



# **Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **Protocol on Member – Employee Relations**

### **1 Introduction**

The relationship between Members and employees is essential to the successful working of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (the Fire Authority) and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service). This relationship is characterised by mutual respect, informality and trust.

Members and employees feel free to speak to one another openly and honestly. Nothing in this Protocol is intended to change this relationship. Its purpose is rather to help Members and employees perform effectively by giving guidance on their respective roles and expectations, and on their relationship with each other. The Protocol also gives guidance on what to do on the rare occasions when things go wrong.

Responsibility for the operation of this Protocol lies with the Chief Fire Officer.

The Protocol must be read and operated in the context of any relevant legislation and national and local Codes of Conduct, conditions of service and any procedure for confidential reporting.

### **2 Roles of Members and Employees**

The respective roles of Members and employees can be summarised as follows:

Members and employees are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another but their responsibilities are distinct. Members are nominated by their constituent authorities and serve only as long as their term of office lasts.

Employees are responsible to the Fire Authority. Their job is to give advice to Members and the Fire Authority, and to carry out the Fire Authority's work under the direction and control of the Fire Authority, its committees and scrutiny groups. Mutual respect between Members and employees is essential to good local government.

## **2.2 Members**

The main areas of Member responsibility are to set the Fire Authority's budget, determine its policy and give it political leadership and to represent the Fire Authority externally. It is not the role of Members to involve themselves in the day-to-day management of the Service.

## **2.3 Chairs and Vice Chairs**

Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Fire Authority, its committees and scrutiny groups have additional responsibilities and their relationships with employees may, therefore, differ from, and be more complex than, those of Members without those responsibilities. This is recognised in the expectations they are entitled to have (see Paragraph 3.1).

## **2.4 Employees**

The role of employees is to give advice and information to Members and to implement the policies determined by the Fire Authority.

Certain employees, such as the Chief Fire Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Treasurer (Section 151 Officer), have responsibilities in law over and above their obligations to the Fire Authority and its Members, which they must be allowed to discharge.

## **3 Expectations**

### **3.1 Members Can Expect From Employees:**

- A commitment to the Fire Authority as a whole, and not to any political allegiance held by Members.
- A working partnership.
- An understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures.
- A timely response to enquiries and complaints.
- Professional advice, not influenced by political views or preference, which does not compromise the political neutrality of employees.
- Regular, up-to-date information on matters, which can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities they have and positions they hold.
- Awareness of, and sensitivity to, the political environment.
- Respect, dignity and courtesy.
- Training and development in order to carry out their role effectively.
- Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality.
- Not to have personal issues raised with them by employees outside agreed procedures.
- That employees will not use their relationship with Members to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly.

### **3.2 Employees can expect from Members:**

- A working partnership.
- An understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and pressures.
- Direction.
- Respect, dignity and courtesy.
- Integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality.
- Not to be subject to bullying or to be put under undue pressure. Members should have regard to the seniority of employees in determining what are reasonable requests, having regard to the power relationship between Members and employees, and the potential vulnerability of employees, particularly at junior levels.
- That Members will not use their position or relationship with employees to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly.
- That Members will at all times comply with the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.

## **4 If Things Go Wrong**

### **4.1 Procedure for Employees:**

From time to time the relationship between Members and employees may break down or become strained. Whilst it will always be preferable to resolve matters informally, through conciliation by a senior manager or Member, employees will have further recourse to the Chief Fire Officer or to the Fire Authority's Monitoring Officer, as appropriate to the circumstances. In the first instance an initial approach may be made by a concerned employee to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer or the Assistant Chief Officer.

In the event that the matter is not resolved through the initial approach, the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, will advise the Chair of the Fire Authority, where appropriate, and a decision will be made on the course of action to be taken.

If the concerned employee believes that the behaviour of a Member or Members constitutes a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members, then it is also open to that employee to make a complaint to the Fire Authority's Monitoring Officer. It is preferable, however, that all other courses of action have been exhausted before this step is taken.

#### **4.2 Procedure for Members:**

In the event that a Member is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an employee, the matter should be raised with the Chief Fire Officer, unless the concern relates to that employee, in which case the Assistant Chief Officer should be approached. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it will be dealt with through the Service's normal line management procedures and performance appraisal process. If the concern relates to the Chief Fire Officer then the issue will be raised with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Fire Authority for resolution.

#### **4.3 Involvement of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS):**

Should it not be possible to resolve internally a matter involving an employee and a Member, then an external mediation process facilitated by ACAS will be available to the parties. Both parties must, however, enter into the process voluntarily.

The Service's Human Resources Department will be responsible for implementing the external mediation process.

March 2009