

Update on Grading Dispute

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

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

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

3 Background

The Rank to Role process began for Shropshire in August 2005, when National Joint Council (NJC) Circular 09/05 “Substantive Move from Rank to Role” was issued.

Following a brief period of negotiation, it was agreed that the process would be split into two phases: allocating jobs to roles, followed by identifying which posts would attract either an A or B rating within role – these being on different pay points.

The first phase was a considerable task but was completed by December 2008.

The second phase was more difficult, with little national guidance on how to undertake it. The working group was tasked to devise a local process and, for several reasons, including a failure to agree on process and staffing issues, this did not progress. In 2012 the Service took the position that, for the purposes of effectiveness and efficiency, and in the absence of an agreed process, all Grey Book management positions above Crew Manager would be paid at the A rating (i.e. the lower one).

As a consequence of this the FBU registered a trade dispute on 6 September 2012. This remained an issue of contention and in autumn of 2014 discussions recommenced on how the situation could be resolved. Through the Service's Joint Trade Union Consultation and Negotiation mechanism it was agreed to move forward by carrying out a formal analysis of all of the management roles that would involve rating all the jobs against a number of relevant criteria using the Croner job evaluation tools. The outcome of this would be numerical scores that would allow jobs to be considered in relation to each other in terms of weight, responsibility and scope, amongst other factors. It was agreed that from this evaluation it would be possible to determine if any of the posts might warrant a regrading and what action, if any, should be taken in relation to the management of the Service.

This would then lead on to a more negotiable position as to what action should be taken on this information with specific regard to the practicalities of managing a smaller fire and rescue service, the budget and other external factors.

The analysis was facilitated by an external consultant and undertaken in spring 2015 by an in-house team, comprising an HR representative, a Grey Book management representative and an FBU representative. The outcome of the analysis and the consultant's recommendations were then reported back to the Executive Leadership Team, with the main points being as follows:

- With the reduction of Area Managers from 4 to 3 the scores of all Area Manager posts increased;
- The Group Manager roles scored towards the bottom of what might be considered as an industry norm for posts at that management level;
- There was a spread within the Station Manager group that showed some posts were attracting a noticeably higher score than others; and
- There was a spread of scores at Watch Manager level that indicated the current pay point allocations did not always reflect the responsibilities of the posts.

It must be stated at this point that, throughout the process, the focus was on the post and not the post holder and, as such, scores have no relation to individual performance.

4 Outcomes of the Job Evaluation

In discussion with the consultant it was identified that there was sufficient justification to allocate a B rating to some of the posts. However, there was also a recognition of the challenges this would bring with it in terms of organisational management, managing the reputation of the Service in a hostile economic climate and simply managing the budget. Therefore the following potential outcomes were agreed upon by the Executive Leadership Team:

- Maintain the Status Quo;
- Re-engineer post responsibilities and / or structure; and
- Reclassify posts in accordance with the findings of the analysis and uplift some posts to B.

At that time a further potential solution was put forward to consider paying all posts in the Watch Manager, Station Manager, Group Manager and Area Manager roles at a midpoint between A and B. At the same time as undertaking further financial calculations and exploring the HR issues attached to this decision a consultation was entered into with FBU members. The outcome was that there was some support from the FBU for paying at the mid-point being a potential solution but there was also informal representation that it would be fairer to simply follow the findings of the analysis. At the same time as this discussions about back pay were commenced between the FBU and management, with the Service position being that any changes would not attract back pay.

The next stage of the process is for the Service to carry out an options appraisal and decide on what form any revised proposal should take. This will then be put to relevant Representative Bodies for formal consultation prior to being presented to the Standards and Human Resources Committee for decision and recommendation to full Fire Authority. It is recognised that in these situations consensus is desirable between management and representative bodies but it is not an imperative.

5 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7 Initial Impact Assessment

This report contains merely statements of fact / historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

9 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

10 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.