



Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority

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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on
19 April 2024 from 10.00 am - 10.40 am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Nick Raine (Chair)

Absent

Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor John Lee

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Leila Berry - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Nick Linthwaite - HR Manager
Matt Sismey - Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager
Jane Garrard - Governance Officer

15 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Tom Hollis – other Council business

16 Declarations of Interests

None

17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18 Human Resources Update

Nick Linthwaite, HR Manager, and Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented the report updating the Committee on key human

resources metrics for the period 1 October to 31 December 2023 and key equalities metrics for the period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024. They highlighted the following information:

- a) During the reporting period, there were 12 new starters and 20 employees left the organisation. There was a total of 414 wholetime staff against an establishment of 431 posts. The Service undertook a national transfer process to fill this gap and as a result 15 firefighters (11 firefighters, 2 crew managers and 2 watch managers) were appointed – four of whom started employment during the reporting period, and a further 11 started in early 2024. The Service has undertaken a wholetime apprentice firefighter recruitment campaign, which resulted in 34 individuals being appointed.
- b) Absence during the reporting period increased by 299.5 days compared to the previous quarter. This largely relates to seasonal factors, and absence figures are historically higher during that quarter. Long-term absence equated to 57.4% of sickness absence - 47.9% for operational employees and 70.7% for support employees.
- c) For the on-call workforce there was an increase in absence of 122 days compared to the previous quarter. This was a decrease compared to the same quarter in 2022/23. Long-term absence equated to 58.6% of sickness absence.
- d) Sickness absence mirrors national trends with musculo-skeletal and mental health issues the most significant reasons for absence. For wholetime staff, NFRS ranks 16 out of 35 Services for days lost per employee. For on-call staff, NFRS ranks 16 out of 22 Services for days lost per employee. For support staff, NFRS ranks 34 out of 35 Services for days lost per employee. For support staff there is an average of 11.87 days lost per employee compared to the sector average of 7.72 days. Long-term sickness equates to 70% of this.
- e) During the reporting period there had been one disciplinary hearing and that resulted in dismissal, and one grievance which was not upheld. Four employees did not pass their probationary period and were dismissed on capability grounds.
- f) During the reporting period, there had been no significant change in key indicators (proportion of female firefighters; proportion of black, Asian, and minority ethnic employees (BAME); proportion of lesbian, gay or bisexual employees; and proportion of disabled employees) compared to the previous six months.
- g) During the reporting period, women constituted 16.9% of the workforce; employees from BAME backgrounds constituted 5.8% of the workforce; employees identifying as being lesbian, gay or bisexual constituted 3.9% of the workforce; and disability declaration was at 4.6% of the workforce. The proportion of the workforce identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual was particularly positive as it compared to 2.68% of the population in Nottinghamshire in the national census, however this was the first time that it was measured so figures may change in future years.

- h) Women were employed in 10.3% of wholetime operational roles and of these, 5.6% are supervisory roles, 3.4% were middle manager roles and 22.2% were strategic operational roles.
- i) Employees from BAME backgrounds represented 6.2% of wholetime operational roles. 5.6% of these were supervisory roles but there were no BAME employees in middle or senior manager roles. Work will be taking place over the next few months to develop talent management tools that identify potential and support development of those individuals.
- j) For support roles, the position in terms of the proportion of the workforce with protected characteristics is really encouraging - there is a 50/50 split between men and women; employees from BAME backgrounds represent 9.5% of these roles; 10% of roles are held by people with a disability declaration; and 5.9% of employees in these roles identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- k) The Service is working with Nottingham Trent University to improve its understanding of representation in the City and County to inform development of a 10 year Workforce Diversity Plan. This Plan will be brought to a future meeting of the Policy and Strategy Committee.
- l) The Service is also working with partners to hold focus groups to help improve understanding of the barriers to recruitment and what can be done to encourage people from a diverse range of backgrounds to apply to join the Service.

During the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- m) There are some female employees from a BAME background but the number is small. The Service wants to do more to better understand their experience and what considerations there are for it as an employer. The outcomes of this work will be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.
- n) There is a need for more targeted support for employees with protected characteristics, including through support and positive action. Work is taking place to develop supervisory managers through development pathways. This is important because it will then enable people to have the opportunity to subsequently progress into middle and senior management roles. There will be work taking place over the next 12 months on talent management.
- o) The proportion of sickness absence amongst support staff that was long-term absence is high and the worst in the country. This is not the position that the Service wants to be in. During the reporting period, there were 12 people on long-term sickness absence for a variety of reasons. 10 of those individuals are now back at work or have finished work, and hopefully the metrics will improve. Trends in the reasons for absence are reviewed and if an issue that relates to work is identified, it is referred to the relevant department to be addressed.
- p) Absence management processes are followed, which can lead to occupational health involvement and a range of support is available including talking therapies and there is rehabilitation and physiotherapy support available from the Firefighters Charity. The Service has a fitness adviser to provide support on

issues such as musculo-skeletal concerns. Regular case reviews take place, which support staff to get back to work with modified duties if necessary. Wellbeing is a core part of the People Strategy.

- q) In terms of support for employees identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual, the Service has worked with Stonewall for a number of years and has changed its policies and improved training. There is an active and prominent LGBT+ Network. There is good attendance at Pride events and support for Allies within the Service is strong. There has been targeted advertising over the last few years. The actions that are being taken are working and need to continue.
- r) In relation to ensuring that all employees with a disability have a declaration, the Service tries to go beyond just compliance and is very aware of these issues. More recently there has been a focus on non-visible disability, including neurodiversity and there is more to be considered in terms of training and guidance.

Resolved to note the report.

19 Wholetime Recruitment Process 23-24

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented the report about the outcomes from the positive action recruitment to wholetime firefighter roles that took place between April and August 2023. He highlighted the following information:

- a) The advertising process was supported by the Futures Group and involved a range of activities to promote the idea that a firefighting career can be for everybody. Activities included targeted advertising through social media, posters and leaflets; awareness days at stations; radio adverts on Dawn FM, Kemet FM and Radio Faza; fitness sessions focused on women; attending community events; and linking in with job centres.
- b) There were 461 applicants, of which 34 were successful. 15 of these 34 successful applicants had engaged with the positive action activity. The rates of success by those with protected characteristics were the best for a long time – 14.7% for women; 24% for those from a BAME background; and 14.7% of those with a declared disability.
- c) 17 of the new firefighter apprentices are starting employment on 22 April with a second cohort to commence in January 2025.

The Committee welcomed this positive work to widen the diversity of employees in the Service, noting that given the relatively low numbers of employees with protected characteristics within the existing firefighter workforce this will have a big impact.

Resolved to note the report.

20 HMICFRS Values and Culture Spotlight Report Update

Leila Berry, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report updating the Committee on the progress that has been made against the recommendations for Chief Fire Officers made within the spotlight review of the values and culture in fire and rescue services published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in March 2023. She highlighted the following information:

- a) Of the 20 recommendations owned by Chief Fire Officers, 12 have been completed and work is well underway on the remaining 8 recommendations.
- b) Actions that have been undertaken include introducing a 'Say So' confidential reporting line to allow anonymous reporting of issues; relaunch of the 'Little Acorns' staff suggestions scheme as a route for escalating issues and amplifying the employee voice; review of the policy framework resulting in the Harassment and Bullying Policy being replaced by a Dignity at Work Policy; review of harassment and bullying cases with action taken to resolve issues; and amplifying the employee voice in areas such as recruitment and procurement.
- c) Action taken in direct response to the recommendations doesn't represent the totality of work on issues relating to values, behaviour and culture. The Service has also been looking at the core code of ethics and service values.
- d) There is further work to be done in relation to background checks. The Service is looking to extend its requirements beyond the basic check. A draft policy has been developed and is currently in consultation with the trade union. It is hoped that it will be possible to implement this soon.
- e) There is also more work needed on equality and diversity issues. The Service is taking action to recruit a more representative workforce and enhance progress pathways for employees with protected characteristics. Workforce diversity plans will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.
- f) It is proposed that progress will continue to be reported to the Committee until all recommendations have been satisfactorily addressed.

Committee members made the following point:

- g) It is important to have enhanced DBS checks for employees, especially those responding to incidents and going into people's homes, as a protection for citizens. It is acknowledged that some employees may have concerns about this, but enhanced DBS checks are used effectively in many other public services so hopefully it will be possible to resolve those concerns.

The Committee welcomed the work that has taken place so far to address the recommendations.

Resolved to:

(1) note the report; and

(1) receive future updates on progress against the recommendations made within the spotlight review of the values and culture in fire and rescue

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**services published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire
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