

MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2018

Present: Councillors C Atkins, T Khan, J Mingay and Y Waheed (Chair)

ACO Z Evans, SOC G Jeffery, SOC A Peckham, Ms D Clarke and Mr R Jones

18-19/HR/016 Apologies

16.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Franks.

18-19/HR/017 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

17.1 There were no declarations of interests.

18-19/HR/018 Communications

18.1 There were no communications.

18-19/HR/019 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2018 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/HR/020 Human Resources Programme and Performance Report, Quarter 1 2018/19

20.1 ACO Evans submitted the 2018/19 Quarter 1 report on the Human Resources programme, projects to date and performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.

- 20.2 ACO Evans reported that the timeline for the HR & Payroll Project Phase 2 (Time and Expenses Module) had been planned and the expected completion date was January 2019. The Recruitment of Green Book employees via the web was also now live.
- 20.3 In relation to the performance report, it was noted that EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) had missed its target with 3.03% (1 out of 33 appointments) of staff recruited during the reporting period identifying as coming from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background.
- 20.4 SOC Peckham advised that the Service was running an extensive positive action campaign in order to encourage applicants from BAME backgrounds.
- 20.5 In response to a comment about the perception of the Fire Service as an unsuitable career to some of the South Asian communities, Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, advised that this was not the case for younger generations. The school visits had generated a lot of interest from Asian young women. It was important that the Service increased its presence and that it was recognised that there was a wide variety of careers available within the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 20.6 Councillor Atkins referred to a visit by a delegation of fire fighters from Bangladesh. It was noted that this would be taking place during the next couple of weeks and would offer opportunities for engagement with the Bangladeshi communities in Bedfordshire. ACO Evans advised that she would obtain and circulate details of this visit to Members of the Committee for information.
- 20.7 A Member commented that a "canteen culture" often put off applicants from certain ethnic minority communities and that improvements had been made in the last couple of decades. The Police had recently run successful recruitment campaigns and it was hoped that the extensive positive action activities that the Service was currently involved with would result in successful BAME applicants to the Service's forthcoming whole-time recruitment campaign.
- 20.8 In relation to the training indicators, SOC Peckham reported that all the stretch training targets had been met with the exception of T7 (percentage of Flexible Duty Officers that have attended an assessed Incident Command Assessment within the last 12 months), T8b (percentage of Retained Duty System personal attainment in maintaining core, operational safety critical training modules within a rolling 12 month period) and T8c (percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programme completed by Control personnel via PDRPro within last 12 months).
- 20.9 T7 and T8b had missed their targets by 2% and T8c had missed its target by 1%. Meeting the RDS target continued to be a challenge and there was a review ongoing in relation to the learning materials provided to on call fire fighters. It was noted that performance against T7 and T8c had been impacted by a small number of staff.

RESOLVED:

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

18-19/HR/021 Audit and Governance Action Plans Monitoring Report

- 21.1 ACO Evans introduced the report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. There were no current requests for extensions to completion dates. All actions arising from internal audits had been completed.
- 21.2 The one action under the remit of this group arising from the Annual Governance Statement was currently in progress.

RESOLVED:

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

18-19/HR/022 Health and Safety Annual Report

- 22.1 SOC Jeffery introduced the Service's Health and Safety Annual Report for 2017/18. This provided an overview of the work undertaken in relation to the management of health and safety within the Service.
- 22.2 The Service's health and safety policy had been reviewed and updated during the year. The Service had also published 9 general risk assessments and reviewed 79 existing general risk assessments. Two safety bulletins had been published during the year on breathing apparatus general check and compressed air cylinder connection and series 19 fire hydrants.
- 22.3 The report also detailed the health and safety training that had taken place during the year.
- 22.4 Members were referred to the health and safety data in the report and it was noted that the number of days lost due to workplace accidents had substantially decreased from 388 in 2016/17 to 104 in 2017/18, 54 days of which related to the same incident.
- 22.5 There were 38 vehicle collisions during 2017/18 compared to 40 in 2016/17. The majority of these were low speed collisions. 11 incidents involved a Service vehicle being struck by another vehicle.
- 22.6 SOC Jeffery advised that the incidents were reviewed using footage obtained from vehicle mounted CCTV systems on Service vehicles. Any complaints that remained unresolved after Stage 1 were reported to the full Fire and Rescue Authority.
- 22.7 Members commented on how well-written and readable the report was and how well it demonstrated the amount of work undertaken in relation to the management of health and safety in the Service.

- 22.8 The significant efforts made by members of the health and safety team to integrate with the operational and support arms of the Service and to change the culture around health and safety within the Service was recognised.
- 22.9 In response to a comment, SOC Jeffery advised that Service vehicles would always find a way to an incident regardless of the number of cars parked on the sides of the road. However, a local campaign would be introduced in Bedford to educate people how to park and this would include flyer and leaflet drops.
- 22.10 ACO Evans reported that the Service would be undergoing a Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Audit with the hope of obtaining a Level 5 qualification.

RESOLVED:

That the Health and Safety Annual Report be acknowledged.

18-19/HR/023 Progress Report on Positive Action

- 23.1 Mr R Jones, the Service Diversity Adviser, presented his report outlining the progress made against the Positive Action Plan. The report also outlined the difference between positive action and positive discrimination and explained the benefits of positive action to the Service and the wider community.
- 23.2 Nine of the actions set out in the action plan had been completed, including sharing best practice with Bedfordshire Police, providing guidance materials for station open days, engagement events and 'have a go' days and on call recruitment campaigns, although it was noted that work on many of these actions remained ongoing.
- 23.3 The Diversity Adviser reported that he attended conferences and regional meetings to discuss best practice in relation to positive action campaigns. The Service engaged with a wide variety of organisations, such as the Asian Fire Service Association, to better understand and address any perceived barriers to those from ethnic minority backgrounds and females applying for positions within the Service.
- 23.4 One of the recognised challenges in recruiting males from certain communities was that the breathing apparatus was not currently compatible with beards as the hair compromised the seal. This would have to be considered further as currently the provider of the equipment would not validate the use of the equipment if the users were not clean-shaven.
- 23.5 In response to a comment on the unconscious bias training provided to managers at the Service, the Diversity Adviser commented that this was currently provided as an online package and that it had been well received. An in-house training programme was being developed.

- 23.6 It was suggested that the unconscious bias training be offered to Members and that this be recommended by the Group to the Fire and Rescue Authority.
- 23.7 The Diversity Adviser reported that there were six actions that remained ongoing, including developing relationships with representatives of a wide range of faith groups, distributing recruitment messages at community events, such as the River Festival and Luton Carnival, holding a series of 'have a go' events at Community Fire Stations and utilising working with young people such as Cadets and Fire Forward.
- 23.8 The 'have a go' events had proven very popular and recent events in Bedford and Luton had been oversubscribed. Although they were not targeted specifically at individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds and females, a number of individuals from these target groups had attended or signed up for future events. The Service would then track if these individuals went on to sign up to the joining page so that they could be sent information about the recruitment process.
- 23.9 The Diversity Adviser reported on the positive action initiatives supporting the 2018/19 whole time recruitment campaign. This included the recruitment of 19 volunteer positive action ambassadors from within current Service staff. 7 of these individuals were recent recruits themselves.
- 23.10 Members were advised that engagement with faith communities was primarily to address perceptions of the Fire Service as a career with the older generation of some ethnic minority communities.
- 23.11 SOC Peckham reported on initiatives to increase engagement in the recruitment process by the Cadets by decreasing the age at which interest in recruitment can be expressed from 18 to 17.
- 23.12 It was recognised that the Service was actively promoting a range of positive action initiatives, particularly in relation to the forthcoming whole time recruitment campaign.

RESOLVED:

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to support the roll-out of unconscious bias training to Members of the Authority.

18-19/HR/024 People Strategy 2018-22

- 24.1 ACO Evans introduced the Service's draft People Strategy 2018-2022. The report set out workforce data, which would be updated in accordance with HMICFRS data requirements, service objectives, vision, national values and virtues, employee relations and survey responses, key achievements, performance and focus areas for 2018-2022.

- 24.2 The Strategy had been subject to internal and external consultation that had closed on 27 August 2018. The Strategy had been sent to 14,589 individuals externally and 92 responses had been received. 92% of respondents responded positively to all areas.
- 24.3 It also encompassed the elements contained in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 and the Service's Inclusion Strategy.
- 24.4 ACO Evans drew Members' attention to the section on "Your Views" which set out results of employee surveys. The strategy importantly highlighted significant achievements as set out across the focus areas building capability and capacity, developing the organisation, resourcing the service, employer of choice and building a strong behaviours culture.
- 24.5 Members recognised the substantial amount of work that had gone into the production of the report and how easy the Strategy was to read and how much work had taken place over the last 4 years. It was hoped that this would be accessed by members of the public on the Service's website upon its publication.

RESOLVED:

That the People Strategy 2018-22 be approved.

18-19/HR/025 Corporate Risk Register

- 25.1 SOC Peckham presented the report on the Corporate Risk Register. The extract of the register relating to Human Resources was displayed to Members. Of the eight risks, six were tolerated and two were being treated.
- 25.2 There had been no changes and no updates to risks within the Corporate Risk Register relating to Human Resources.

RESOLVED:

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

18-19/HR/026 Work Programme 2018/19

- 26.1 Members received the Work Programme for 2018/19.
- 26.2 Councillor Mingay reported on concerns that had been raised by on call firefighters at Sandy Community Fire Station at the recent station visit. They had expressed dissatisfaction about leave arrangements and commented that these could have an adverse impact on recruitment and retention of on call firefighters.

- 26.3 SOC Jeffery advised Members that one of the strands of the RDS Improvement Programme was the use of the Gartan payroll module to increase the flexibility of leave arrangements to allow for a pro-rata retainer and for on call firefighters to be able to take shorter term periods off as leave rather than full 24 hour periods. This would support a better work life balance. Any changes to the contractual arrangements would be subject to negotiation.
- 26.4 ACO Evans advised that the RDS Improvement Programme project was reported to the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group. She assured Members that the concerns were known about and being addressed by the programme of work.
- 26.5 SOC Jeffery reassured Members that these issues would be addressed and that the Service would make more of an effort to ensure that communications were improved and firefighters at retained stations were aware of future improvements.
- 26.6 SOC Peckham advised that he would be visiting the fire station in Sandy in the next 2-3 weeks and he would communicate this to the on call firefighters there.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be agreed.

The meeting finished at 11.25am