

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards and Human Resources Committee
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 16 November 2017, at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Hosken, Mellings and Murray

Officers

Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lisa Vickers	Human Resources Manager (Contracts)	HRMC
Donna Trowsdale	Development Officer	DO
Muhammad Younis	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer	EDIO
Zoe Gittins	Human Resources Officer	HRO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Dee, Councillor Milner and Independent Person Mr Humphries.
Councillor Jones did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 March 2017, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Committee Constitution and Training Needs

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members. It also asked Members to consider whether there is any training or development that they wish to receive in order for them to fulfil their role on the Committee.

Members requested that training on the terms and conditions for Grey and Green Book staff. The HHRA undertook to arrange an information session on this.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the constitution of the Standards and Human Resources Committee; and
- b) Request training on the terms and conditions for Grey and Green Book staff in order to fulfil their role on the Committee effectively.

6 Ethical Framework Matters

This report dealt with a number of ethical framework matters, including a review of the Members' Code of Conduct and related documents.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the review of, and the proposed amendments to, the Members' Code of Conduct;
- b) note the review carried out by officers of the related procedures and documents; and
- c) agree to recommend the amendments to the Members' Code of Conduct to the Fire Authority, for agreement.

7 'Rank to Role' Dispute

This report informed Members of the ongoing dispute between the Service and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), relating to the 'Rank to Role' process, and presented options for consideration by the Fire Authority for settling the dispute.

The DCFO presented the report and thanked the FBU for their work on the subject.

Members asked the DCFO to clarify what rank to role is and what other fire and rescue services (FRSs) had done to resolve the situation. The DCFO explained that nationally the move from ranks to roles, saw a reduction in the number of different levels there used to be within the fire service, from 12 ranks, down to 9 roles. However, this change to roles also included the opportunity for varying the pay rate within many roles, introducing 'A' and 'B' rates dependent on 'job size'. This has actually increased the overall number of levels available FOR Services to use back up to 13.

The DCFO explained whilst there are significant differences in the job evaluation processes for non-operational and operational staff, the process used was suitable for the move from rank to role. The Service is confident that employees were put into the correct role but the level within that role now needs to be determined. Therefore, an extra stage is needed to ensure proper evaluation with additional responsibilities being recognised to ensure B criteria are met. Lack of agreement on this process was the cause of the dispute.

Other FRSs used these changes as an opportunity to buy in additional skills or paid everybody at the 'B' rates. There was no definitive national guidance issued at the time other than a simple example based on how many fire engines are at a station.

Members queried whether As and Bs were a mechanism for assessment for promotion. The DCFO clarified that it is about the differences in roles and gaining extra pay for additional responsibility. Operational staff have to move into a different role to go up from an A to a B. Members then asked how back pay would work in relation to the resolution. The DCFO explained that the beauty of the proposed solution is that the FBU are prepared to accept 1 year of back payment. Limiting back pay to a 1-year period makes it easy to identify those that were in B related roles over that period.

The Committee asked why the Service was addressing this issue now when it had been on and off since 2004. The DCFO explained that the Service believed that it is not good for industrial relations to have disputes carrying on for long periods, as there is the potential that it may be used as a possible obstacle by the FBU when negotiating future changes. The evaluation process, detailed in the report, has illustrated differences in roles and it is morally difficult for the Service not to take action to even out the identified inequalities.

Members asked if there was also a process for moving roles down from a B to an A. The DCFO advised this situation, if it occurred, would need discussion with the appropriate Representative Bodies. Members were clear that this issue needed to be covered in the options presented in the report. The DCFO explained that within option 3, everybody would be B, so there would be no requirement for this.

The Committee acknowledged that a tremendous amount of work had been undertaken on a significant issue and those involved deserved credit for that work. The co-operation between the Service and the FBU is also very creditable. Members then proposed and seconded Option 3 as set out in the report.

The Chair of the Committee, stated that he believed that there was not enough included in the proposal to secure the situation in the future. Historically there had been periods of time when there were no processes that could be used to enable substantive proposals to be put forward.

The Chair agreed with option 3, provided there was assurance that there is nothing 'synthetic' in the proposal, which may cause issues in the future. The DCFO acknowledged that whilst there had been fallow process periods, effort had always been made to seek an agreement but this had not been possible until now.

The Chair asked that the following additions be included in the recommendations in relation to option 3:

- i The Service should make sure that it regularly reviews all Job Descriptions so that it can be confident that they remain valid; and
- ii The Service should ensure that a consistent approach is taken to how new roles are evaluated going forward, so that the process is clear and transparent.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee

- a) Note the work that has been undertaken by the Service and the Fire Brigades Union in attempting to find a solution to this dispute;
- b) Having considered the three options outlined in section 5 of the report;
- c) Endorse the stated preferred option (Option 3) but asked for the following points to be borne in mind by the Service into the future:
 - i The Service should make sure that it regularly reviews all Job Descriptions so that it can be confident that they remain valid; and
 - ii The Service should ensure that a consistent approach is taken to how new roles are evaluated going forward, so that the process is clear and transparent.

8 Updated Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure

This report updated the post and committee references within Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP). The procedure remains in line with the requirements of the Pension Act 1995, and subsequent amendments, and in accordance with the recommendations contained within Fire Service Pensions Scheme Circular 1/2009.

Resolved that the Committee note the updated post and committee references at Stage 2, Internal Dispute Resolution.

9 Update on Apprenticeship Levy

This report provided the Committee with an update on the apprenticeship levy, following its introduction on 6 April 2017.

The DO presented the report and advised another level 2 apprenticeship has commenced since the report was written with an additional cost of £2k and that there is the potential for firefighter apprenticeships to be developed.

Members asked how long the apprenticeships are and what skills would be developed. The DO advised that the firefighter apprenticeships have not yet implemented but the level of the qualification sought will determine the length, with the average length of time being 12 to 18 months. The skills learnt during the apprenticeships will be based around work.

The Committee raised concerns about the value of apprenticeships and whether it was worth the Service undertaking them. The HMRC explained the Service had taken on apprentices prior to the introduction of the levy. There had been success with those apprentices gaining jobs and there was proof that the apprentices had added value to the Service during their apprenticeships.

In response to further questions from Members, the DO explained that the apprenticeships offered cannot be too bespoke, as there is a framework that they have to sit within; and that the funding limitation is 2 years, which are fixed and are not rolling years. There are also no age restrictions for people who wish to access apprenticeships.

The HHRA commented that there is work to be done internally as there is also an element of upskilling existing staff, which needs to be promoted within the organisation.

Members acknowledged the benefits for the organisation, as well as the individual and asked if further training would be supported once an initial qualification is achieved. The DO confirmed that this was possible.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

10 Update on Occupational Health Provision

This report gave an update on the Occupational Health (OH) service supplied to Shropshire fire and Rescue Service by the current providers, Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust, McClelland Centre (University of Worcester) and Shropshire Council (Occupational Health Physician).

Members queried the process if an employee was deemed to be unfit following their fitness assessment. The HMRC explained that various types of support are offered including the provision of health advice and a 6-week period in which to address the issues identified before a retest is taken.

The HMRC drew the Committee's attention to the increased levels of mental health referrals. This is a positive increase and may be because of greater awareness of mental health issues through initiatives such as the Blue Light Pledge. Members asked to what extent, the mental health issues were workplace related or were due to outside factors. The HMRC did not have the information to hand but undertook to find out. The HMRC also explained that individuals who are suffering trauma related to work are referred to the clinical chartered psychologist.

The HHRA advised that mental health issues have been highlighted in relation to Fire Control. All Fire Control employees have been offered NOS counselling sessions and a stress audit has been undertaken for the department. It is hoped that this will have a positive effect for the Fire Control, particularly with the imminent trial of flexible rostering.

The HMRC explained that health and wellbeing days are being run for employees and that the dates could be made known to Members as well.

The Chair commented that he was impressed with the quality of the report and its presentation.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

11 Gender Pay Gap

From 2017, an organisation that has 250 or more employees must publish, under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, specific figures about their gender pay gap (GPG).

A gender pay gap shows the difference between the average hourly earnings of men and women, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings e.g. a gender pay of 18% indicates women earn 18% less than men do. The national average GPG is 18%.

The figures must be calculated using a specific reference date, i.e. the snapshot date. Public organisations are required to publish the GPG online by 31 March 2018 and this data must remain available for at least 3 years.

The data consists of six reports:

- The mean pay gap in hourly pay
- The median pay gap in hourly pay
- The mean bonus pay gap
- The median bonus pay gap
- The proportion of male and females receiving a bonus payment.
- The proportion of males and female employees in each salary quartile band

(Figures can be reported in whole percentages or percentages rounded to one decimal place.)

Along with the written statement, an organization can add supporting narrative. Adding a narrative helps anyone reading the statement to understand the organisation's view of why a gender pay gap is present and what the organisation intends to do to close it.

The Service is currently researching methods to produce the information in discussion with the Finance Team and the Payroll Team from Shropshire Council. Prior to publication, a report with the full detail will be taken to Fire Authority in February 2018.

To date only one Fire and Rescue Service, West Yorkshire, have published their GPG, which is 12%.

Resolved that the Committee note the update given.

12 Equality and Diversity Steering Group Update

This report provided a summary of the work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group from October 2016 to the beginning of September 2017.

Members requested more information on 'Your Future Your Choice', which the HMRC undertook to provide outside the meeting.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

13 Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire Ltd.

This report set out the progress made by Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH) Ltd. from September 2016 to September 2017.

The Chair the EDIO for his work on the reports.

Resolved that the Committee note the report and that an annual report on the progress of FRESH Ltd. will be brought to the Committee for information.

14 Wholetime Recruitment

This report provided Committee members with information to allow them to agree the most appropriate method of recruiting ten Wholetime Firefighters in 2018

The EDIO commented that the work undertaken within diverse communities was very positive, as was the move to offer job share contracts as the commitment to the full time hours required of a firefighter is a large barrier to certain BME groups. This is a very positive step forward, which potentially could have a large impact on BME and female recruitment.

In relation to the online application process, Members queried if the form could be printed, as internet access could be a barrier for some. The HRO undertook to check if hard copies could be provided, as well as a crib sheet for the process. In addition, the Human Resources Department offer the use of Retained Stations for completion of forms and advise applicants to use local libraries. The HRO also undertook to check that the application form could be completed on mobile phones.

The Committee asked what the definition of the West Midlands region was. The HHRA explained that was the area covered by Shropshire, Hereford & Worcestershire Warwickshire, Staffordshire and West Midlands postcodes. The DCFO further explained that there had been much discussion about including areas such as Cheshire and the Welsh Borders.

The Committee's view was that the focus on the West Midlands region tends to exclude the area to the west of region and that all surrounding counties should be included.

Members asked why this particular action was being instigated now, as it appears to be insular move and a change from last year's recruitment process. The HHRA explained that the move is partly around reducing the volume of applications, but the main aim is to promote the provision of local jobs for local people.

The Committee expressed concern that the definition of the West Midlands region can be contentious and it is still a very big area to recruit from. Member also commented that Service should not be unduly worried about representation from BME groups, as this will take time to happen and to develop.

The Committee proposed, and seconded, that the postcode restriction for the recruitment campaign should include the West Midlands region, Cheshire, Wrexham and Powys.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee

- a) Note the use of the Fire Service College managed electronic system as the preferred method of recruiting ten Wholetime Firefighters in 2018;
- b) Agree to recommend that the full Fire Authority approve the proposed use of post code restricting the campaign to the West Midlands region, Cheshire, Wrexham and Powys, in order to support our ambition of becoming a more inclusive employer; and
- c) Note the various options being tried to improve on the recruitment and targeting of our under-represented groups.

The meeting closed at 3.55 p.m.

Chair.....

Date.....