

Notes of Joint Consultative Panel

19 September 2016
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Clinton (Chair)
Councillor Booth (Vice Chair)
Councillors Allcock and P. Singh

Apologies: Councillors Dad, Idrees (Substitute) and Bennett
Andrew Scattergood – Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
CFO Andy Hickmott, Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)
Vic Mallabar – (UNISON)

Employees Side: Steve Price-Hunt – Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
Angela Johnson (FBU)

Officers: Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler (People Support Services)
Wendy Browning-Sampson, People Support Manager

8/16 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

9/16 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel held on 11 April 2016

The notes of the Joint Consultative Panel held on 11 April 2016 were approved as a correct record.

A note indicating the Business Partners and Business Assistants areas of responsibility was circulated to the members of the Panel and will also be emailed to Members of the Panel. It was explained that the People Support Services support just under 2,000 members of staff. They support both line managers and their staff.

It was agreed that at the next Joint Consultative Panel on the 7 November, a demonstration of one or two of the Effective Manager Series videos will be shown to the Panel. Members of the Panel will also be shown how to access the videos via Ecademy.

Further to a report received by the Joint Consultative Panel in February 2016, where the MIND “Blue Light” Pledge was signed, the Panel were further informed of the Wellbeing Strategy, Blue Light programme and new initiatives that have been developed and are currently being embedded within the organisation.

The Wellbeing Strategy was launched in December 2015 and an update on activities was provided:

- A fire service choir “The Choir Brigade” has been formed.
- A number of leadership forums have been held, including informative and informal activities on health and wellbeing.
- Global Corporate Challenge began on 25 May 2016, a 100 day wellbeing programme involving 27 WMFS teams competing in a virtual race around the world, counting as many steps as possible each day. This programme will be evaluated.
- Operational Fitness Assessment – Shortly, all operational employees will be required to undertake an Annual Fitness test using a new method, the Chester Treadmill Test (CTT). A Policy would be issued and will encourage staff to think about their health, fitness and well being. The test will be carried out on sites using the calibrated treadmills and recorded electronically as an Activity Role. The tests will be repeated annually and quarterly reports will be provided to Operational Commanders. Previously, assessments were three yearly and the new 12 month programme had been achieved with support from the FBU.
- Individuals who don’t achieve the required standard but remain above an identified safety threshold level will be referred to the Brigade Fitness Advisor for further gas analysis testing (Covox) and advice.
- Individuals who fail completely could be a risk to themselves, colleagues and the community and will be taken off the run and given advice by the Brigade Fitness Advisor. They will be placed on a work up programme with involvement with the line manager and Business Partner from People Support.

- Menopause Training for Managers had been well received. The Service had worked closely with the West Midlands Association of Women in Policing in raising the profile of the effects of the menopause in the workforce.
- A series of short videos of employees talking about their disabilities and dyslexia videos had been received.
- World Suicide Prevention Day – 10 September – The Service raised awareness of this day as the highest suicide rate in the UK in 2014 was for men aged 45-49 (our demographic). The Service would be highlighting the support that is available internally and externally such as through the Employee Assistance Programme OPTUM 24/7, Occupational Health and the Samaritans. Help them to get the help they need.
- It was explained that OPTUM 24/7 is an Employee Assistance Programme who provide a counselling service to members who are struggling with their work and life stresses
- The work also underlines the Critical Incident Support and debriefings and shows that External support can be brought in to help.
- Working with the FBU Learning Centre, 60 places have been secured for WMFS staff on the Level 3 Certificate in Personal training qualification. The course is free of charge to employees and last for 15 months. It will benefit all operational staff to have a local Personal Trainer that they can utilise to improve their fitness and lifestyle.
- MIND Blue Light Programme

In January 2016, the WMFS action plan was approved by MIND and the Service became authorised signatories to the Pledge. Over the past twelve months, WMFS has worked closely with MINDS and a lot of managers had attended the training. Positive feedback had been received and an intern was currently evaluating the impact of the programme. The training had been open to the wider workforce. WMFS will continue to work with MIND and to implement the action plan.

The Wellbeing Strategy continues to be implemented and supports programmes for employees' wellbeing. It is a supporting strategy and will continue to be embedded within the organisation. It has been recognised that illnesses caused by stress and mental health issues can manifest themselves in aches and pains and is an area for the organisation to focus on. This can also lead to improved sickness levels and directly links to the Service Delivery Model.

The Chair of the Panel thanked officers for the report and felt it was useful in making men aware of their problems and helping them to become more confident to bring issues forward. It was felt that special awareness days should be celebrated and it was confirmed that the Service does raise awareness in this way.

It was confirmed that staff trust and value the Occupational Health Department and engage with them. There was a good level of understanding of mental health issues and staff watch out for each other and feel able to approach a colleague if they noticed any changes.

WMFS would continue to work with MIND as there was some scepticism amongst staff and they would prefer to Occupational Health and Welfare.

Councillor Paul Singh indicated that he was very proud of the work undertaken in respect of MIND and had issued a Press Release earlier in the year. He stated that this was a hidden problem, but there were over 6,000 lives lost a year to suicide, but it would be amazing if the work saved a life and possibly this work would save more lives from suicide than from fire.

Councillor Keith Allcock was really pleased with the work being carried out in respect of mental health.

Councillor Allcock enquired to the level of support given to people leaving or have left the Fire Service. It was explained that this was an ongoing issue and plan was being put in place. Retirement courses are run to support individuals with the next steps of their life.

It was confirmed the staff leaving the service have access to the Employee Assistance Programme that provide information on debt management and financial support. The Firefighters Charity also provides support to individuals when they have left and the Chair stated that if staff had been a member of a union they would have access to support from the Union as well. The Fire Service Chaplain is also available.

The Panel noted the report and thanked the officers for their work with the Union.

11/16

Dispute Resolution Report

The Panel received the Dispute Resolution Report for the period 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2016. It was noted that officers were looking at simplifying and condensing the report from September to make it easier to read.

It was explained to new Members of that the report had been produced at the request of the FBU when there had been a rise in appeals. The report is produced in order that Members of the Panel have the information and also the approaches being taken by the Service to address any issues. The report provides a summary of lessons learned, taking into account issues raised by Trade Unions/Representative Bodies, Line Managers and People Support Services Business partners, specifically issues raised during the discussions at the Joint Consultative Committee and Joint Working Party.

It was explained that Green Book applies to staff on local government terms and conditions such as non uniformed staff.

Grey Book applies to the Conditions of Service for operational staff.

11.1 Grievances

Appendix 1 Section A provides details of 11 grievance cases during 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2016.

There were:

5 Grey Book employees

6 Green Book employees

None of the grievances had led to a complaint being filed with the Employment Tribunal Service as at 30 June 2016.

The number of formal grievances had increased by 3 compared to the previous year.

11.2 An increase in disciplinary investigations was detailed in Appendix 1 Section B

There were 30 investigations commenced in this reporting period, 22 were undertaken at Gross Misconduct level and 8 at Misconduct level.

Of these 21 concerned Grey book employees and 9 concerned green book employees, 29 were male and 1 was female.

17 of the 30 went to Gross Misconduct which were covering Grey Book employees. There were 4 hearings, 3 at Misconduct level and 1 at Gross Misconduct level.

36.6% of the investigations are linked to 1 station. The outcome of 11 disciplinaries was that no formal action was taken following investigation. A Management enquiry is still ongoing.

There were no trends to report and the data is proportionally reflective of the service.

11.3 Employment Tribunal Activity

The one outstanding claim against WMFS lodged with the Employment Tribunals Service had been settled.

Two cases were in the pre-conciliation process, but no agreement had been reached so complaints may come in.

11.4 Lessons Learned

One of the lessons learned was to nip issues in the bud and move forward.

The People Support Services Team are working on the revised toolkit for managers including template letters. The toolkit will be shared with the Trade Unions/Representative Bodies and will be shared with Member the next Joint Consultative Panel meeting when the report comes to Panel.

Collaborative working between Managers, People Support Services and the Trade Unions/Representative bodies has been taking place. The Chair of the Authority has a blog and this has been used to communicate information. The People Support Service were constantly working with unions to improve relationships and this had significantly improved.

11.5 Failure to consult/agree

A Trade dispute was going to come to previous Joint Consultative Panel. However, it was decided to work together to find a way forward and this work is continuing to ensure there is a better platform to start from.

Steve Price-Hunt, confirm that the FBU had decided not to bring the trade dispute to Joint Consultative Panel and it was resolved by dialogue. Members agree to changes in working practices. There was a big change at the moment with the Fire Brigades Union working together with management to implement different and new ways of working and to provide a period of stability during a time of austerity.

SPH welcomes new structure. By way of background, it was explained that the Fire Brigades Union raised concerns about the amount of grievances and disciplinary investigations being undertaken. The amount was alarmingly high and Joint Consultative Panel looked at this and instructed the People Support Services to look at it.

PSS looked at working practices, and introduced an education programme of new measures and over the last 18 months, the numbers have reduced to a level acceptable for an organisation of this size.

The Joint Consultative Panel had put this in place and People Support Service put the education programme in place and this was producing encouraging results.

Councillor Paul Singh was surprised by the large number of incidents and wondered if this would reduce.

Steve Price-Hunt explained that any investigation takes a lot of time and resources. Education has been taken on board and figures have come down to an acceptable level and the organisation can cope with this.

The Chair felt that the FBU and PSS had done well and that the education programme had worked.

Sarah Warnes confirmed that managers had received their training and there had been a positive improvement

The aim was to strive for zero and disciplinary cases to become the exception rather than the norm and they would continue to focus on key areas. Out of the debrief process.

The Chair stated that they would look at the report again in six months' time, but if there is anything that needs to be highlighted before the meeting in April, it should be reported to the Joint Consultative Panel.

(The meeting closed at 1320 hours)

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