



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

# **High Level Review of an Internal Report of the HR Function**

## **Overview Summary**

**December 2009**

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2006 the Nottinghamshire Combined Fire Authority commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) to undertake a review of the Human Resources (HR) function. This involved PwC in reviewing HR policies and procedures and their application; issues in relation to the management of absence, discipline and grievances; how the function met the needs of its customers; whether the team structure was supporting service delivery and the role of HR team members. PwC delivered its report to the Fire Authority in December 2006. The report contained a series of recommendations which were presented as an action plan.

Reports on progress against the Action Plan, and information relating to levels of absence, discipline and grievance, have been submitted to each meeting of the Human Resources Committee since this time.

In mid 2009, Frank Swann, NFRS Chief Fire Officer asked PwC to undertake a high level review of progress made by the HR Function since the initial report.

It was agreed that the most cost effective way to undertake the review was for NFRS to produce an internal report and for PwC to consider the validity of its contents by interviewing a cross section of Council members, Operational management and HR team members. It was also determined that consideration of relevant documentation should form part of the review.

The review of documentation, structured interviews and also some ad-hoc discussions took place between the beginning of August and the end of October 2009, with subsequent telephone contact and email correspondence, as required, between PwC and NFRS.

All of the information gathered from the three sources outlined above tends to support the conclusions of the internal report. This indicated an HR Function which was well structured and managed and which had experienced considerable improvement since the initial PwC report in December 2006.

# Approach

A high level review of an internal report on the HR Function was conducted. The report was read and its content and conclusions were reviewed and considered. (See appendix 1)

Relevant documentation and data identified during a scoping exercise was also reviewed in order to aid validation of the report's contents. (See appendix 1)

A series of structured telephone interviews with key stakeholder groups was conducted, i.e.:

- CFA members/former CFA members x 3
- Senior Managers x 3
- HR team members x 3

(see appendix 2)

Interviewees were asked broadly the same questions, (see appendix 3) although there was a slight variation in the ones put to the HR team members. The questions were aimed at:

- Establishing the interviewees relationship with HR, or role within the HR team
- Identifying the current business context within which the HR Function was operating
- Understanding any changes in HR operation and related impacts since the initial PwC report in December 2006

Whilst on site at NFRS HQ to carry out the document review, a number of brief, ad-hoc discussions were held with some NFRS Managers and the HR team. (see appendix 3) These brief discussions helped in getting a "feel" as to the current people and HR climate within NFRS.

## **Analysis and conclusions**

### **Internal Report**

The internal report referenced the initial PwC report, in particular those areas where potential improvements for HR operations and structures had been identified. The report went on to articulate where improvements had actually been made and indicated documents which would corroborate the changes.

Overall the report appeared to address in sufficient detail its indicated remit.

### **Structured Interviews**

All interviewees appeared to be completely open and frank in their responses to the questions posed. Where there were areas which they were unable to comment on through lack of direct knowledge, they readily indicated as such.

It was clear from the discussions with all interviewees that there had been a marked change in climate within the HR Function since the initial PwC report. The main themes which were articulated generally by all interviewees were:

- The HR team were now clear about individual roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- There was a discipline within the team which manifested itself in directing requests for support and assistance to the right area of expertise, rather than trying to deal with issues when having limited knowledge and resource
- There is consistency and high standard of advice given by the HR Function
- The structure of the HR Function (broadly split along Corporate/Operational/Administrative lines) is much more fit for purpose than it was previously
- There are improved links with operational management and they in turn are taking on board their own responsibilities for people management with improved support and guidance from the HR Function
- People issues are dealt with at a much earlier stage, due to improved working relationships and communication and as a result are able to be dealt with more effectively and expeditiously
- There is more structure and organisation, for example, access to a comprehensive range of HR Policies on an internal intranet and also through planning and review processes
- There were numerous clear references to improved leadership, but also a sense of empowerment within the HR team which has helped to create a much more positive atmosphere
- Relationships with the Trades Unions were indicated as being stable and positive, mainly due to early consultation and involvement in key issues

Whilst all of the above could be termed as positive feedback, there were some comments relating to further improvement, particularly in respect of providing challenge and demonstrating greater confidence when dealing with strong operational management.

### **Document Review**

The range of documents reviewed broadly supported the conclusions of the internal report, particularly those which had “hard” indicators such as absence statistics and Grievance/Disciplinary cases.

Where information required to inform this report was not readily available, clarification was provided either in discussion, or through the production of additional documentation and subsequent email correspondence.

Some of the documentation would have benefited by having additional information, for example, indicating status reports on policy review, or trend analyses for example. In addition various reports may also benefit through having a more consistent format. (These observations were discussed with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and taken on board at the time of the review)

### **Other meetings and discussions**

Whilst on site at the Bestwood HQ a number of ad-hoc discussions and meetings were held with several NFRS members of staff as indicated in Appendix 4.

Whilst these discussions were not structured, or planned as part of this report, they did help in demonstrating “feel” of HR Operation and outputs and also people issues in general within NFRS.

The overall impression was very positive and appeared to indicate an organisation which understood the key people issues and the roles they had to play in dealing with them.

### **Conclusions**

All of the information gathered from the three sources outlined above tends to support the conclusions of the internal report. This indicated an HR Function which was well structured and managed and which had seen considerable improvement since the initial PwC report in December 2006.

It would also appear that this has contributed in relation to a beneficial impact on people issues in general within NFRS.

This review of the internal report can only be described as high level (although over ten hours was devoted to interviewing and speaking with key individuals). However, the fact that information was gathered from a number of sources, added to previous PwC knowledge of the organisation would appear to give weight and confidence to the conclusions.

### **Next steps**

Following the delivery of this overview report to Frank Swann, Chief Fire Officer (Designate), it will be presented to a meeting of the Nottinghamshire Combined Fire Authority on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

## **Appendix 1 – Documents reviewed**

NFRS Internal Report - “An evaluation of the implementation of the review of the Human Resources function by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)”

HR Committee report (September 2008)

HR Structure chart (September 2008)

HR team Job descriptions/Person specifications (June 2008)

List of current HR policies and procedures (2008 onwards)

Grievance monitoring form (October 2007)

Discipline monitoring form (October 2007)

PDR policy (March 2009)

JNCP minutes (March 2009)

Monitoring information (March 2009)

Managing Sickness Absence policy (issued November 2007, reviewed June 2008)

Report to Performance Monitoring Committee (June 2009).

Draft ill health retirement process map (April 2009)

Evaluation report to SMT - use of Firstcare (February 2009)

Firstcare commercial agreement (November 2008)

Establishment of Attendance Team (September 2008)

Equality Impact Assessment toolkit (January 2009)

Copy of policy/report template

Single Equality Scheme - “Equal life chances for all” (2009-2013)

Business Plan (2009/10)

Workforce Plan (2009/11)

HR Strategy review – report to HR Committee (March 2009)

NFRS Annual Report (2008/2009)



## **Appendix 2 – Persons Interviewed**

Councillor Darrell Pulk, Chair of the Fire Authority

Councillor John Cottee, former Fire Authority Lead Opposition Spokesperson

Pat Lally, former Councillor and Chair of the Fire Authority Human Resources Committee

Andy Beale, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

John Buckley, Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Head of Community Risk Response

Sean Whelan, Area Manager Corporate Services

Tracy Crump, HR Manager (Corporate)

Alison Cordon, HR Services Officer

Aileen McPherson, HR Business Partner

## Appendix 3 – Structured Interview Questions

### Manager and Member Interviews

Which HR services do you interact with most, e.g. Recruitment/Training delivery/Case Management/HR advice / Management Development / Management Information, Statistics, Introducing and developing strategy etc and how often?

What are the key business factors and issues currently facing NFRS as an organisation?

What are the people implications of these?

How would you describe the HR service provided to NFRS managers and staff in your Committee/Area/Team?

How could the provision of HR services change/improve to add more value in the future?

How would you say that the HR Function and its Service has changed over the past 2-3 years?

- The way it is structured
- The way in which individual/team/support skills and knowledge are utilised and deployed
- Planning and strategy

Can you give some examples to illustrate this?

In relation to People issues within NFRS how would you say that the following has changed over the last 2-3 years?

- Development and implementation of Policies and Procedures
- Management of Disciplinary and Grievance issues
- Management of sickness absence issues
- Management of ill health issues
- Application of the Personal Development Review Process
- Application of Equality Impact assessments
- Formal and Informal relationships with Trades Unions

Can you give some examples to illustrate your thoughts?

Any other comments?

### HR team Interviews

Which HR services do you manage, help deliver most, e.g. Recruitment/Training delivery/Case Management/HR advice / Management Development / Management Information, Statistics, Introducing and developing strategy etc.

What are the key business factors and issues currently facing NFRS as an organisation?

What are the people implications of these?

How could the provision of HR services change/improve to add more value in the future?

How would you say that the HR Function and its Service has changed over the past 2-3 years, with particular reference to the following aspects?

- The way it is structured
- The way in which individual/team/support skills and knowledge are utilised and deployed
- Planning and strategy

Can you give some examples to illustrate your thoughts?

In relation to People issues within how would you say that the following has changed over the last 2-3 years?

- Development and implementation of Policies and Procedures
- Management of Disciplinary and Grievance issues
- Management of sickness absence issues
- Management of illness issues
- Application of the Personal Development Review Process
- Application of Equality Impact assessments

Formal and Informal relationships with Trades Unions

Can you give some examples to illustrate your thoughts?

Any other comments?

## **Appendix 4– Other Meetings and discussions**

Andy Beale Deputy Chief Fire Officer

John Buckley Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Head of Community Risk Response

Dave Horton Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Head of Community Risk Reduction

Neil Timms Assistant Chief Officer/Head of Finance & Resources

Alison Cordon HR Services Officer

Ruth Dobson HR Administrator.

Rachel Rodda, HR Administrator.

NB some of the discussions above were in addition to structured interviews previously conducted with certain individuals.