

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards and Human Resources Committee
held on Tuesday, 20 October 2015, at 2.00 pm in the
Oak Room at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams (Chair), Mrs Barrow, Kiernan, Mellings, Price and Turley

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Support Manager, Equality and Diversity Officer and Temporary Executive Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Reynolds.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair reminded Members that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter, in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and that they should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate on that matter.

Councillor Price declared an interest in item 10 Firefighters Pension Scheme – Transitional Protections, in that he received a pension through a Firefighters Pension Scheme. As, however, the transitional arrangements to be considered related to a different Firefighters Pension Scheme, it was not deemed necessary for Councillor Price to leave the meeting room, when this item was to be considered.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 March 2015.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 March 2015, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Committee Constitution and Training

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 was any training or development they wished to receive in order for them to fulfil their role on the Committee.

Councillor Price asked that a session on dyslexia be offered to Members. Referring to training for appeals hearings, he felt that the practice of providing such training immediately prior to the hearings should continue.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that:

- a) Dyslexia training be included in the Member development activity for 2015/16; and
- b) Training for appeals hearings be provided immediately prior to the hearings.

6 Ethical Framework Matters

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

The Chair questioned why, in the section of the Members' Code of Conduct, which dealt with 'Honesty', there was a reference to 'private interests', when the terminology now in use was 'pecuniary interests'. As the Corporate Support Manager was unable to provide an answer, she undertook to raise this with the Fire Authority's Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

Committee Clerk's Note

Since the meeting the Deputy Monitoring Officer has provided the following response to the Chair's question.

The Code of Conduct uses more generic language, when setting out the basic requirements. It borrows from the Nolan Principles, which form the basis of standards of conduct in a wide variety of public sector areas. Elsewhere in Fire Authority documentation officers have moved to more specific references, i.e. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. There is no intention to overcomplicate the terminology but merely make it relatable to the relevant ethical framework, where required.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow, and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Agree the proposed changes to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- b) Note the review carried out by officers of related procedures and documents;
- c) Agree to extend the term of office of the Independent Person for a further 4 years; and
- d) Make recommendations accordingly to the Fire Authority.

7 Implementation of the Living Wage

This report explained what the 'Living Wage' was and the implications of its implementation for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the report pertained only to Service employees. If, however, the Committee and, in turn, the Fire Authority agreed to implement the living wage, officers would consider how it might also be applied to contractors' employees.

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the status of Loughborough University in calculating the living wage, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer undertook to research the matter and report back to the Committee.

Committee Clerk's Note

Since the meeting the Corporate Support Manager has provided the following response to the Chair's question.

The Centre for Research at Loughborough University is an independent research centre based in the Department of Social Sciences. The Centre has built a national and international reputation for its high quality research. It is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, an independent research organisation, which focuses on poverty and the disadvantaged. The Minimum Income Standard research, gathered by Loughborough University every year, is used for setting the acceptable living wage in the UK. This research is also being replicated in other countries to establish benchmarks of acceptable household income levels.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority that the living wage be implemented for Service employees with effect from 1 October 2015.

8 Employment of Police Community Support Officers as 'On-Call' Firefighters

This report updated the Committee on the current position relating to the proposed dual role for Police Community Support Officers, operating as 'on-call' firefighters within Shropshire.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that officers did not anticipate that this collaboration would provide significant additional on-call support in the short term. After the one-year trial, it would be possible to evaluate how much extra capacity had been gained and a decision could then be made about the benefit of future collaboration.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Barrow, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the implications for pensions and insurance would be the same as those for retained firefighters.

Councillor Price felt that Members should support this initiative in light of the Government's collaboration agenda. He went on to mention the possibility of a housing development in Much Wenlock, on which two properties might be made available for key workers, including firefighters and Police Community Support Officers. He undertook to advise Service officers of developments as they arose.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Endorse the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers as on-call firefighters in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

9 Apprenticeship Scheme

This report provided the Committee with an update on the progress of the Apprenticeship Scheme.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer emphasised that the Service had made it clear to the apprentices from the onset that it could not guarantee them permanent employment. They would be able to apply for any posts, which were advertised, although they would not be given preferential treatment in the recruitment process.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10 Firefighters Pension Scheme – Transitional Protections

Members noted that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had made a legal challenge regarding the transitional protections in the 2015 firefighter pension scheme regulations, in respect of potential discrimination.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that, although the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had brought in the regulations, the legal challenges had been made against individual employers, who were responsible for implementation. Three cases had so far been served on this Fire Authority, which would be co-ordinated with other cases by the Local Government Employers.

They had retained a legal advisor, whose costs would be shared, based on the number of employees of each participating Fire Authority. It was anticipated that the financial implications of the outcome would be borne by DCLG but administered locally.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Turley, and

Resolved that the Committee note verbal update provided by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

11 Update on Occupational Health Provision

This report gave an update on the occupational health service supplied to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service by the current providers, Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust, McClelland Centre University of Worcester and Templar medical.

A discussion took place about a recent change in the requirements relating to asbestos medicals, which meant that two medicals were now required every three years. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that, as this would double the amount of the doctor's time spent on medicals, there might be logistical difficulties in organising the tests.

Members noted that the Service would be holding its first health awareness day for staff in November. A number of health providers had been invited, who would be giving advice on issues, such as cholesterol levels and alcohol and weight awareness.

It was proposed by Councillor Turley, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

12 Equality and Diversity Steering Group Update

This report provided a summary of the work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group from September 2014 to the beginning of October 2015.

Referring to the Action Plan appended to the report, the Equality and Diversity Officer reported that the Plan had now been streamlined and was very much outcome focussed.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Turley, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

13 Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire Ltd.

This report set out the progress made by Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH) Ltd. from June 2014 to June 2015, as requested by the Fire Authority.

At the request of the Chair and for the benefit of new Members to the Committee, the Equality and Diversity Officer gave the background to FRESH Ltd. and outlined the differences between it and the previous forum.

She advised that volunteers carried out paid work and the money was paid back into FRESH Ltd.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the range of activities, which were now undertaken under Equality and Diversity. One notable example was dyslexia work, which had made a real impact on the lives of a number of employees.

The Chair asked that in future reports both negative and positive constructive criticism from commenters be included to provide balance. The Equality and Diversity Officer undertook to do so.

Following a question from the Chair the Committee agreed that they should give a vote of thanks to the volunteers for their valuable work.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Turley, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report and that an annual report on the progress of FRESH Ltd. would be brought to the Committee at a later date for information.

14 Update on Grading Dispute

This report updated the Committee on the progress made to resolve the current dispute between the Fire Brigades Union and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service on the A to B phase of the Rank to Role process for Grey Book managers.

Members noted that there was no clear national guidance on this issue, which officers could use to resolve the situation. The next stage of the process was for the Service to carry out an options appraisal and decide on what form any revised proposal should take. This would then be put to relevant Representative Bodies for formal consultation. The desired outcome was an honest and fair payment for the posts, based on the work carried out. Councillor Price felt that it would be useful for a small group to carry out the options appraisal and he volunteered to participate in that group, if that would be helpful.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The meeting closed at 3.45 p.m.

Chair.....

Date.....