



Minutes

Human Resources Committee

Date: 01 November 2013

Time: 10.30 am

Venue: Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Birkenshaw

Present: Councillors R Grahame (in the Chair), C Burke, P Caffrey, J Hardy, M Harland, L Holmes, J Hughes (as substitute for Councillor G Thornton), M Khan, A Taylor, A Wainwright and G Wilkinson

In Attendance: N/A

Apologies: Councillor G Thornton

13 Minutes of the last meeting

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Committee at a meeting held on 5 July 2013 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

14 Urgent Items

None.

15 Admission of the public

There were no items which required the exclusion of the public and press.

16 Declarations of interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made in any matter under consideration at the meeting.

17 Firefighters' Pension Scheme and New Firefighters' Pension Scheme – Amendment Order 2013

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Service Support which provided an update on the key implications for West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in relation to amendments to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 1992 (FPS) and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 (NFPS) which had been made as part of an ongoing programme of modernisation and public sector pension reform.

Members were advised of the key amendments as follows;

- Removal of rule relating to compulsory retirement on the grounds of efficiency – existing employment and equalities legislation would suffice
- Commutation rule (Rule B7) had been removed – would require future Member approval for implementation of a new West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority policy in relation to Authority discretions
- Discretionary introduction of additional pension benefits – this would have little impact as the Authority had taken the policy decision to make temporary promotion allowances non-pensionable
- Abatement – the Authority's Flexible Retirement Policy, following some minor adjustment, would be consistent with the Government intentions in relation to abatement

It was reported that an additional proposed amendment relating to exemptions from payment of pension contributions had created some uncertainty about whether or not it was discriminatory on the grounds of age. Government was seeking a declaration from the Courts to gain some legal certainty in this regard.

Financial implications in relation to changes to the Commutation Rule B7 would be reported to Members in any future reports recommending its application on an individual basis.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

18 Retained Firefighters' Pension Settlement – Consultation on access to a modified scheme

The Director of Service Support submitted a report which updated Members on the response made to the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation document in relation to the proposed terms of access to a pension scheme for retained firefighters employed by a Fire and Rescue Authority between 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006.

It was reported that the potential costs for this Authority could exceed £2m and there continued to be some uncertainty about how the changes would be funded, whether it be through pension grant from central government or the Revenue Support Grant. Members were advised that the most likely outcome would be an adjustment to employer contributions over a fifteen year period. Further work had to be undertaken centrally on the funding element although it was anticipated that the Authority would be asked to approve an increase in balances to cover potential costs associated with these changes in the interim.

The four consultation responses were detailed at paragraph 2.4 of the report now submitted.

RESOLVED

That the consultation responses on the terms of access for retained firefighters into a pension scheme for the period between 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006 be noted.

19 Local Government Pension Scheme 2014 – consultation

Members considered a report of the Director of Service Support which advised of the consultation response submitted by the West Yorkshire Pension Fund on behalf of this Authority in respect of changes to the administration of the new Local Government Pension Scheme.

The consultation had been short and concluded in early August and Members were advised that changes would be introduced with effect from 1 April 2014. A copy of the responses made were detailed at Annex A to the report now submitted.

It was also reported that the main regulations had been laid before Parliament on 19 September 2013.

RESOLVED

That the responses on the third period of statutory consultation for the new Local Government Pension Scheme be noted.

20 Government Review of the Public Sector Equality Duty

The Director of Service Support submitted a report which updated Members on the outcome of an independent review into the effectiveness of the Government's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Members were advised that the review had been undertaken by an independent Steering Group as part of Government's "red tape challenge" and had considered evidence from a diverse range of organisations. Conclusions and recommendations from the review had been published on 6 September 2013. The main finding of the Group was that it was too early to make a final judgement on the effectiveness of PSED which had only been introduced in April 2011. A number of recommendations were made however (including one to revisit the review in 2016) and were detailed in the report now submitted.

Members considered the recommendations and sought further information on benchmarking in this Authority and commented on the Authority's pragmatic and practical approach to this specific duty. Some disquiet was also expressed about the fact that a suggestion should have been made in the Review that some public bodies were not proportionate in their approach to compliance.

RESOLVED

- (i) Committee noted the findings of the report and concurred with the feedback at paragraph 2.6 of the report now submitted;
- (ii) That the Committee wishes to reiterate the view that this Authority and other public bodies do not "gold plate" what they do but rather treat their equality duties as an integral part of service delivery; and
- (iii) That Officers be again congratulated on the work they have undertaken in assisting this Authority to achieve the highest standard of benchmarking under the Equality Framework.

21 Pay Settlement and Allowances 2013 – 14 – Green book employees

Members received an update on the 2013 / 14 pay settlement, removal of Spinal Column point 4 (SCP4) and allowances for Green book employees which were implemented on 1 April 2013.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

22 Department of Communities and Local Government Operational Training Guidance – Breathing Apparatus

The Director of Service Support submitted a report which summarised the position of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (WYFRS) in relation to recently published operational guidance on breathing apparatus.

It was reported that a gap analysis had provided assurance that the WYFRS breathing apparatus (BA) training was compliant with the guidance and that only a few minor amendments were required to some elements of the training in West Yorkshire.

Members were advised that introduction of the guidance would not incur any additional costs for the Authority.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

23 Human Resources Activity Report

The Director of Service Support provided a report which informed Members of the Authority's key areas relating to Human Resources to the end of September 2013, sickness absence figures to the end of June 2013, the annual age profile review and changes to the establishment.

Members were advised that sickness levels were good in the face of demanding targets and the reduction in non-certified sickness was particularly pleasing in view of it being a notoriously difficult issue to manage.

It was reported that the Retained Firefighter recruitment drive, made in response to the requirements of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), had been very successful and 14 new Retained firefighters were in the process of being recruited.

With regard to fitness levels and the current national debate, the Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the previously reported Firefit review which was examining the possibility of introducing different national testing regimes appropriate to role (Min no. 8 refers).

RESOLVED

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That the amendments to the establishment be approved; and
- c) That Brigade fitness performance against standards be included in future Activity Reports.

Chair