NOTTINGHAMSHIRE Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Policy and Strategy Committee

PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 02 February 2024

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on progress against the People Strategy 2023-25.

Recommendations:

That Members note the progress on the delivery of the People Strategy.

CONTACT OFFICER

Name:	Leila Berry Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tel:	0115 8388100
Email:	leila.berry@notts-fire.gov.uk
Media Enquiries Contact:	Corporate Communications Team 0115 8388100 corporatecomms@notts-fire.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 A People Strategy forms part of the delivery mechanism for the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), setting out key workforce issues and commitments to ensure that the Service can deliver on its strategic objectives.

1.2 The people elements of the CRMP are set out within Strategic Goal 4: "We will continue to support and develop our workforce and promote an inclusive service". However, by the very nature of this Strategy, it will seek to support all six strategic goals, as only through effective workforce planning, training, and development of a culture which is inclusive, supportive and where each individual contribution is valued, can the Service meet its CRMP commitments and ambitions. The ultimate aim is to be an outstanding employer.

1.3 The People Strategy is underpinned by national standards and workstreams developed through the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) to promote good working practice across the sector.

1.4 The report provides an overview of progress against the following focus areas:

- Shaping our workforce to deliver our services;
- Leadership and employee development;
- Positive workplace, and culture;
- Inclusion;
- Health and well-being.

2. REPORT

2.1 A key component of any People Strategy is the way in which the Service continuously reviews it workforce model to ensure it has the right people, with the required skills, in the right place at the right time. This is achieved through effective workforce planning and **shaping our workforce to deliver our services** effectively.

2.2 A workforce plan for 2023-25 was approved by this Committee in June 2023 and an update was provided at the last meeting on 10 November 2023. This update set out the actions being taken to ensure that the Service is in a sustainable position to deliver its key services and can make continuous progress toward achieving the objectives of the CRMP.

2.3 The previous update outlined the actions taken to maintain the operational establishment and referenced reductions in turnover for both on-call and support roles, as well as positive action recruitment activity during 2023. The transition of Ashfield fire station to a wholetime cover model was set out within the People Strategy and was achieved in November 2023.

2.4   The previous Workforce Plan update referenced the role of the Futures 25 agenda as part of a planned programme to review the current establishment structure to better align posts, systems and skills, to meet current and future demands. The first phase of this review has focused on prevention and community engagement and will conclude toward the end of this financial year. This will meet the commitment made within the People Strategy to focus improvements in these areas.

2.5   To ensure that employees have the skills they need, **Workforce Development** is provided for both operational and non-operational training throughout the year, primarily to ensure that operational employees acquire, develop and maintain core skills and knowledge to operate safely and competently in line with national operational guidance. The Service is active within the region in terms of developing material and support to ensure consistent standards for operational training provision.

2.6   Acquisition and revalidation of core skills takes place at the Service Development Centre (SDC), but maintenance of competence is undertaken through a variety of measures, including drills within the workplace, or exercised through operational activities, often with partner agencies, to test preparedness for major events. The focus for operational training this year has been compartment fire behaviour training (revalidated every two years) which provides firefighters with the requisite skills and knowledge in the principles of combustion and compartment fire behaviour; how fire develops and spreads within a compartment and how it can be extinguished.   As a measure of assurance, 98% of operational personnel are competent ("in ticket") against core national skills.

2.7   Trainers also provide incident command training at a bespoke training facility at Mansfield fire station for commanders at Level 1 (supervisory managers) to Level 3 (flexi-officers). Significant investment delivered a new suite following the move from its site at the former headquarters to Mansfield in 2022 and is a state-of-the-art facility, providing realistic, virtual programmes to provide both development and re-validation in a safe learning environment.

2.8   A focus for non-operational training is leadership development – this is identified by the NFCC as key to effective workforce and succession planning. The NFRS Leadership Framework, which sets out a development pathway from supervisory to strategic roles, is currently under review.

2.9   This year the Service has adopted the NFCC supervisory leadership programme for Level 3 leadership development and has recently appointed a Level 5 leadership training provider (middle manager) to provide a revised programme from January 2024. The Service is currently working with Nottingham Trent University and other public sector partners to provide a transformational leadership programme aimed at potential future strategic managers. These programmes are supplemented by access to workshops, e-learning packages and continuous professional development to ensure that current and future NFRS leaders receive support to manage their personal and professional development throughout their careers.

2.10 A focus on a **positive workplace** within the strategy is intended to ensure that all employees experience a positive working environment where they feel engaged, valued and listened to and where the physical environment, as well as expected behaviours, support dignity, respect and equality.

2.11 This reflects the national position of improving the culture of the Fire and Rescue Service, which has been a focus during 2023 and is set out within the NFCC Culture Action Plan and HMI Culture and Values report. One aspect of which is the confidence of employees to raise concerns and, as reported to the previous Committee, has resulted in the implementation of an independent reporting provision through company called 'Say So' as another way for employees to raise issues.

2.12 The Service has recently incorporated the Organisational Development and Inclusion team to the Futures 25 programme to reflect the importance of cultural and equalities priorities as an integral part of the change agenda. This team has been supplemented by additional internal roles to support the roll-out of cultural change and they are working with an external cultural change consultancy to provide an independent overview and engagement plan, which will be implemented during 2024.

2.13 The Service is also working to embed the Fire and Rescue Service Core Code of Ethics through engagement with staff and changes to key policies, ensuring that the five commitments to ethical conduct translate into measurable outcomes and behaviours. The five commitments are:

- Putting Communities First;
- Integrity;
- Dignity and Respect;
- Leadership;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

2.14 As part of ensuring that the physical workplace environment is supportive of these commitments, particularly those linked to dignity and respect and EDI, the Service has commissioned a review of all fire stations and the Service Development Centre. This had led to the funding of a range of planned improvements to changing, toilet and shower facilities and access to buildings and facilities for both employees and service users.

2.15 A critical aspect of embedding a positive workplace and cultural change is communication and feedback from employees. This is set out within the People Strategy under **Workforce Engagement.** The Service provides numerous opportunities for employees to learn about key priorities and decisions and to feedback their views through staff conferences, news items, newsletters, live updates from the Chief Fire Officer, surveys, and involvement in, for instance, working groups for equipment replacement, station refurbishments, uniform review, changes to policy and the two-yearly staff survey which will be undertaken during 2024.

2.16   Staff networks have also become well established over the past year and provide valuable feedback on policy, and suggestions for future improvements. Whilst employee-led, the networks are supported by a strategic manager who can offer their support and guidance to progress issues and provide feedback.

2.17   Collectively, and in addition to the formal and informal engagement with the representative bodies, these channels ensure that the workforce remain informed and can engage with key issues, raise concerns and recommend improvements to ways of working with the Service.

2.18   A positive workplace has **inclusion** at its heart. The Service is committed to creating a workplace which understands and respects the different communities that it serves, as well as creating a workplace which is inclusive of different religions, race, sexual orientation, disability or gender. The Service provides training to all employees on equality and has introduced an Inclusive Leadership workshop for all managers during 2023 to emphasise the pivotal role that managers play in creating an inclusive environment.

2.19   The importance of **well-being support** is central to ensuring the physical, emotional and mental health of the workforce. The Service has a dedicated occupational health team who provide advice and support on medical and fitness issues, implement statutory medical and pre-employment checks, advise on long-term health conditions and refer employees to other specialist providers, including physiotherapy and counselling.

2.20   Focus during 2023 has been on mental health support and awareness, with development of the Post Critical Incident Support policy to respond to potentially traumatic incidents through a Crisis intervention team and access to specialist support. This will be supplemented by training for response officers in early 2024 and launch of a manager's mental health toolkit.

2.21   The Service has also been working with Derby University Mental Health Hub throughout the year to assess the provision against the MIND mental health standards and has undertaken employee surveys to support this work. One outcome from this engagement has been the creation of a Mental Health network which will launch in the new year. The network will seek to raise awareness of mental health issues and provide a "listening ear" for employees, sign-posting them to appropriate support and information.

2.22   Employees can also access a 24/7 Employee Assistance programme via an external provider to receive counselling support, advice on a number of issues including legal and debt advice, stress management, healthy lifestyles and a library of webinars, information, and self-help workbooks across a range of health, lifestyle and fitness topics. This is a confidential provision which is easy to access and available to all employees.

2.23   The Service is at the half-way point of implementing its People Strategy commitments. This report sets out the progress made to date on working toward delivery of these objectives and those area of focus for 2024, to provide assurance to Members of the ongoing commitment to creating a

workforce which is professional, supported and engaged, and where equality and diversity remain the cornerstone of this approach.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Specific workstreams outlined in the report are funded from existing budgets.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

The human resources and learning and development implications are set out within the report.

5. EQUALITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Strategy focuses on creating a positive workplace for employees where fairness, equality and inclusion are prioritised, and where ethical behaviour is an expectation of a professional workforce. The report sets out progress and future work in these areas over the next year, and the longer-term commitments to community engagement, cultural development and diversity through a 10-year plan.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental and sustainability implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from the report. However, a range of activities demonstrate continued fulfilment of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The People Strategy forms part of a suite of strategies which underpin the achievement of the strategic objectives of the Service, establishing a clear direction and priorities for workforce management and for equality, diversity and inclusion.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the progress on the delivery of the People Strategy.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER