



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Joint Fire / Police HQ, Sherwood Lodge, Arnold,
Nottingham, NG5 8PP on 10 November 2023 from 10.00 am - 10.56 am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Nick Raine (Chair)
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor John Lee

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tracy Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Matt Sismey - Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

7 Apologies for Absence

None.

8 Declarations of Interests

None.

9 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

10 Human Resources Update

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report which provides an overview of key human resources metrics for the period 1 July to 30 September 2023, whilst absence data is for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023, and equalities monitoring data for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) Due to a later agenda item on workforce planning, staffing numbers will be considered in further detail later in the meeting;
- b) In addition to the commentary, the appendix to the report provides helpful charts illustrating sickness absence trends and attributes, individually across Whole-Time, On-Call, and non-uniform staff, and combined. In addition, absence performance data of this Service is compared against the other Fire and Rescue Services nationally;
- c) In quarter 1, sickness absence significantly decreased, and then increased in quarter 2;
- d) Absences due to covid are still tracked, and whilst much lower at 4.6% in quarter one and 5.8% in quarter two, there is an upward trend, so tracking will continue;
- e) The Service provides flu vaccinations to staff via vouchers;
- f) Long-term absences in quarter one accounted for 57.3% of sickness absence and 59.1% in quarter 2. This includes employees with significant health conditions;
- g) Work-related sickness absence, including mental health and stress, has accounted for 13.5% of all sickness absence in Q1 and 14.7% of sickness absence in quarter 2;
- h) The Service has a robust support system in place to help staff return to work, which includes regular contact, referrals to occupational health, and reasonable adjustments. With regard to some longer-term serious health conditions, some members of staff have now retired;
- i) There were no dismissals or tribunal cases lodged during this reporting period;
- j) Equality monitoring is reported every six months and so data is for the period 1 April to 30 September 2023;
- k) The report provides a breakdown of equalities data across the Service including female, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB), and disabled, with Service statistics compared to population statistics for each grouping;
- l) The increase in the number of employees declaring themselves LGB+ is welcomed as a reflection of employees' confidence in the environment and culture of the Service, and is welcomed as a positive result of a lot of work promoting equalities. This now needs to be duplicated for other groupings;
- m) A further breakdown of male and female within the BAME grouping can be provided to members following the meeting, along with the grading of roles occupied;

- n) Identifying protected characteristics of the workforce supports cultural change;
- o) Since disability was defined in the Equality Act 2010, the Service is very proactive in encouraging staff to consider, and where appropriate, declare non-visible disability and neuro diversity. Some staff may not consider themselves disabled, but the broadened definition of the Act may include their conditions. The methods of how disability can be declared have been revised and are much improved;
- p) There are frustrations that work in addressing the gender pay gap is not progressing as quickly as hoped. However, incremental changes are being made and a new piece of work seeks to accelerate the change in the make up of the workforce, including deprivation, type of roles citizens apply for, and localised community reflection of the workforce. Proposals will be submitted to the Strategic Inclusion Board, but will require further investment and resources;
- q) The Service actively encourages and facilitates staff development to management roles, but there needs to be a critical mass of BAME employees for take-up of the opportunities to reflect the broader local BAME population in management roles;
- r) Service diversity is much improved, but further investment is required to progress diversity in management roles and work continues in targeted recruitment of diverse communities in an effort to increase the diversity of the Service to proportionally reflect that of the population.

Members of the Committee commented:

- s) As the BAME population is smaller in the County than the City, consideration should be given to more intensive BAME targeted recruitment in the City;
- t) It would be interesting to know if there are any Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) identifying employees in the Service as this too is a protected characteristic and there is a notable population in the Newark area;
- u) It needs to be acknowledged that not everybody wants to declare their heritage/culture/sexuality, and so it's important to include the 'other' option when requesting information;
- v) It's a concern that currently there are no senior managers identifying as BAME, and so additional support should be considered to help BAME staff engage for promotion;
- w) The Service still has work to do but has increased the diversity of the workforce with very good recruiting campaigns which appeal to the broader community, for which officers should be proud.

Resolved to note the report.

11 Gender Pay Gap 2023

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the annual report which provides an update on the progress in addressing the gender pay gap, including the methodology applied, using data for the year ending 31 March 2023.

The following points were highlighted, and members' questions responded to:

- a) Whilst there has been a slight improvement in narrowing the gender pay gap in the Service, it is noted that it will be very difficult to eradicate it as there are fewer women in the Service as a whole, and fewer women in the higher paid roles. However, the Service does offer support to female employees to develop their skills to advance their careers into the higher paid roles, if that is what they choose;
- b) The Women's Network is valuable in providing a reference group for the development of strategies. Some actions stated are effective but need further impetus, as will be elaborated on in the strategic proposals report to the Strategic Equalities Board;
- c) Although the way in which the Service has to report some elements is set nationally, members are assured that the Service does pay the living wage. This will be clarified in future reports;

Members of the Committee commented as follows:

- d) The establishment of the Service's Women's Network is welcomed;
- e) Excellent equalities work has been achieved so far, but more women still need to be recruited to entry level posts;
- f) The Service needs to provide support in addressing some of the key issues which are preventing women from applying for the Service, but also further expand and promote the support available to women wanting to progress their careers;
- g) Higher level male colleagues can mentor women in areas where there is currently a lack of female representation;
- h) More involvement in project work could be a good way to expand the experience, confidence and visibility of women wanting to progress.

Resolved to note the outcomes from the report and support the action points set out within Paragraph 2.21 of the report, to maintain and enhance the career advancement of, and support provided to, women within the Service.

12 Review of Workforce Plan 2022-24

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report which provides an update on the workforce plan.

The following points were highlighted, and members' questions responded to:

- a) the report provides a breakdown of how the Workforce Plan monitors and calculates projections of workforce elements which are then responded to in ensuring workforce resilience, including the workforce numbers and skill bases required;
- b) Whole-time workforce numbers fell below those set out in the workforce plan as a result of the pause in recruitment due to the budget uncertainty. However, this is now being addressed through recruitment;
- c) 27 new Firefighters have been recruited, mostly into apprentice Firefighter roles and although mostly starting training in April, they are due to be placed on stations during December;
- d) 3 additional Firefighters have been recruited into the Fire Prevention Team as apprentices, but with time first spent on stations, which has proved valuable;
- e) During this reporting period, 16 members of the workforce left the Service, mostly due to retirement, but generally approximately 9 leave for other reasons. These numbers align with the plan turnover predictions;
- f) National advert for existing firefighters, specifically those with specialist skills, has been successful with 15 operational roles filled at different levels;
- g) The current recruitment programme is three quarters completed, with a lot of positive action, including selection days on stations in evenings and at weekends;
- h) It was decided to change the order of the selection process by holding fitness testing at an early stage and providing additional support to help candidates achieve the required level of fitness, which is set nationally for firefighters and the same for male and female candidates. Candidates who only just fail the fitness test now have the opportunity to take the test again in a different way after further fitness work. This approach will be evaluated;
- a) 370 applicants are to be externally telephone screened, and if successful at that stage then they will be job related tested, with successful candidates progressing to the assessment centre in January. It is anticipated that up to 32 new Firefighters could be in post over next year;
- b) The Service does provide a lot of support to applicants in advance of fitness testing to help them build their fitness to the required standard. This includes working with a fitness advisor, which has been particularly beneficial approach for some female candidates as historically this was the stage at which most failed. More information on the fitness test and what it involved can be found on the Service's website;
- c) Resourcing to risk has identified different approaches to ridership which resulted in the release of 4 operational posts. Work is ongoing to determine where these posts should now be placed;

- l) Promotions are set out in the report across every level as part of succession planning;
- m) As agreed by the Authority, Ashfield Fire Station is due to return to full time crewing as of 30 November 2023;
- n) 13 new On-Call Trainee appointments have just started. During this reporting period the Service has not experienced the usual anticipated level of turnover of On-Call Firefighters, which is welcomed;
- o) Support Staff turnover has slowed significantly from the 24% of the post-covid period, with 10 leavers and 14 starters in the past 6 months;
- p) The pay settlement has now been agreed as a flat sum of £1,925, which will also help with recruitment and retention of staff;
- q) The Futures25 efficiency programme is reviewing Prevention activities. It is anticipated that there will be workforce implications, with a report submitted to members towards the end of the year;
- r) The Service works hard to provide an outstanding Employee Wellbeing Service and support. A recently introduced scheme to enable an advance of up to £1,000 to purchase white goods, with repayment over several months as a deduction from wages, has been put in place to support employees manage their finances in difficult times.

Resolved to note the report.

13 Confidential Reporting of Employee Concerns

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which sets out the process for confidential reporting and the reporting data for the period 31 March 2022 to 31 March 2023, as required following the findings of the Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade, and concerns raised nationally by HMICFR.

The following points were highlighted, and members' questions responded to:

- a) Members are assured that there is now a new confidential reporting route via the independent organisation 'Say So';
- b) The report sets out:
 - i. how 'Say So' has been procured;
 - ii. the service it provides;
 - iii. staff accessibility;
 - iv. how it has been promoted to staff;
 - v. how the information provided is gathered and forwarded to senior officers;
 - vi. the response requirements/agreement of senior officers;
 - vii. the monitoring and reporting of themes, trends and take-up;

- c) It is noted that existing routes for reporting concerns are still available, including as detailed in the Whistleblowing Policy, through line managers, through the Human Resources Team, or to trade union representatives.

Members welcomed the progress and assured the workforce that members were not complacent in addressing any issues identified.

Resolved to note the report.

14 Candida Brudenell

As this was Assistant Chief Fire Officer Candida Brudenell's last meeting prior to her retirement, the Chair thanked Candida for her work with the Service and wished her well in her retirement.