

23 November 2009

Other business update

Summary

This report updates Members on current issues of interest to the Committee which are not covered elsewhere on this agenda. Updates are included on:

- LGA Guidance on Fire and Rescue Services on uniformed ill-health retirements
- Industrial relations
- Best practice on co-responding schemes
- Pensions (Cllr Walker to provide an oral update)

Recommendations

Members are asked to note policy developments.

Action

Secretariat as appropriate.

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Other business update

Best practice on co-responding schemes

At the Committee meeting in September, Members requested the LGA Group to prepare examples of best practice for Fire Authorities on co-responding schemes.

Since the meeting, IDeA officers have progressed this, and have had a positive response from Authorities willing to put forward examples. These case studies will be available via the IDeA website, www.idea.gov.uk, shortly.

LGA Guidance on Fire and Rescue Services on uniformed ill-health retirements

Revised guidance has been issued to assist Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England to manage those medical incapacity and long term sickness cases which may result in an ill health retirement and in particular, to enable them to avoid reaching that outcome as far as is practicable. The guidance, therefore, covers absence management, alternative employment, the process FRSs need to go through and to provide links to useful support information for those involved in the process. A copy is available on the LGA website - www.lga.gov.uk

Update on industrial relations

Background

LGE provides the Employers' Side Secretariat to the National Joint Council for LAFRS. Part of that role is the provision of assistance at local level where disagreements have not been resolved through local consultation or negotiation. This service is provided solely on request by both parties at local level. It can be undertaken on either a formal or informal basis. The former involves a formal conciliation role; the latter facilitates the discussion at local level without the need for a formal meeting utilising the contacts we have with the FBU at national level (unlike formal conciliation where discussion at local level has been exhausted such work normally takes places at a relatively early stage). Both aspects of this work are clearly valued by the majority of FRS's, many of whom have made successful use of it on one or more occasions. Matters remain the property of the individual FRS and as such referral does not make a 'local' issue 'national'. Accordingly, to respect the confidentiality of the local parties it is not work that allows us to publically identify the FRSs concerned.

Recent activity

In recent months there have been serious industrial relations issues in six fire and rescue services. For the purpose of this report, "serious" is defined as "subject to a

23 4

ballot for industrial action resulting in strike action or action short of a strike, or awareness that such a ballot may shortly be undertaken.” Four of those six fire and rescue services have made use of the formal Joint Secretaries conciliation process. In each case a mutually acceptable resolution has been identified and either signed up to by the parties at the time or has formed the basis of agreement shortly thereafter at local level. The remaining FRS's will shortly take part in a formal Joint Secretaries conciliation process. In the meantime both sides have seen the wisdom of mutually agreeing to extend the 'life' of the ballot in order to allow time for those talks to take place and as such no strike dates have been announced.

We have not been involved with the remaining two FRSs in the context of Joint Secretary support. We understand in the case of one of those FRSs (from press releases issued by both parties today) that the matter of dispute - the introduction of a new shift arrangement based on two twelve-hour shifts and notice of the intention to dismiss and re-engage staff in order to achieve this - will be referred to ACAS for arbitration. In the meantime, the authority will withdraw notice of its intention to dismiss and re-engage staff on new arrangements and the union has agreed to suspend strike action. As far as I am aware the other FRS remains subject to action short of a strike.

Informal work has also been undertaken with three FRSs (again at the request of both parties) to assist the discussions at local level and reduce the potential of industrial action in those FRSs.

Pensions update

Cllr Fred Walker will give an oral update on Firefighters' pension schemes at the meeting.