



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM
FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**MINUTES of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service HQ,
Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on 5 July 2019 from
10:00am to 11:29am**

Membership

<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos (Chair)	None
Councillor Vaughan Hopewell	
Councillor John Longdon	
Councillor Jawaid Khalil	
Councillor Salma Mumtaz	

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

John Buckley	- Chief Fire Officer
Tracy Crump	- Head of People and Organisational Development
Adrian Mann	- Governance Officer
Matt Sismey	- Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

3 MINUTES

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2019 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

4 HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report on the key Human Resources metrics within the Service, including issues such as

sickness absence, formal discipline, grievance, employment tribunal cases and staffing numbers. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the sickness absence report for 2018/19 showed a decrease of 4.3% relative to the previous year, which reflects the hard work taking place to promote good health, rather than solely managing ill health. Overall, the average employee absence was 7.68 days per year, down from an average of 8.05 days in the previous year. Although this is below the average for the sector (at 8.26 days), the Service's aim is to reduce this to an average of 6 days per employee per year. 68.4% of all absence in the year was due to long-term sickness (defined as an absence of more than 28 days);
- (b) the Fire Authority is required by the Government to report sickness in terms of the number of days taken off by the average employee per year, but it could also be reflected in the reports in terms of the percentage of working time lost, as is often the case in the private sector;
- (c) the sickness figures the period of 1 January to 31 March 2019 (quarter four) showed absence across the workforce, excluding retained employees, increasing by 150 days (13.4%) during the review period. This represents an increase of 53.5 days (4.4%), compared to the same quarter of the previous year. Generally, a number of sickness absences during this fourth quarter can be attributed to seasonal reasons, but results can also be skewed if a small number of employees are off on long-term sickness in a quarter. Work is being carried out with the on-call teams, where the sickness rates are relatively high, to find ways of reducing absence;
- (d) an occupational health team is based on site to provide help and support to employees, and a health benefits scheme is also in place. Due to the statutory requirement for fitness testing for firefighters, there are gyms in all stations and staff are encouraged to use them for a period during the course of their working day;
- (e) there is a strong focus on support for mental health and wellbeing, in addition to the provision for supporting physical good health. Muscular-skeletal injuries and mental health issues constitute the two main reasons for sickness absence, and they can often lead to long-term absence from work. A wellbeing strategy is being produced for adoption by the Authority, which will set out the way in which the Service can support staff with mental health issues, with the aim of enabling mental health to be spoken about more openly. An employment assistance programme is also in place to help staff access various other beneficial forms of support from outside the Service, such as counselling and legal/financial advice;
- (f) a structured management and support procedure for absence is in place, which includes 'return to work' interviews, absence review triggers and occupational health reviews. Employment hearings are not conducted at a set interval of absence, as an assessment of individual circumstances takes place on a case-by-case basis;

- (g) it would be valuable to reflect the absence figures in the context of gender and of minority ethnic groups, which can highlight certain issues, and identify any trends with occupational health;
- (h) following the creation of the new Joint Control Centre as part of the sustainability strategy, the current establishment figure for the total workforce numbers will be amended in September, given that the Authority will no longer be the employing authority in terms of control staff.

5 EQUALITIES MONITORING REPORT

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the breakdown of the workforce and the work being done to address under-representation of groups with protected characteristics, as part of the Service's commitment to promoting equality and diversity. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the report covers the six-month period from 1 January to 30 June 2019 and compares the current numbers of the under-represented groups in the workforce against the data from the 2011 census. The substantial recruitment of operational personnel during 2018, following 6 years of not recruiting to new firefighter roles, has been very successful. There are now many more female firefighters and the numbers of BAME staff have increased over the last 18 months;
- (b) the Service works closely with Stonewall to support LGBT+ staff and is among the top 100 employers in the Stonewall index. However, declaration rates are relatively static and members of staff are more likely to tell colleagues about their sexual orientation than to declare this to the Service. Over the next year, the Service will be taking a wider approach on the range of protected characteristics;
- (c) the rates of staff declaring a disability are low relative to the population as a whole, but some of this is accounted for by the level of physical fitness required for firefighters. There is an improved approach to mental health and wellbeing, and a number of reasonable adjustments have been made for staff with dyslexia;
- (d) representation of BAME groups in the workforce is low relative to the local population and work is underway to engage with these under-represented communities. Firefighter role models have been established and initiatives are being carried out in community sports groups to improve the fitness of people who are considering an operational career in the Service;
- (e) on-call firefighters must live within a certain distance of a fire station, so the potential workforce make-up is restricted to the people who live in the areas around fire stations;
- (f) the number of BAME and female staff reduces at senior levels of the Service. Female firefighters have been employed within the Service for the last 15 years and it will take time for women to progress to senior operational positions. Progress has been made in appointing women to senior positions where an operational background is not a requirement of the role. To attract people from under-represented groups, it is vital to develop innovative and engaging positive action initiatives;

- (g) the success rate of job applicants with protected characteristics is reviewed regularly to ensure that appointment processes are fair. Interview panels are gender-balanced wherever possible, and personal details on application forms are redacted during the sifting process, so that personal details relating to the applicant are not known to the people carrying out the selection process until the interview stage.

RESOLVED to note the Equalities Monitoring Report and support the Service's continued commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining a workforce that is reflective of the population that it serves.

6 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2019

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report on the outcomes of the Gender Pay Gap Audit for 2018. The following points were discussed:

- (a) in 2017, the Government introduced a duty on employers with more than 250 employees to calculate and publish specific information in relation to the pay gap between men and women in their organisation. Reports are returned on the mean and median rates of pay for men and women employed by the Authority and the proportion of male and female employees by quartile pay band. As the Service remunerates roles on the basis of fixed pay bands, any given type of post receives the same level of pay, regardless of the gender of the post holder;
- (b) the pay gap present in the Authority reflects the fact that there are more men in senior roles than women. A greater proportion of men in the Service (83.3%) tends to mean that men hold a greater proportion of the senior roles, and this is relatively typical of the sector as a whole. Strategies are being developed to attract more women into the Service, and to encourage women within it to apply for management roles. An 'Aspiring Leaders' programme is in place to support people who are considering applying for these senior posts and there are national networks in place to support women in the sector;
- (c) over the next year, the actions to improve upon the gender pay gap will focus on establishing why more female firefighters do not apply for promotion, reviewing any barriers for women seeking appointment to senior roles, reviewing the requirements of the on-call duty system to make it more attractive to potential female applicants, providing opportunities for women to gain experience in higher level roles, introducing a mentoring scheme to enable women in senior roles within the service to provide advice to women who are interested in development, and exploring any additional flexible working arrangements that can be put in place. Consultations with a wide range of people, including employees and their workplace representatives, will take place shortly, to explore the issues and develop a detailed action plan.

7 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining item in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act

1972, under Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1 and 3, on the basis that, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

8 REDUNDANCY PAYMENTS: PRINCE'S TRUST

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the recommendations of the Discretionary Compensation Payments Board following the Fire Authority's decision to disestablish the Prince's Trust programme.

RESOLVED to support the recommendations as set out in the exempt report, subject to approval by the full Fire Authority.