



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

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

# Review of the HR Strategy

Report of Chief Fire Officer

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**Agenda Item No:**

**Date:** 25 October 2013

**Purpose of Report:**

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

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 This review supplements the review undertaken in 2012, as reported to this committee on 26 October 2012.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1 Section four of the Strategy sets 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:** paragraph 4.2 of the Workforce Strategy (“the Strategy”) refers to the need to align the workforce with service needs through effective planning. As part of an annual review of workforce requirements, the Workforce Plan 2013-15 was approved by this committee at its meeting on 27 July 2013. This identified the anticipated changes to workforce, as well as projected turnover, and set out an action plan to manage HR related issues identified in the plan.
- 2.3 During 2013 the Service implemented 1 voluntary redundancy, which had been agreed as part of the voluntary redundancy programme undertaken in 2012 and was delayed due to the implementation of a new payroll system. A further voluntary redundancy will be affected in January 2014 and will reduce the number of Station Managers in Control in line with the recommendations of the review undertaken in 2012. There have been no other reductions to the workforce, other than for normal retirements of resignations, during 2013.
- 2.4 Following a period of public consultation, the CFA agreed the closure of the RDS section at Arnold and removal of the second appliance at West Bridgford at its meeting on 27 September 2013. Any redundancies arising from this decision will be managed by the HR department in line with local and statutory agreements, with the aim of redeploying into the wholetime workforce where this is the stated preference of the individuals under threat of redundancy. There will also be an option for employees under threat of redundancy to relocate to another retained section where there are current vacancies, supported by a relocation allowance which will contribute to the cost of moving house.
- 2.5 The whole-time establishment has reduced from 541 posts to 530 during 2013 due to the conversion of a Watch Manager post in Fire Protection to a non-uniformed FP Inspector role and the removal of 10 posts (8 Fire-fighters and 2

Crew Managers) due to the removal of the second appliance at West Bridgford.

- 2.6 Projected workforce short-falls arising from retirements for the period 2013-15 are being primarily addressed through the recruitment of trainee Fire-fighters, following from the Fire-fighter Recruitment Campaign undertaken in 2012. Ten trainees completed their initial course in June and have now been posted to stations, and a further 15 commenced their training on 9 September. Additionally, 5 RDS employees have been transferred to Whole-time roles following the selection process. This will result in an initial over-capacity of 11 (9.5 FTE) Fire-fighters, who will gradually be absorbed into the whole-time establishment as people retire from service.
- 2.7 A Station Manager and Watch Manager selection process is currently on-going, with a view to filling current vacancies and creating a holding list for vacancies anticipated over the next year.
- 2.8 A review of the Retained Duty model, as referenced in paragraph 4.5 of the Strategy, is currently in process and a report will be considered by the CFA at a future date. It is anticipated that this may lead to changes to some aspects of retained cover and changes to contractual provisions. Such changes will be subject to negotiation with representative bodies.
- 2.9 The re-structure of service departments, as referenced in paragraph 4.6 of the Strategy, was implemented from August 2012 and is currently being reviewed by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. A report on the implementation of the new structure and any outstanding issues will come to this Committee for consideration at a future meeting.
- 2.10 In anticipation of a reduction in budget for the 2015-16 grant settlement, the Chief Fire Officer has written to all non-uniformed employees seeking expressions of interest in voluntary redundancy. Applications will be considered over the next couple of months and supported applications will be referred to this Committee at a future meeting.
- 2.11 Finally, the review of Control section cover has been completed during 2012 and a new self-rostering system has been implemented since April. Initial feedback is positive and a formal review will be undertaken later in the year.
- 2.12 The Human Resources department has been, and remains, fully engaged in this process and will work with service managers and representative bodies to effect the changes to workforce and to ensure the Service meets its statutory obligations in terms of consultation and employment legislation.
- 2.13 **Employee relations and engagement:** the Service continues to place a high priority on effective communication with its workforce and the representative bodies. This has been particularly important given the proposed changes to service provision and possible workforce reductions over the coming year. This has been achieved through frequent consultation meetings with representative bodies on establishment and structural changes, regular

updates to all employees through the intranet news page, staff briefing papers and individual and team meetings.

- 2.14 As part of its commitment to engage and listen to the views of its employees, as referenced in paragraph 5.2 of the Strategy, the Service undertook an employee survey in 2012, the results of which were reported to this committee at its meeting on 19 April 2013. The survey seeks to establish employee views over a range of issues and, where required, to develop an action plan for improvement in specific areas. The survey is undertaken every 2 years.
- 2.15 The introduction of an internal mediation process, as referenced in paragraph 5.4 of the Strategy, took place in 2011 and has been used on 6 occasions during the last year. The aim of mediation is to resolve workplace conflicts at an early stage, reducing the need for formal grievance and thereby improve working relationships. Whilst it is difficult to directly correlate outcomes from mediation, the number of formal grievances in 2012-13 reduced to 6 compared to 8 in 2011-12 and 11 in 2010-11. A review of the mediation process was considered by the Corporate Management Board in June 2013 and a recommendation accepted that the mediation process should continue to be supported.
- 2.16 The development of a scheme for considering employee suggestions for service improvements and efficiency savings, as referenced in paragraph 5.3 of the Strategy, has yet to be completed. This proposal will now be developed during 2014-15.
- 2.17 In the previous review, it was anticipated that there may be a threat of industrial action arising from furtherance of a national dispute over pensions. Members will be aware of a mandate for strike action following a ballot by the Fire Brigade's Union, notified on 29 August 2013, and the strike action undertaken on 25 September 2013. The Service has instigated its business continuity provisions to deal with industrial action, and employees have been written to with information about the impact of industrial action on their pay and conditions. A further report will be presented to the CFA on this issue at a later date.
- 2.18 **Equality, diversity and culture:** the Equalities team is currently working with managers to prepare for the assessment against the Excellent standard of the equality framework in December 2013. We have received positive feedback from an external consultant who is acting as a "critical friend" and is confident that the assessment will go well.
- 2.19 In line with paragraph 6.1 of the Strategy, significant work has been undertaken over the past year to embed equalities training within the core training programme, with an emphasis on developing skills and awareness to deal effectively with vulnerable individuals and those with special needs. During 2013 we have introduced a new Managing Diversity workshop, using actors to simulate situations that managers may encounter, and has proved to be extremely well received by the 100+ participants so far. We have also commissioned some e-learning packages that employees will be able to

access through LearnPro (our e-learning platform) and this will be rolled out during the next couple of months.

- 2.20 The Service has recently submitted its annual application to the Stonewall Index of employers, which rates employer engagement and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual employees and service users. Last year we progressed to 118 out of 376 participants and we are hoping to achieve a top 100 place this year. The Service continues to sponsor the Nottingham Pride event to support the IDAHO raising awareness day. Work has also been undertaken with Outburst, a LGBT youth group in the city.
- 2.21 The Service also attends the Mela Festival and Nottingham Carnival as part of its engagement with minority communities. Work has also been undertaken with Outburst.
- 2.22 The Fire-fighter recruitment campaign, undertaken in 2012, provided an opportunity to undertake positive action initiatives to encourage applications from women and those from black and ethnic minority communities to apply to the Service. This supports the objective set out in paragraph 6.4 of the Strategy. These were well attended with 89 (34%) women and 77 BME participants in Fire-fighter for a Day events and 44 women (44%) and 32 (32%) attending mentoring sessions. This resulted in the successful appointment of 6 women and 4 from BME groups. This is by far the most successful positive action campaign in terms of candidate interest and outcomes and will be a model for future campaigns.
- 2.23 **Training and personal development:** For the first time in many years, the training department is operating at full strength and this has allowed us to offer a more extensive training programme and develop areas, such as incident command training. As part of this, greater emphasis has been placed on transferring technical knowledge and understanding, and assessment of competence in role and this will be further developed over the coming year. This aligns with paragraph 7.1 of the Strategy.
- 2.24 SDC has run 2 Trainee Fire-fighter courses and will run a Retained Initial Training course from November which has absorbed a significant amount of trainer time, but will ensure that the Service has sufficient resilience to deal with projected turnover over the next two years.
- 2.25 The Performance and Development Review (PDR) process is the means by employees and managers annually agree individual training plans, to ensure maintenance of competence and facilitate development within their current role. This information is used to determine the resources required to support the internal Service training programme and funding for external training courses for the next financial year. The PDR scheme will be reviewed over the next year to ensure that it better meets the expectations of staff, with the aim of developing role specific assessment.
- 2.26 Further work will be undertaken over the next year to enhance e-learning opportunities within the workplace, which will extend the training offered at the

Service Development Centre. The Service will seek to develop a new training database over the next year, which will improve the administration and management of training and will track and report on the required competency levels of all uniformed operational staff. This will support the new Tri Service Control system, as well as ensuring that skills are regularly refreshed.

- 2.27 **Performance Management:** the Service just fell short to meet its absence target during 2012, with an average of 6.43 days lost to sickness per employee compared to a target of 6.25 days. This compares with a national average of 6.5 days in the public sector and 5.8 days in the UK workforce. There was only 1 ill-health retirement during 2012-13 which is a measure of the success of the way the Service supports individuals to return to work after long-term illness/injury wherever possible.
- 2.28 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, rehabilitation support and modification to duties where appropriate. This supports the objectives set out in paragraph 8.3 of the Strategy.
- 2.29 **Occupational health and fitness:** the revised Fitness Policy is now firmly embedded, with annual fitness testing and 67 Fitness Instructors providing fitness support at stations. Results show that 98.7% of operational personnel achieved a Grade 1 pass. This links into the objective set out in paragraph 9.1 of the Strategy.
- 2.30 Management of stress was highlighted under paragraph 9.2 of the Strategy. Anxiety and depression (not work related) continue to represent the highest incidence of long-term sickness absence in 2013. The Service provides counselling support, including CBT and referrals to RELATE, for employees if required and will support employees on their return through the application of workplace adjustments where this is recommended by medical advice. Stress risk assessments are undertaken for any work related aspects which may be contributing to a condition. All managers receive stress management training as part of their development programme. We have also run Mental Health Awareness workshops through the Disability Business Forum for managers and have offered Stress Awareness courses for all employees to enhance knowledge and understanding in this area.
- 2.31 A flu vaccination session has also been piloted this year on a voluntary basis, and over 70 people have signed up, with a view to reducing absence resulting from respiratory infections.
- 2.32 The Occupational Health team continue to work with external agencies, such as the NHS Community Nutrition Team, and the Healthy Workforce, Better Health team, to implement joint working on health issues and to promote healthier lifestyle choices in line with paragraph 9.4 of the Strategy. Positive collaborative working relationships with Derbyshire and Leicestershire Fire and

Rescue Services have been established, which allows us to share resources and expertise and reciprocal service audits to ensure the maintenance of quality occupational health care provision. This aligns with paragraph 9.4 of the Strategy.

- 2.33 **Health and safety risk management:** NFRS continues to focus on providing accessible, authoritative, concise advice in person or via the Intranet to enable line managers to make proportionate risk management decisions.
- 2.34 Training is provided to new firefighters and briefings for new Crew and Watch Managers emphasise the need for them to focus on their health and safety risk management responsibilities.
- 2.35 The regular meetings to monitor the progress of the multi-activity contract for NFRS premises feature health and safety risk management as a standing agenda item.
- 2.36 NFRS is critically reviewing how it manages the risk arising from its work-related driving activities via a multi-disciplinary Road Risk Group
- 2.37 **Employee pay and benefits:** the application of pay restraint within the public sector over the past three years has been lifted this year with a 1% award to both operational and non-uniformed employees. It is likely that this level of pay restraint will continue to operate for the foreseeable future.
- 2.38 An equal pay audit has been commissioned for 2013 and a report is expected by the end of the year.
- 2.39 The opportunity to participate in a Cycle to Work Scheme was offered during this year and has been very popular with employees, with 121 bikes purchased. This allows Service employees to purchase cycle and equipment up to the value of £1000, and pay through salary reduction with tax and NI savings for the employee. This also supports the Service commitment to improving the fitness of the workforce and follow a greener transport policy. We intend to offer a further scheme in 2014.
- 2.40 **Developing the capacity and value of the HR function:** the role of HR Business Partners continues to work well and means that HR has close involvement in district management teams and directly with managers and employees. The benefit of this close integration with client departments means that guidance and support can be offered at an early stage, and relationships of trust have developed. In 2013 a review was undertaken amongst managers who work with Business Partners, and the response was extremely positive. This is in line with paragraph 12.1 of the Strategy.
- 2.41 The HR team plays a full part in effecting workforce changes arising, for instance, from changes to working practice and effecting workforce changes linked to the fire cover review and budget reductions. HR Officers take an

active role in the consultation and implementation process by supporting senior managers and by maintaining positive relationships with the representative bodies. This has helped the Service to deal with potentially contentious and difficult issues in a collaborative way and developing a shared understanding of issues.

- 2.42 In line with paragraph 12.3 of the Strategy, a number of employment policies and procedures have been developed or reviewed during 2013 to reflect changes to legislation and working practices, and are available in the reference library of the internet. All new or revised policies are subject to a full consultation process with the representative bodies and are equality impact assessed.
- 2.43 Work on specifying and procuring a new HR system was completed in 2012, which resulted in the appointment of Midland HR, and work is currently underway to implement the new Midland HR i-Trent system. The project team are working toward a Phase 1 implementation date of April 2014, and will interface with the new Mobilising and Rostering system in Control. This is a complex project, with inter-dependencies across the Service, but will result in greater efficiency and integrated working across the organisation and more direct access for employees and managers.
- 2.44 The Service has made significant progress in taking forward the objectives of the HR Strategy, and will continue to place a high priority on the effective management of its workforce, HR processes and working practices to support achievement of its strategic objectives.
- 2.45 The development of a revised Strategy will be aligned to the next Integrated Risk Management Plan which is due for publication in 2014.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report although the workforce changes outlined in the first part of section 2 are supported by the budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as reported to the Combined Fire Authority.

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

The implications are contained within the report.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

There is no requirement to undertake an equality impact assessment 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**

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report.

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

None.



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# Human Resources Strategy

Policy No: Strat 1003

## Scope:

This Strategy applies to all employees of the Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

## Summary:

This Strategy sets out HR priorities and principles for the Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service, and covers the period 2010-13.

## Version Control:

<i>Person Responsible</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
HR Manager (corporate)	1.0	Sept 2010
Revisions		

## Review Date:

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## 1. FOREWORD

- 1.1 The period since the adoption of the current HR Strategy has been a time of service development and improvement for the Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. The challenges posed by the national modernisation agenda, set out in the Fire and Rescue Services National Framework documents, required the Service to undertake a fundamental review of its priorities, the way these could be delivered and to appraise how effectively it was meeting its commitments to the local community. Underpinning this agenda has been a commitment to tackle equality and diversity issues, through service delivery, prevention and employment.
- 1.2 Notwithstanding these challenges, it is and always will be the primary role of the Service to respond to emergency situations and to ensure that fire-fighters have the skills, knowledge and resources to operate effectively and safely. The first priority of the Service is to ensure an effective infrastructure of management and support to frontline personnel and to maintain the confidence of the public in the services that we deliver. The Human Resources team have worked hard to establish a responsive and high quality support network to ensure that at a strategic, operational and management level we are supporting the organisation to achieve its objectives.
- 1.3 At the time of writing, the political landscape is changing. Funding is likely to become tighter and priorities will inevitably come under scrutiny. The ethos of working “smarter not harder” will become an imperative for future changes. Efficiencies and their resulting savings will need to be found.
- 1.4 Human Resources will continue to play a central role in supporting and guiding the organisation at a time when difficult decisions will have to be made and implemented. It will work at a strategic level to guide decisions that will impact on employees and work with managers to deal effectively with issues within the workplace. It will work to ensure that workforce planning is effective and allows the service to deliver its objectives. It will work to ensure effective engagement with employees and with our representative bodies. It will work to embed a culture of fairness and equality across the service and to provide an environment where the health, safety and well-being of its employees is paramount.
- 1.5 I believe that this Strategy sets the direction and provides a sound basis for the future development of Human Resources into the next decade.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

2.1 The HR Strategy 2007-10 very much reflected the national drivers for service improvements which were set out in documents such as the National Frameworks, National Learning and Development Strategy, National Equalities Strategy, core values and CFOA Human Resources Strategy. The themes which arose from these documents provided a framework for HR development across the national Fire and Rescue Service. The CFOA document in particular was the main focus for the NFRS HR Strategy and identified six key priorities:

- Developing leadership and capacity
- Developing the organisation
- Developing the skills and capacity of the workforce
- Resourcing the Fire and Rescue Service
- Recognition and reward
- Developing the capacity of HR

2.2 By its nature a HR Strategy is always a work in progress. The objectives of the national HR Strategy are set out as Appendix One and are still relevant today. However significant progress has been made by the Service over the last three years in taking forward initiatives and service improvements in all of those areas set out above. Many of these are now incorporated into the way that we work and approach HR issues.

2.3 The next three years will require us to build upon this progress within the context of a changing political, legal and financial environment. It is clear that the fire service nationally will have less central direction in terms of targets and in the determination of its priorities and it has been made clear that individual authorities may set their own agenda in terms of regional collaboration and the way that they recruit and develop their workforce.

### **FUTURE DRIVERS**

2.4 Looking ahead to issues which may affect future drivers for change within the life of this Strategy, significant issues will include:

- Implementation of the Service Plan 2010-13
- A fundamental review of the service delivery model in terms of the balance between response and prevention
- The outcome of the Fire Cover Review which may result in a fundamental change to resourcing requirements;
- An assessment of the current role and employment issues posed by the Retained Duty System – taking particular account of the impact of the Part Time Worker regulations, the Working Time Regulations and restrictions on driving activity;
- Budgetary constraints which may result in significant reductions across all service budgets and withdrawal of central funding streams resulting from the outcomes of the comprehensive spending review;

- Legislative changes which will include further regulation of agency workers, the lifting of the statutory retirement age and the impact of the Equalities Act;
- Changes to pension scheme regulations which are currently under consultation and may result in increased employer and employee contributions and review of existing benefits;
- Changes to current regional working arrangements which may impact upon collaboration on Fire-fighter recruitment, Assessment and Development Centres and regional people work-streams;
- Anticipated delays to the Regional Control Project;
- Review of the National Fire and Rescue Service Equalities Framework.
- Increasing pressure to maximize reducing budgets by identifying and addressing areas of loss (or potential loss) via the application of risk management techniques.

2.5 This strategy sets out the underlying principles and aims for human resources management over the next three years. The emphasis will be to deliver continuous improvements, specifically on those Diversity and Workforce issues established within our Service Plan 2010-13. It is underpinned by the Learning and Development Strategy and by our Service Values.

### 3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 At a local level, this Strategy will aim to achieve the following key objectives:

- Contribute to the management of corporate risk by  
*“Ensuring compliance with relevant legislation, identifying and providing advice on individual and corporate risk to the organisation”*
- Support the delivery of the Safety Plan by  
*“Working with others in the organization to develop partnerships that support the delivery of the Plan, with the focus on Fire and Rescue Service staff and Workforce Development”*
- Ensure effective workforce planning by  
*“Linking the HR Business Plan to the corporate plan and working with others to support achievement of their business objectives, identifying and planning for change and ensuring that the organisation has the skills and resources to meet future needs”*
- Support all employees through effective Human Resource policies and practices by  
*“Creating a work environment where people feel safe, valued and respected and where they are treated fairly ”*
- Managing change effectively by  
*“Supporting employees on an individual basis, ensuring effective communication and information-sharing, engaging with staff and the*

*representative bodies on changes to their work arrangements, and ensuring that employees have the skills to deal with change effectively”.*

- Developing people by  
*“Providing opportunities and support to enable people to achieve their full potential, and be role competent, and through implementation of the Service Learning and Development Strategy”*
- Support the organisation to develop and improve by  
*“Facilitating change through effective engagement with the workforce, challenging the existing culture where appropriate, and promoting continuous organisational development and best practice.”*
- Improve the health and well-being of all its employees by  
*“Taking a preventative and holistic approach and by reacting to the business needs of the organisation. A key aspect of the policy is to continue to reduce the instances and levels of sickness absence across the organisation”*
- Encourage and promote diversity, equality and fairness by  
*“Establishing values which encourage an inclusive working environment, free from discrimination and working toward a more diverse workforce which reflects the community we serve, and through implementation of our Equalities Action Plan”*
- Ensure the health and safety of all employees and those affected by Service activities by  
*“Implementing and maintaining safe systems of work by identifying and assessing work related hazards and applying the necessary risk controls”*
- Encourage the participation and engagement of employees, representative bodies and stakeholders by  
*“Consulting stakeholders at the earliest opportunity, ensuring positive engagement, open dialogue, and mutually acceptable outcomes”*
- Improve work-life balance and flexible working opportunities by  
*“Developing opportunities for people to balance their personal needs and commitments with the needs of the service”*
- “Live” our core values by  
*“Providing a responsive, efficient and high quality service to all our users every time; encouraging respect for other people and an appreciation of different cultures and differing needs of our local communities; supporting continuous service and personal improvement.”*

## **4. STRATEGY IN PRACTICE**

- 4.1 Through the implementation of this strategy we seek to achieve a Human Resource function which is central to and supportive of service delivery and improvements. The priorities and overarching principles for the next three years are summarized below:

### **Resources and planning**

- 4.2 The workforce planning process is embedded within the annual business planning process. It will be our aim to provide management information which will allow the service to review its workforce requirements and plan for succession and recruitment into key roles. Control of establishment will be maintained by the Director of HR, working through the Corporate Management Team, to ensure that the structure of the service and numbers of salaried roles support the achievement of corporate objectives within budget.
- 4.3 It is important that the Service undertakes effective succession planning to ensure that it has sufficient competent supervisory and middle managers to meet projected vacancies which will arise through retirement at these levels during the life of this plan.
- 4.4 During the next 3 years, the Service will objectively assess its operational cover arrangements to ensure that resources are deployed to best effect and will be effective in meeting changing demands. The HR team will work with service managers to implement agreed changes.
- 4.5 The future shape and role of the Retained Duty System is likely to come under future scrutiny due to the impact of employment regulation on existing contractual arrangements. This may lead to changes to the nature of the employment contract and the way in which employees provide cover. The HR team will ensure that any contractual changes are subject to appropriate consultation and negotiation and the service meets its contractual and statutory responsibility in this regard.
- 4.6 The future shape of the workforce will undoubtedly be affected by budget constraints and will be the role of the HR function to facilitate changes to the current workforce through a range of options, including redeployment, job redesign, departmental re-structures, shared resourcing or, where this is unavoidable, through redundancy. Such changes will be undertaken through effective consultation with employees and their representatives with the aim of maintaining stability, effective communication and staff morale. This is likely to be the focus of HR activity over the next three years.

## **5. Employee Relations and Engagement**

- 5.1 Building on our ongoing commitment, it is our aim to foster positive relations with our representative bodies and to engage directly with our employees on issues which affect them. In effecting any changes which may arise through the Fire Cover Review, budgetary impacts or through the development of the service, it is important that our employees feel informed and are able to contribute their views.
- 5.2 We will achieve this through formal and informal dialogue and by using the facility provided by the intranet, amongst other methods, to disseminate information and receive feedback. We are committed to undertaking an employee survey bi-annually and to establish employee forums so that our employees are able to contribute to debate on a range of topics which affect them and impact on service delivery. The value of team meetings and regular briefings at all levels will be central to maintaining the flow of information and feedback vertically and horizontally across the organisation.
- 5.3 We will also develop a process through which employees will be able to contribute their ideas for improvements and efficiency savings and receive recognition for their contribution.

- 5.4 It will be our aim to minimize areas of potential workplace conflict through actively engaging with our representative bodies to achieve a shared understanding of issues and by seeking to find mutually acceptable resolution where this is possible. On an individual basis, the implementation of a workplace mediation process will be an alternative route to resolve workplace issues and to reduce the need for the use of formal grievance procedures.

## **6. Equality, diversity and culture**

- 6.1 The importance of establishing fair and non-discriminatory employment practice and service delivery will remain a priority for the Service. We will continue to do this through improved equality and diversity training for all employees through traditional methods and through our on-line learning tool, LearnPro. The mainstreaming of equality will continue through the equality impact assessments we undertake on service functions and policies.
- 6.2 Building on work we have already started, we continue to develop a culture and working environment in which people treat each other with respect and where fairness, inclusion and mutual trust and support underpin our relationships at work and with our service users and wider community. We will seek to eliminate discrimination and bullying from our workplace and establish standards of expected behaviour. Our recent staff survey has told us that we are improving in this area and we intend to build on this success.
- 6.3 We will work to find more ways in which we can be more flexible in our working arrangements to accommodate family and caring responsibilities.
- 6.4 We will continue to nurture and establish effective links with our communities, and to work with other agencies to protect those who are most vulnerable and to understand and meet the different needs of the people we serve. We will ensure that employment opportunities are equally accessible to all, and will promote the fire service as a career choice. In particular, we will encourage more women and black and minority ethnic applicants to apply for jobs with the Service; and challenge negative perceptions.

## **7. Training and personal development**

- 7.1 Our priority is to ensure that our workforce has the knowledge, skills and understanding to undertake their job roles safely and competently. This will be achieved through a variety of methods, as set out in our Training and Development Strategy.
- 7.2 The Integrated Personal Development System framework, linked to national occupational standards, will provide the benchmark for operational competence through a mix of technical training and workplace assessment. The maintenance of competence will be assessed on an annual basis to ensure that knowledge and skills are refreshed and up-to-date for all roles, from Fire-fighter to Brigade Manager.
- 7.3 The Personal Development Review (PDR) process is the means by which our employees can discuss their personal development needs and access training and support for their continuous professional development. These needs will be met through access to our internal programmes, seminars and, where appropriate, professional courses.



- 7.4 Over the next 3 years, we will develop skills matrices for all roles within the service to establish core competencies and ensure that support staff have the opportunity to access training relevant to their role and to meet their future development needs.
- 7.5 The development of leadership skills will be critical as a number of long-serving managers are likely to retire from the service during the course of the next 3 years. The use of Assessment and Development Centres to identify those with the potential to progress to higher roles will continue to be supported at a regional level. Work is currently on-going to improve current access arrangements and make them more relevant to the situations that managers will face. The ADC process is the conduit through which individuals can access selection processes and will link to personal development plans to ensure that newly promoted managers, and those who require further development to meet selection criteria, are supported and receive the experience they need through temporary promotion opportunities.
- 7.6 The Supervisory and Middle Management Development Programmes, with links to the ILM qualification, forms the foundation for all management and leadership development, with additional support from the Centre of Excellence at Moreton and our links into the Nottingham Trent University Business School.

## **8. Performance Management**

- 8.1 Our performance management system ensures that strategic objectives are cascaded through the organisation through the annual business planning process and the links made into team and individual objectives. At a corporate level, progress against objectives are monitored through specific steering groups and national and local performance indicators are scrutinised by the Performance Monitoring Committee. Individual performance objectives are set and monitored through the PDR process.
- 8.2 The Human Resources department will work with managers to actively manage individual performance issues and will ensure that HR policies and activity support the achievement of departmental objectives where inter-dependencies are identified.
- 8.3 The achievement of our objectives relies upon the effective management of attendance and the ability to work at optimum levels. The Service has worked hard to achieve absence levels below the national average and efforts will continue to be focused on supporting employees to return to work in some capacity where this is possible. Short-term absence will be monitored and issues addressed through effective managerial and occupational health interventions.
- 8.4 The planned replacement of the HR system will further improve efficiency and the integration of our information systems to ensure that managers have the information they need to manage workforce issues effectively.

## **9. Occupational Health and Fitness**

- 9.1 Our occupational health and fitness team will work with individuals to ensure that the highest levels of support are available to employees who are recovering from illness or injury, and to promote a high standard of fitness. Our revised Fitness Policy sets out a standard of fitness to ensure that our operational personnel have the physical capacity to deal with operational demands and to minimise risk to personal health and safety.

- 9.2 The importance of stress awareness and management will continue to be a high priority for the Service and will become embedded in our managerial development programmes. The provision of counselling and workplace adjustments will continue to be available to support individuals as part of a managed occupational health response.
- 9.3 Access to physiotherapy, MRI scans and other options to promote recovery from injury will be available through our membership of the Westfield Health Scheme and form part of an individual rehabilitation plan monitored by the Service's Fitness Advisor and Occupational Health team.
- 9.4 The Occupational Health service will actively seek to improve health through prevention and awareness raising programmes with the intention of raising the levels of health and fitness throughout the organization.

## **10. Health and safety risk management**

- 10.1 The highest priority for the Service will be to ensure the continuing health, safety and well being of its employees by adopting a pro-active risk management approach. The organisation will maintain its Written Safety Policy and Job Descriptions to clearly indicate its corporate aims and post-holder responsibilities.
- 10.2 Competent advice on health and safety risk management will remain readily available to the organisation and its line managers.
- 10.3 All events (events means accident, near-miss or dangerous occurrence) will be investigated and risk controls put in place to reduce avoidable work related injury and ill-health. Personal protective equipment will be of the highest standard and employees will receive clear instruction on the use of equipment and safe systems of work. The role of the representative bodies is paramount to this process and the key role of Safety Representatives is valued in ensuring and maintaining a safe work environment.
- 10.4 Risk assessment models and tools will enable line managers to effectively identify hazards, evaluate and then manage risk.

## **11. Employee pay and benefits**

- 11.1 The Service is bound by contractual links to national pay systems and conditions of service.
- 11.2 At a local level we will ensure that our pay and grading processes are fairly applied and are based upon objective assessment of the role undertaken. We will achieve this through the application of job evaluation processes and progression procedures which do not discriminate on the grounds of gender or any factor other than the requirements of the job.
- 11.3 The Service is currently undertaking an equal pay audit to ensure that its pay and grading policies do not discriminate on the grounds of gender.
- 11.4 The Service offers access to a range of benefits and salary sacrifice schemes for its employees, including Westfield Health, childcare vouchers, cycle to work scheme, employee discounts and occupational maternity and adoption schemes which enhance statutory provisions.

- 11.5 We will seek to enhance our benefits package but will be mindful of the increasing constraints on our budgets and the need to show restraint at a time when public expenditure is under review.

## **12. Developing the capacity and value of the HR function**

- 12.1 Through the work of the HR Business Partners, we continue to provide responsive and informed support to line managers and employees at their workplace and to establish good working relationships. The role of peripatetic trainers will further enhance this location based support. By working more closely with managers, and district based teams, it is our aim to develop a greater understanding of HR issues and to understand more about issues of importance to our workforce. We hope that this approach will go some way to closing the communication gap that has been identified through feedback from our service users.
- 12.2 The importance of HR skills and knowledge is a critical element in the development of effective managers. We will work with managers and with the L&D team to ensure that managers receive key HR skills training to support them in their roles.
- 12.3 A suite of HR policies and procedures will be available via the intranet and will be updated and supplemented to ensure consistency of approach and compliance with employment legislation and good practice. Such policies will be subject to consultation and negotiation with our representative bodies and will be equality impact assessed.
- 12.4 The development of a new HR system will provide managers and employees with greater access to information and will improve functionality and efficiency, with the aim of bringing together all HR data bases into an integrated system. The delivery of this project will, of course, be subject to budgetary priorities.
- 12.5 Joint working and the sharing of resources with our regional neighbours already operates across a number of HR areas such as regional fire-fighter recruitment, Assessment and Development Centres and the Regional Control project. We have also recently been working on a regional recruitment portal which will streamline the recruitment process and will become operational in 2011. It is anticipated that collaboration on HR related projects will continue as this shared approach will bring efficiencies and greater integration of approach.

## **13. Service Values**

- 13.1 It is important to re-iterate that this Strategy is underpinned by those values and principles which have been adopted by the Service and which centre on:
- Service to the community through working with others, recognising and responding to different needs, treating others with respect, being answerable to those we serve and striving for excellence in all we do
  - People by practicing and promoting fairness and respect for others, recognition of merit, acting with honesty, integrity and mutual trust, cooperative and inclusive working and supporting personal development
  - Diversity by treating everyone fairly and with respect, providing varying solutions for different needs and expectations, promoting equal opportunities in employment and progression with the service
  - Improvement by accepting responsibility for our performance, being open-minded, considering criticism thoughtfully, learning from our experience and consulting others.

## **REVIEW**

This Strategy will be reviewed as part of the Service's annual planning cycle to ensure that key changes to national or local priorities or to our operating environment, are identified and incorporated into our priorities. The objectives of this Strategy will be built into our future Business Plans, and other performance management documents such as the Equalities Action Plan.

An evaluation of the Strategy will be undertaken annually to assess our progress and to report into the Human Resources Committee and Equalities Steering Group of the Combined Fire Authority on progress made.

## Appendix 1

### **The Objectives of the national HR Strategy are to:**

- Support the FRS in meeting current and future organisational needs
- Support the FRS in achieving an effective balance between intervention, prevention, safety, civil protection and resilience
- Support the FRS in achieving a culture of continuous improvement in organisational, team and individual performance
- Support the FRS in achieving a diverse workforce that is representative of the communities it serves across all occupational groups and at all levels promoting equality, fairness and dignity in the treatment of all employees
- Support the FRS in achieving best value from its investment in people management; including the efficient and effective targeting, deployment and management of resources and expertise
- Support the FRS in creating and sustaining a competent, motivated and well-led workforce - recognising the particular context of leadership in the operational/critical incident management aspect of FRS activity
- Support the FRS in developing and implementing employment packages that meet the needs of a modernised service and flexible workforce
- Support the FRS in developing collaborative methods of working and effective partnerships
- Support the FRS in promoting the Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of choice
- Support the FRS in recognising the contribution of all employees across the Fire and Rescue Service.