



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

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Human Resources Committee

# **HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY REVIEW**

Report of Chief Fire Officer

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**Agenda Item No:**

**Date:** 21 October 2011

**Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update on the implementation of the Human Resource Strategy 2010-2013

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

An updated Human Resource Strategy was considered and approved by the Committee at its meeting on 22 October 2010. Members requested that a short milestone report be submitted on an annual basis to highlight progress made and to highlight key HR issues for the forthcoming year.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1 Section four of the Strategy set out how key objectives would be implemented in practice across HR functional areas. Progress in these areas are summarised below:
- 2.2 **Resources and Planning:** the Workforce Plan 2011-13 was approved by this committee at its meeting on 22 July 2011. This identified the projected changes to workforce arising from anticipated turnover and the likely impacts of the Fire Cover Review and budgetary reductions, and set out an action plan to manage HR related issues identified in the Plan.
- 2.3 The management of the establishment to meet required budgetary reductions has been a priority for the Service. The Authority has recently confirmed the dis-establishment of 9 vacant posts and 14 Station Cook roles as a means of reducing the salaried workforce. Strategic Management Team will be undertaking a re-organisation of all departments before the end of the year, and this may identify further reductions in establishment. The Human Resources Department are fully engaged in this process and will work with service managers and representative bodies to minimise the need to effect compulsory redundancies wherever possible.
- 2.4 The HR Department will also ensure that the Service meets its statutory obligations in terms of consultation and employment legislation, and has already undertaken consultation with the representative bodies on a redundancy framework.
- 2.5 In anticipation of workforce reductions, the Corporate Management Board have been scrutinising each business case for roles which have become vacant and, where appointments have been necessary to meet service demands, appointments have been made on a temporary or agency basis. It has also taken a decision not to undertake a wholtime recruitment campaign during 2011. This will ensure that there are redeployment opportunities available for employees who may be placed at risk of redundancy in the future.
- 2.6 Following the termination of the regional fire control project, 11 posts have been dis-

established within the Control section resulting in 5 redundancies. Work is currently on-going to review the nature of future control functions and the implications of this for the staffing structure will become apparent in early 2012. HR will play a key role in effecting any changes to establishment, contractual conditions and working practices arising from the review.

2.7

### **Employee Relations**

**and Engagement:** the Service continues to place a high priority on effective communication with its workforce and the representative bodies. This is particularly important given the changing environment in which the Service is currently operating and the need to share information and receive feedback on key budgetary and operational issues that will impact on the workforce. The Service has regular formal panel meetings with its recognised trades unions, as well as consultation meetings to discuss the on-going development and review of HR policies and procedures.

2.8

### The consultation

exercise on the proposals contained within the Fire Cover Review has incorporated feedback from trades unions and the opportunity for all employees to contribute their views. Information is regularly updated on the Service intranet site to ensure that employees are kept up-to-date.

2.9

### The Service will be

undertaking an employee survey during 2012 to establish employee views over a range of issues.

2.10

### In the last year, the

Service has invested in the training of six accredited Workplace Mediators to support the development of a formal mediation process. This aims to offer impartial mediation to deal with workplace problems between individuals, in a safe and confidential environment. Over time, it is hoped that this approach will reduce the number of grievances and improve working relationships.

2.11

### Looking ahead, it is

likely that the Service will be affected by the threat of industrial action from the public sector unions in furtherance of a national dispute over pensions. The HR department will play a key role in advising on employment law in this area and managing associated workforce issues. Any developments will be reported to the Committee as the situation progresses.

2.12

### **Equality, Diversity and**

**Culture:** the Service is committed to achieving the Excellent standard of the equality framework by 2013. The Equalities team will be instrumental in ensuring that the Service is prepared for assessment within this time frame. This will involve working closely with all departments to embed a culture where diversity and equal access to services and employment are fundamental to all policy decisions and service delivery models. A review of the way in which we undertake impact assessments has already been undertaken and will support the Service to meet this objective.

- 2.13 The Equality Act 2010 has strengthened and amalgamated equalities legislation going back to the Equal Pay Act from 1970. The Service has made a number of changes to policy and procedures in order to ensure that we remain compliant with the new requirements.
- 2.14 Information received from recent staff surveys and employee data validation exercises demonstrate that confidence levels of staff in telling us about their sexual orientation or disability have improved. This is really important in improving staff satisfaction and managing health and safety in the workplace. If employees are more confident in telling us about these things the Service is able to manage these issues more effectively.
- 2.15 The Service Harassment and Bullying Policy has been reviewed during 2011 to incorporate new definitions of harassment (including third party harassment), the inclusion of homophobic and cyber bullying and to re-emphasise our expectations about employee behaviour in the workplace. This is supplemented by leaflets about the policy which have been circulated to all work locations and the development of a learning package on LearnPro. The aim is to eliminate all forms of discrimination and harassment from the workplace through awareness raising and education and by appropriate intervention when issues arise.
- 2.16 All courses run by the Service Development Centre have been reviewed to ensure that equality and diversity issues form part of mainstream training and all employees receive equalities training as part of their core induction programme. Screening for employees with dyslexia and associated learning difficulties is now also available to ensure that adjustments can be made in the workplace where it is reasonable and possible to do so. Proposals for a new suite of equalities-related training opportunities are currently being formulated by the Equalities Team.
- 2.17 As part of its commitment to provide support to its employees, the Service is in consultation to extend current discretionary leave provisions to include time off for disability related appointments, IVF treatment and extended paternity leave. This forms part of the Service's flexible working arrangements to support those with family and caring responsibilities.
- 2.18 A suite of equality performance indicators has been agreed by the Authority and progress against these targets will be assessed by the Performance Monitoring Committee.
- 2.19 **Training and Personal Development:** the Service has now completed its maintenance of competence programme to ensure that all operational personnel can demonstrate evidence of the skills and knowledge required to operate

competently in role. This is one of the key elements of the IPDS principles of initial acquisition, application and maintenance.

- 2.20 The move from a regionally supported Assessment and Development process has seen the development of an in-house provision, with easier on-line access for participants at the first stage of assessment. Local management of the process has also created greater flexibility in the timing and type of assessment methods used.
- 2.21 The Performance and Development Review (PDR) scheme is currently under review. All employees have an annual PDR meeting with their manager to review past and future work performance and to identify individual training needs. Following feedback from participants, the aim of the review will be to make the process less bureaucratic in application.
- 2.22 Consultation is currently underway on changes to the way in which the Service develops its potential Supervisory and Middle Managers, with the emphasis on developing key incident command and core skills prior to promotion. This will ensure that the development phase in a new role is reduced and managers can commence their role with critical skills, particularly in operational command situations, already in place. As part of this greater emphasis will be placed on transferring technical knowledge and understanding, with the option of undertaking IFE examinations.
- 2.23 The LearnPro e-learning platform has become functional during 2011 and is available to employees via the intranet. This will facilitate access to learning over a range of topics and at sites remote from the Service Development Centre. This will allow employees to acquire knowledge as part of a managed development programme or to access information to enhance their own personal development.
- 2.24 **Performance Management:** the Service met its absence target during 2011, with an average of 5.33 days lost to sickness per employee. This compares with a national average of 9.6 days in the public sector and 7.7 days in the UK workforce. The target has been reduced again this year from 7.5 to 6.5 days per employee. Attendance is actively managed through the Management of Sickness Absence Procedure and closely monitored by the HR Department. The Occupational Health and Fitness team work with HR to deal with health and fitness issues, with the aim of returning employees to work at the earliest opportunity through effective intervention, support and modification to duties where appropriate.
- 2.25 Work is currently underway to introduce a Performance and Capability Policy which will support managers and employees to deal appropriately with poor performance.

- 2.26 **Occupational Health and Fitness:** the revised Fitness Policy is in its first year of implementation and has been successful in introducing a consistent level of aerobic fitness across the operational workforce. The introduction of workplace Physical Training Instructors ensures that support and advice is available on station and the Fitness Advisor works closely with employees who need to improve their fitness levels. A programme of replacing gym equipment has now been completed.
- 2.27 It has also been the first year of application of the Substance Misuse Policy and the HR department have worked closely with Occupational Health to introduce random screening through a specialist testing agent called Modern Healthcare Systems. Consultation with the representative bodies has been on-going and changes have been made to the testing regime to meet concerns raised.
- 2.28 A revised policy on Infection Control is currently in consultation.
- 2.29 **Health and Safety Risk Management:** The fire risk assessments for all of the properties comprising NFRS's estate have been completed and the findings have been incorporated into the planned maintenance of the premises.
- 2.30 A Safety Management System has been developed for the Prince's Trust which elicited a favourable response when its health and safety standards were externally audited.
- 2.31 Manual handling refresher training is now available via the LearnPro system which enables employees who have received initial training to revisit the main learning points by means of a web-based "e-learning" package.
- 2.32 Employees promoted to Watch Manager and Station Manager now attend an induction day and receive input regarding health and safety risk management which is supplemented by a resource pack which they take away for future reference.
- 2.33 **Employee Pay and Benefits:** the application of pay restraint within the public sector over the past two years has led to under-spends in the revenue account which will assist in cushioning the impact of budgetary reductions. In view of this there are no reported changes to pay and benefits during the past year. However this period has now ended and negotiations are underway at a national level for the financial year 2012-13 and beyond.
- 2.34 The agreement of a national settlement to the long-running dispute over pay and pensions for employees conditioned to the retained duty system has led to the involvement of the HR Department in collating information for payments to its RDS

employees. It has also led to some changes to local pay arrangements to bring them into line with full-time comparators.

2.35 An equal pay audit was concluded during 2011 and reported no significant gender disparities. The next audit will be undertaken in 2013.

2.36 The Service is currently in consultation on a job evaluation process for uniformed roles which will further reduce the potential for equal pay claims.

2.37 **Developing the Capacity and Value of the HR function:** the role of HR Business Partners has become embedded over the past year, with greater involvement in district management teams and at local levels. This approach has ensured that key messages and information about new policies and procedures are conveyed more effectively across the organisation and HR issues are dealt with at a much earlier stage.

2.38 HR is also represented at a corporate level in discussions about workforce implications arising from operational and budgetary changes and is able to fully contribute as part of the risk-assessment and decision-making process. This, in turn, ensures that HR is intrinsically involved in the management of change.

2.39 The regional recruitment portal has now gone live and is being used to manage our e-recruitment processes. This has involved collaboration and joint working with regional partners.

2.40 The procurement process for the development of a replacement HR system has commenced, with an implementation date of April 2013. This will significantly improve integration of our information systems and create efficiencies through the application of integrated workflows which will reduce manual processing, and improved access for all our employees.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from the report.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Human resources and learning and development implications are contained within the report.

### **5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken, as this report does not directly impact upon policy, function or service.

#### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from the report.

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from the report.

#### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The adoption of an effective Human Resources Strategy is integral to the achievement of the Service Plan and underpins the strategic objectives of the Service and forms part of the corporate risk management measures associated with the delivery of these objectives.

#### **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members note the contents of this report.

#### **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

Frank Swann  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**