

LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

MEMBER TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

Notes of meeting held in the Main Conference Room, Service Headquarters, Fulwood, on Wednesday, 4 November 2020.

PRESENT:

Councillors

D Smith (Chairman)
I Brown (Vice-Chair)
Z Khan
T Williams

Officers

B Norman, A/Deputy Chief Fire Officer (LFRS)
B Warren, Director of People and Development (LFRS)
D Brooks, Principal Member Services Officer (LFRS)
N Bashall, Member Services Officer (LFRS)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from County Councillors S Holgate and A Kay.

NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman, Councillor D Smith welcomed the Members to the meeting.

The notes of the previous meeting held 6 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

REVIEW OF MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Authority has had a Member Training and Development Strategy in place since 2006 which had been reviewed regularly. Members noted that the review of the Member Training and Development Strategy included a comparison with the model strategy which was used by North West Employers Organisations and other local Authorities' strategies. Members reviewed and approved the revised Strategy as presented which included minor revisions to the PDP – Review Meeting and Personal Development Plan template to update the details of the training and development information available to Members.

Members continued to find the Members' Handbook a useful resource. It was confirmed that the Handbook would be updated after the elections were due in May 2021 and that hard copies would be circulated to Members. Members also felt that the Member Information Bulletin was very informative and continued to be the main means of communication.

Members felt that the Strategy worked well and approved the revised Strategy as presented.

MEMBER TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT - UPDATE REPORT

The Director of People & Development gave a brief background of the work and successes of the Member Training & Development Working Group.

Personal Development Plans

This year had seen 3 new Councillors join the CFA all of whom had participated in their initial PDP and induction discussions. Members noted that a lack of resources over the 7-month period to March 2020 followed by Government restrictions imposed later that same month due to the Coronavirus Pandemic had led to a backlog of work. Democratic Services had started the process of circulating review documentation electronically to all Members with effect from September 2020 and the remaining 22 Members had been reviewing their annual PDP and Action Plans.

e-Learning

Through the Member Information Bulletin, Members were encouraged to view North West Employers Organisation (NWEO) and Local Government Association (LGA) websites which offer support to authorities in the region and for Members to access training opportunities. Members noted that, although the majority of face-to-face events had been postponed due to the Pandemic, online content had continued to be available to support elected members.

Members' Handbook

The Members' Handbook was a pocket-sized, quick reference guide produced for Members to support their Training and Development. It set out: the role of the CFA and its committee structure, scheduled meeting dates and Members' contact details. It also detailed the Executive Board contact numbers and responsibilities, area contact information and a number of key issues for new Members to consider. Members noted that the Handbook would be updated for the municipal year 2021/22.

Member Information Bulletin

A quarterly Information Bulletin had continued to be emailed to keep Members informed of the latest items of interest, up and coming Fire Authority Committee meeting dates and Member Training and Development news and opportunities. This was valued by Members and was considered by Officers to be the key document for keeping Members up-to-date. Members noted that Government restrictions imposed in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic had meant that the majority of events, such as Prince's Trust Presentations had not taken place during 2020.

Members felt that the Lancashire Resilience Forum Newsletters circulated to all CFA Members were really informative and contained some really useful links to additional details.

Co-ordination of Training

To reassure Members, Democratic Services made regular contact with home authorities to co-ordinate member training and development opportunities and avoid duplication; sharing

Members personal development plans and records with home authorities as appropriate.

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS 2019/20

The Member Training and Development Working Group was responsible for analysing and agreeing the training needs of Members that linked to the objectives, priorities and vision of the Authority.

Members were updated on the action that had been taken in response to training needs identified from the Training Needs Analysis undertaken in 2019 and the Personal Development sessions that had been held with Members throughout 2019/20.

Members noted that in light of the Covid-19 restrictions the Chairman of the Member Training and Development Working Group had agreed that the 2020 Personal Development Plan (PDP) reviews would be conducted electronically. Democratic Services had started the process of circulating review documentation to all Members.

Following consideration, Members agreed that their training needs were being met and agreed the training needs for 2020/21 as follows:

- To continue to promote fire safety and the work of the Member Champions;
- To continue to attend service area inductions / meetings at stations and information sessions on key issues to support decision-making;
- To maintain good attendance at all Strategy Group meetings, encouraging all Members to attend;
- To continue with the informal buddy system;
- To support the principle to use electronic systems where preferred / available;
- To attend a 'SafeDrive StayAlive' event.

The Director of People & Development referred to the points raised by CC Hennessy at September's Fire Authority in her role as the Fire Authority's Local Government Association (LGA) representative with respect to Pensions. Members agreed that, as the body responsible for the Firefighters Pension Scheme, knowledge of pensions should be added as a Member training need for 2020/21. The Director of People & Development confirmed that this would be taken forward through a presentation by the senior pension adviser of the LGA directly after the next Fire Authority on 14 December 2020.

Members noted that the HMICFRS Inspection in respect of the Service's response to Covid had taken place. It had not been a formal inspection and a letter outlining the overall findings was expected in the coming weeks.

MONITORING, REVIEW & EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

This report provided an update on Member Training and Development activities since the previous meeting of the Group. The report showed opportunities and outcomes of Member Training and Development activity. Members noted the report for information which included:

Visits to Local Fire Stations

Prior to the introduction in March 2020 of restrictions due to the Coronavirus Pandemic,

Members were encouraged to contact area personnel to visit their local fire station to discuss local key issues. Visits were promoted through the handbook and member information bulletin. The Chairman, accompanied where possible by the Vice-Chairman aimed to visit each station on an annual basis.

The Chairman had attended 24 station visits since November 2019 and this had been rolled out to include attendance at Area Management meetings prior to the Covid-19 restrictions.

LGA Annual Fire Conference & Exhibition

Positive feedback had been received from Members who had attended the 2020 Conference in Blackpool, Lancashire. The 2-day conference had included sessions on: climate change, responding to the HMICFRS inspection, finance and funding, risk, standards and protection and building safety.

Involvement at Area Level

Members had been routinely invited to attend local events including Prince's Trust Presentation events prior to the introduction of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Members noted that a number of events and visits normally attended by Members during the course of the year had not taken place following the Government restrictions introduced in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, including: The Annual Service-Wide Open Day; the LGA Leadership Essentials Fire and Rescue Programme and Member visits to North West Fire Control in Warrington.

Preparation for CFA Virtual Meetings

Government legislation and guidelines in response to the Coronavirus had led to significant changes to working practices from March 2020. All Fire Authority meetings since July 2020 had been held remotely using Microsoft Teams and made accessible to the press and public via a live webcast on YouTube. Members had taken part in 1-2-1 test sessions using Microsoft Teams in preparation for the virtual meetings.

Members confirmed that they had adapted to the need to access meetings remotely using Microsoft Teams and agreed that connectivity during meetings continued to be the main issue. It was felt that things had improved considerably over time and that ongoing problems seemed largely due to personal broadband bandwidth, the device used to access the meetings and the method used to join the meetings. Members noted that some staff had experienced similar issues when accessing meetings from remote areas. It was agreed that Lancashire County Council moving to Microsoft Teams as the primary product would also assist with Members' access to meetings.

The Director of People & Development confirmed that although the Service had continued to deliver a lot of the work, steps had also been taken to review all activity to support the efforts of the Government and the NHS to reduce the general infection rate in the population by reducing any activity that was not necessary. Meetings were still going ahead remotely where possible. Members were reminded not to visit stations until Covid restrictions were lifted.

The Chairman of the Working Group asked the A/Deputy Chief Fire Officer to write to all staff on behalf of the Member Training and Development Working Group to thank them for continuing to do a very professional job during these unprecedented times.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

The next meeting of the Group would be held on Thursday, 29 April 2021 at 1000 hours – venue to be confirmed.

A further meeting date was agreed for 4 November 2021 – venue to be confirmed.

B WARREN
Director of People and Development

LFRS HQ
Fulwood