

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Wednesday, 22 November 2023, at 1.30 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Aldcroft, Burchett, Cook, Evans, Hartin, Hignett, Lea, Minnery (Chair), Offland and Wynn

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Adam Matthews	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Guy Williams	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Carter, Overton, Pardy and Price.
Councillor Blundell did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Pensions Update

This report provided Members with an update on the Service's implementation of changing pension legislation, the challenges associated, and the recommended action of recruiting a specialist Pensions Officer.

The ACFO (SS) presented the report and explained that Pensions are a complex subject and the McCloud / Sergeant and Matthews cases have increased this complexity even further. The Service's pension administration is currently provided by West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) who were awarded the contract following a tender process.

This was triggered by the previous pension administrators, Shropshire County Pension Fund, informing the Service in November 2020 that they were unable to provide the additional resource required to undertake the McCloud / Sergeant remedy and would therefore be withdrawing from the pensions administration contract.

Since the contract with WYPF commenced in April 2022 there has been an increase in administration and technical queries together with an expectation that the Service will provide much more support and administration to deal with these. The Human Resources (HR) and Finance Teams have been trying to bridge this gap but lack the specialist skill set needed to do this efficiently. In order to address this issue, there has also been collaboration with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's (HWFRS) Pension Officer. Whilst this has helped, it lacks resilience and specialist knowledge and is not seen to be a long-term solution, although the Service will continue to work collaboratively with HWFRS in this area.

The Service therefore believes that the best course of action would be to recruit an in-house pension officer. The post will sit within the Service's Finance Department and the pension specialist that is employed will be able to work on forthcoming legislation and manage the implementation of the McCloud/Sergeant remedy that needs to be completed by April 2025.

The financial impact of employing an in-house Pensions Officer would be up to £56,892 including on-costs.

Members asked where a pension specialist would be recruited from. The ACFO (SS) explained that the Service does have contacts with suitable people, but it is recognised that recruitment may be a challenge hence why this Extraordinary Fire Authority Meeting has been called to hasten the process. This is particularly important as collaboration with HWFRS has already been maximised.

Members asked if the salary for the post should start at a higher scale point than that stated in the report. The ACFO (SS) explained that the salary is believed to be competitive and allows the role to progress through the salary scale points over time. The HHRA added that the post has been advertised previously but this was unsuccessful leading the Service to use one of the HR Team members and collaboration with HWFRS to address the workload associated with pensions. As this solution is now becoming unsustainable, the Pension Officer role has been re-evaluated and the salary grade has increased from 9 to 10 which is believed to be appropriate. The CFO added that it is a market value salary and whilst the Service normally struggles with the recruitment of specialist skill sets due to salary disparities, this role does seem to be equitable with similar positions in other organisations.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority approve the recruitment of a fulltime Pensions Officer.

The meeting closed at 1.50 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....