MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT GROUP

13 DECEMBER 2016

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr Barbara Murray (Chair)** Councillors Sharon Connor and Lesley Rennie

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Councillor Marianne Welsh

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Marianne Welsh.

2. Review of Notes taken from Staff Engagement Event 22nd September 16

Members were provided with a copy of notes and feedback from the last Staff Engagement Day in September 2016, for their consideration.
Members discussed in detail the comments and ideas from staff and Members.

Communication with Staff:
There was discussion around the best way in which Lead Members can interact with all staff, not just senior managers. Members were of the opinion that there are many opportunities to engage with staff, including attendance at team meetings, Hot News articles and utilising "Message of the Day" on the Portal.

The Democratic Services Manager gave an update on progress with regards to Hot News articles on Members and the poster currently being produced, which will be issued to all stations.

Suggestion Box Comments:
Members discussed the suggestions that had been put into the suggestion box at the Staff Engagement Day, which included the introduction of first aid training for all staff; and having an ideas forum.

Participation of Staff in Decision Making/Problem Solving:
Members noted the comments made on this issue during the Staff Engagement Day.
The Democratic Services Manager provided some examples of the ways in which staff are encouraged to participate (bearing in mind that each department will have different ways of working) such as being involved in the development of the Functional Plan and setting of departmental objectives.

Discussion took place regarding staff involvement in Police and Fire collaboration decisions.

Feedback on the inclusivity of the service with regard to BME and recruitment was discussed. Members agreed that the service works in excess of any requirements, wherever applicable arranging positive action events for recruitment. However they noted that appointments can only be made from the applicants that apply; and on merit.

Grievance and Discipline:
Comments had been made by staff regarding independent review of appeals. Discussion took place around the reasons for changing procedures in the past, including the need to avoid unnecessary escalation of grievances and disciplines. This has required the training of managers in having difficult conversations and in the use of the Conduct and Capability Policy.

Staff Morale:
Members noted that some concern had been expressed by staff at the Staff Engagement Day over further potential collaboration with the Police; and differences in culture that exist between the two services.

Staff had raised with Members their concern that departments and teams are often unaware of what other areas of the Service do, or contribute to the aims and values of the service. Best practice was discussed with regard to format of team meetings and buddy support provision to new employees.

It was resolved that:

a) Lead Members should arrange to attend team meetings of those teams within their respective remits.

b) Members will use Message of the Day to wish employees Happy New Year.

c) Staff will be made aware of how to contact Members should they wish to do so.

d) The Democratic Services Manager will speak to the Training and Development Department about the possibility of cascading First Aid Training to all staff.

e) The Democratic Services Manager explore with the Head of Strategy and Performance the possibility of re-invigorating the Ideas Scheme; with ideas resulting from the scheme to be discussed by this Committee.

f) Lead Members discuss the issue of staff participation in decision making at meetings with their Support Officer.

g) Lead Members be requested to promote best practice with Senior Officers in regard to promotion of other departments and teams at team meetings, such as the use of “guest speakers”.

3. Outcomes of the 2016 Staff Survey

Members discussed the outcomes from the 2016 staff survey, with results on employee opinions of the Fire Authority and its Members showing some improvement on the 2014 survey.

Members commented that the ideas following the 2014 survey are now being implemented and progressed and it was requested that the outcomes be monitored.

4. Input from the Authority for the Equalities Framework Assessment

Members were informed about the Equalities Excellence Framework Assessment which was due to take place in June 2017, but which is now on hold pending potential changes. However the Authority still needs to consider how Members engage with communities – particularly individuals with protected characteristics or those who are vulnerable, with regard to the work of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service; and consider how evidence of this engagement can be captured.

There was some discussion regarding training for Members around what role they can play in terms of delivering fire safety messages; and identifying issues within their communities. It was suggested that this could take the form of a learning lunch, providing Members with information regarding the delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks and Safe and Well Visits, to help raise Members awareness around identifying fire safety issues and vulnerability within their communities.

It was resolved that:

The Democratic Services Manager speak to relevant officers regarding Member training on Safe and Well visits; and how to identify risk in the community and deliver fire safety messages effectively.

5. Format of Station Visits

Members discussed the format of station visits, with particular focus on recent visits to the TDA and Aintree/Kensington.

Members commented that they felt the format of the Staff Engagement sessions held with support staff, led to more open engagement with those employees, compared to the format of Station Visits with operational staff.

It was noted that the Engagement Day in January 2017 to Fire Control, will follow a different format, allowing for 1-2-1- discussion with staff and enabling Members to see first-hand what the role of Fire Control entails.

Consideration was given to the format of future station visits, with suggestions made that Members and staff “buddy” up to be shown different elements of the station and equipment.

Members also discussed other events that they could attend on stations and the timings of station visits. It was noted that there would be no benefit to undertaking station visits at evenings or weekends, as this would not capture different groups of employees.

It was resolved that:

a. Consideration be given to the format of future station visits.

b. A follow up visit to the TDA be undertaken, to capture non-operational staff (such as advocates) based on fire stations and canteen staff based at the TDA.

6. Hot New Articles

Members were informed that in conjunction with Corporate Communications, Democratic Services have produced a poster to be issued to all Authority premises. This poster gives an outline of what the Authority does and the photographs of existing Members. After the AGM each year the poster will be updated.

Corporate Communications have confirmed that regular space will be made available in the Hot News magazine for the Authority. Democratic Services have emailed all Members with a range of questions, the responses to which will form the basis of the articles in editions of the Hot News.

It was resolved that:

Members will consider the questions over the Christmas break, in order to respond in the New Year.

7. Any Other Business

Members discussed the “Member Development Programme 2016-18”.

They were informed that Democratic Services are currently investigating the possibility of commissioning NW Employers to deliver scrutiny training to Members, with particular emphasis on scrutiny within Fire and Rescue Authorities. To this end, the Democratic Services Manager was negotiating with the other NW Fire and Rescue Services to determine the level of interest in sharing this training.

Members discussed the need to have open and effective challenge during all Authority and Committee meetings.

Members were minded that this group, the “Member Development and Engagement Group”, forms part of the scrutiny process and that minutes from this meeting should go forward to the Full Authority for information.

It was resolved that:

a. Democratic Services will continue investigating the delivery of scrutiny training by NW Employers and the opening up of this training to Members from other NW Fire and Rescue Services.

b. The minutes from the Member Development and Engagement Group will be submitted to the Full Authority for discussion.

8. Action Log

An Action Log has been produced for the Member Development and Engagement Group to monitor the progress of actions.

9. Close

The meeting was concluded.

Date of next meeting Thursday, 23 February 2017

Signed:_____ Date:_____