

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group
18 March 2019
Item No. 4**

MINUTES OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2019

Present: Councillors C Atkins, D Franks, J Mingay and Y Waheed (Chair)

DCFO A Hopkinson, GC A Draper, GC I McLaren, Ms D Clarke and Mr R Jones

18-19/HR/027 Apologies

27.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Saleem.

18-19/HR/028 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

28.1 There were no declarations of interests.

18-19/HR/029 Communications

29.1 There were no communications.

18-19/HR/030 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2018 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/HR/031 Human Resources Performance Report, Quarter 2 2018/19

- 31.1 DCFO Hopkinson submitted the 2018/19 Quarter 2 report on performance against Human Resources performance indicators and associated targets.
- 31.2 Mr R Jones, the Service Diversity Adviser, provided an update on EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women) and EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation), both of which had missed their targets. He acknowledged that the Service continued to face challenges in recruiting a workforce that was representative of the communities that it served, despite putting considerable resource into positive action campaigns. It was expected that performance against EQ1a would improve during the year and that the whole-time recruitment campaign would have a positive impact on performance against EQ2.
- 31.3 The Service had undertaken a number of engagement activities across Bedfordshire, including in schools and religious venues, in order to reach underrepresented groups. As the Service recognised that there was a noticeable decrease in the percentage of applicants from BAME backgrounds who became successful recruits, it had also put in place measures to address this, such as providing guidance on the required fitness standards, as well as removing a test which unfairly favoured individuals with previous knowledge of fire and rescue activities, such as those who were related to serving or retired fire fighters.
- 31.4 In response to a question, the Diversity Adviser confirmed that the Service had worked closely with Bedfordshire Police to learn from its' successful recruitment of BAME candidates. However, it was noted that whilst recruitment levels were high, the Police still had challenges relating to retention and that the Fire and Rescue Service was heavily oversubscribed with a very low level of staff turnover. The Service also performed very well in comparison to the national average.
- 31.5 428 individuals had registered an interest via the Service's joiners page, 30% of which had identified themselves as being from the targeted groups.
- 31.6 The challenges in recruiting a representative on-call workforce were also recognised, as there was a requirement that the individual lived or worked in close proximity to the on-call station, many of which were located in the rural areas of the County.

- 31.7 Ms D Clarke, the Head of Human Resources, advised that a programme was in place to assist Fire Cadets in progressing into whole-time posts. It was noted that applicants must be 18 at the time of appointment, but could be 17 at the time of application.
- 31.8 The Head of Human Resources reported that the year-end performance against HR3 (appraisals completed by 30 September – PI Target 90%) was 83.55% against a target of 90%. This measured a full year from 1 October to 30 September. Appraisals were undertaken in two stages: the initial appraisal and a review. In some cases, whilst the initial appraisal had been undertaken, the review had not been completed. Performance had also been affected by management vacancies. At the time of writing the report, 97% of appraisals had been completed and this was the figure that would be reported to HMICFRS as it collected performance information for the period 1 January to 31 December. Managers had been reminded of their responsibility to complete and review appraisals in a timely manner.
- 31.9 DCFO Hopkinson advised that performance against H1 (number of serious accidents (over 28 days) per 1000 employees) had been adversely affected by two accident injuries. Both individuals had now returned to work. H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees (excluding Retained Duty System employees)), which was linked to H1, had also missed its target with 116 days lost associated with 26 workplace accident injuries. 98 of those days lost were associated with the two events detailed in the H1, with the loss of 59 days and 39 days lost respectively.
- 31.10 GC A Draper reported that the majority of training indicators had reached target levels for Quarter 2. The exceptions to this were T7 (percentage of Flexible Duty Officers that have attended an Incident Command Assessment within the required frequency for their role) and T8b (percentage of Safety Critical Maintenance training programmes completed by On-Call Operational Personnel via PDR Pro within the last 12 months).
- 31.11 T7 was rated as amber as one individual had been nominated for but withdrawn from the course and had missed subsequent courses due to sickness absence. That individual had now returned to work and had been nominated for a future course.
- 31.12 T8b was 5% below target as a number of new RDS personnel had been recruited and assigned to stations. As they completed the mandatory training, performance against this indicator should improve.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on Human Resources Performance be acknowledged.

18-19/HR/032 Human Resources Quarter 2 Programme and Projects Report 2018-19

- 32.1 The Group received the 2018/19 Quarter 2 report on the Human Resources programme and projects to date.
- 32.2 Ms D Clarke, the Head of Human Resources, reported on the progress made against the HR & Payroll System and Services Project. Stage 1 had been completed and Stage 2 was progressing well, with the recruitment and overtime modules in place for Green Book staff. The expenses module had been introduced from the beginning of the month for both Green and Grey Book staff.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on Human Resource Programme and Projects be acknowledged.

18-19/HR/033 Audit and Governance Action Plans Monitoring Report

- 33.1 DCFO Hopkinson 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.
- 33.2 The one action arising from the Annual Governance Statement was currently in progress. Ms D Clarke advised that a report would be presented to the Service's Corporate Management Team (CMT) for consideration following the completion of a salary benchmarking exercise by Hay. This had identified that the salaries offered for professional posts was not competitive with equivalent posts in the private sector. This would be considered by CMT along with the implications of the recent NJC pay award.

RESOLVED:

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

18-19/HR/034 Public Sector Equality Duty Report

- 34.1 Mr R Jones, the Service's Diversity Adviser, submitted the 2017/18 Public Sector Equality Duty report to the Group for approval. This was the sixth annual report produced by the Service to fulfil its duty under the Equality Act 2010 and covered the period 1 April 2017- 31 March 2018.
- 34.2 The report set out the Service's equality objectives, the profile of the community that it served, the workforce it had in place and the services that it provided.
- 34.3 It was noted that the Service had been awarded the status of being a "Disability Confident" organisation in recognition of its approach to disability, and retained this status upon being assessed in 2018.
- 34.4 The Service's workforce consisted of 417 fte firefighters, with 561 staff in total. 29 staff fulfilled more than one role so that the Service had the equivalent of 590 posts.
- 34.5 Female staff made up 7.1% of operational staff, which was higher than both the England average (5.7%) and the non-metropolitan average (5.3%). Whilst the Service performed well in comparison to other Fire and Rescue Services, its aim was to become more representative of the community that it served.
- 34.6 Staff from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME) made up 4.1% of operational staff. This was comparable to the England average and better than the non-metropolitan average. Work continued through the Service's positive action campaign which sought to improve the representativeness and diversity of the Service's workforce.
- 34.7 60 members of staff had left the Service during the year, the majority as a result of retirement. A number of RDS staff had left the Service citing the need for more flexible working arrangements. This was being reviewed by the Service and improvements to the work-life balance of on-call fire fighters would be implemented.
- 34.8 In response to a question, the Policy and Challenge Group was advised that exit interviews were voluntary and individuals could request that these be undertaken by their line manager, HR or the Chief Fire Officer.

- 34.9 Turnover was very low, with 4% for whole-time firefighters and Green Book staff.
- 34.10 In relation to the services provided, the Diversity Adviser reported that there had been a reduction in the overall number of incidents attended by the Service, although there had been a slight increase in both fires and road traffic collisions attended.
- 34.11 The number of Home Fire Safety Checks and Safe and Well visits had decreased in 2017/18. Targets had been introduced to increase the number of Safe and Well visits and to introduce more robust quality assurance procedures.
- 34.12 The Service continued to receive high levels of customer satisfaction and measures were in place to improve the number of surveys completed following Safe and Well visits, as this had recently decreased and it was difficult to obtain feedback after certain incidents, such as road traffic collisions.
- 34.13 The Diversity Adviser concluded by highlighting the following:
- The recruitment process continued to improve the diversity of the Service's workforce and the percentages of females and individuals from BAME backgrounds employed by the Service compared favourably to national averages.
 - The number of staff leavers had fallen, the majority of who left the Service as a result of retirement.
 - Retention of female and BAME staff was high.
 - Plans were in place to collect demographic data from every Safe and Well visit.
- 34.14 In response to a question about asking individuals for their sexual orientation, Members were advised that this was a requirement as it was one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act. It was noted that the number of people deciding to answer this question had increased and this demonstrated that these individuals had greater confidence that they would not be discriminated against.
- 34.15 Members commented favourably on the content of the report and it was agreed that the report should be promoted more widely. The Diversity Adviser reported that the report would be published on the Service website and agreed to investigate how it could best be promoted.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be approved.
2. That the Diversity Adviser considers ways that the report can be promoted to the public.

18-19/HR/035 Corporate Risk Register

- 35.1 GC I McLaren presented the report on the Corporate Risk Register. The extract of the register relating to Human Resources was displayed to Members.
- 35.2 There had been one update to the register as follows:
- 35.3 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): lessons had been learnt from the 2016/17 whole time recruitment campaign and additional support was being provided to support this process. The decision had been made to not invite transfers in so that the Service could focus on the whole-time recruitment campaign and to provide more opportunities for internal progression.
- 35.4 In relation to the loss of managerial experience, Members expressed concern about the lack of information they had received about the imminent departure of ACO Evans at the end of January 2019. DCFO Hopkinson explained to Members that he was standing in for ACO Evans as she was on leave and that he could have made this clearer at the beginning of the meeting. He advised that the Chief Fire Officer would be providing Members with more information and the proposed way forward in the near future.
- 35.5 In response to a question, DCFO Hopkinson advised that it was his understanding that determining the responsibilities of the ACO post was one for the Chief Fire Officer, although appointment to the ACO role would be a responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Authority following a decision to recruit.

RESOLVED:

1. That the development of the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Human Resources be noted and approved.
2. That the Chair write a letter on behalf of all Members of the Policy and Challenge Group, thanking ACO Evans for her support to the Group and wishing her well in her future endeavours.

18-19/HR/036 Work Programme 2018/19

36.1 Members received the Work Programme for 2018/19.

36.2 DCFO Hopkinson advised that the RoSPA audit would be undertaken during the week commencing 25 March 2019. This item would therefore need to be deferred from the 12 March 2019 meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be agreed, subject to the deferral of the report on the outcomes of the RoSPA audit to the Policy and Challenge Group's June 2019 meeting.

The meeting finished at 11.01am