17-18/HR/33 Positive Action Report

SOC Peckham reported on the positive action work being undertaken to address the under-representation of women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff employed by the Service.

He referred the Group to the summary of all the positive action work undertaken between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2017 and the Action Plan for 2017-19. This consisted of 15 actions, along with expected outcomes, Management Lead and timescale for completion.

The Service was working closely with Police colleagues on its recruitment campaign and had recently recruited an individual with Police experience to its HR team.

It was noted that the employee breakdown included in the report was from 2015/16 and that it would need to be updated with the 2016/17 figures.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted Positive Action report be acknowledged.

17-18/HR/34 Employee Opinion Survey Report

SOC Peckham introduced his report informing Members of the main outcomes of the Employee Opinion Survey 2017, highlighting the changes from previous survey responses. 370 surveys had been returned, which was a 62.8% response rate.

The survey responses were set out in relation to eight themes, in the three areas of staff engagement, satisfaction and equality and diversity.

Satisfaction with senior management had reduced to levels previously reported in 2009. This related to posts at Group Manager and above.

An action plan had been developed to address the issues identified through the opinion survey.

Members noted that 68% of staff reported that they were likely to leave the Service in the next five years. This was an increase of 17% over the levels recorded in 2014/15.

ACO Evans advised that the Service had run confidential independent workshops and interviews to further triangulate issues and actions were being put in place going forward.

She acknowledged that workloads were an issue across the Service and that improvements must be made in managing the demands of the Service. Other issues which needed to be addressed were work-life balance and communication within the Service.

In relation to the communication within the Service, it was noted that this should flow from both the top and the bottom. Management briefings were being increased and managers were being encouraged to be more visible to their staff.

It was noted that, although there were a number of areas which required improvement, there were a number of positives identified in the survey.

Members acknowledged the openness and transparency of the Service in providing this information to Members and for seeking to address the areas of concern.

RESOLVED:

1. That the key indicators, additional comments and considerations within the report be acknowledged.
2. That the Action Plan and the wider engagement with staff on the outcomes be supported.

17-18/HR/35 Review of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group's Effectiveness

The Group considered the following questions relating to its effectiveness during 2017/18:

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

Members agreed that they had been effective and discharged their responsibility in regard to the Group's terms of reference and that there were no areas that had not been considered that needed to be addressed.

The view was expressed that the Group was well briefed on current issues and that Members were confident in providing challenge when required.

In relation to training and development, ACO Evans reminded Members that a visit to the Fire Services College was being arranged for a future Member Development Day where it was hoped to observe firefighters on the Foundation Training course.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Group's discussion of its effectiveness be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 18 January 2018 to review the Fire Authority's Effectiveness in 2017/18.

17-18/HR/36 Corporate Risk Register

AC D Cook presented his report on the Corporate Risk Register. There were no changes to risk ratings and one update as follows:

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 would ultimately affect our service delivery and wider corporate functionality in the shorter term): a number of experienced firefighters had joined the Service on transfer. The Corporate Management Team received regular workforce planning reports that included assumed resignation rates.

RESOLVED:

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

17-18/HR/37 Annual Appraisal Process

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, introduced her report which provided a sample of employee annual appraisals for 2017/18, as requested by Members of the Group at a previous meeting.

The appraisal process sought to measure and review performance against a number of agreed objectives. Until a few years ago, appraisals were only conducted for posts at Station Manager and above, these had now been rolled out across the Service and had been well received.

RESOLVED:

That, following the review of the appraisals provided, the appraisal process followed be endorsed.

17-18/HR/38 Firefighter Pension - 2017 Regulation Amendments

Ms D Clarke, Head of Human Resources, submitted her report on the recent changes in fire pension legislation and the measures put in place to ensure compliance.

The main changes were that widows, widowers and surviving civil partners of firefighters who had passed away would no longer lose survivor benefits if they remarried or formed civil partnership and that transitional members moving from the 1992 scheme who were being considered for ill health retirement by an independent qualified medical practitioner would remain in their existing pension scheme until a final decision was made.

RESOLVED:

That the action taken following legislative changes be endorsed.

17-18/HR/39 Review of Work Programme 2017/18

Members received the updated Work Programme for 2017/18.

ACO Evans advised that the report on the annual appraisal process needed to be captured as an additional item that had been commissioned by Members.

The Chair referred to the need to defer the next meeting of the Group, scheduled for 20 March 2018, as the DCFO selection process would be taking place during that week. It was noted that this meeting would be the annual target-setting meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Work Programme be agreed
2. That the next meeting of the Group be held on 29 March 2018.
3. That the Group receive an update on the updated fitness standards at its next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am