



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

**Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom and live-streamed on YouTube on
Friday 23 April 2021 from 10:15am to 11:28am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos (Chair)
Councillor Vaughan Hopewell
Councillor John Longdon
Councillor Salma Mumtaz

Absent

Councillor Jawaid Khalil

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Tracy Crump	- Head of People and Organisational Development
Gavin Harris	- Head of Digital Transformation
Adrian Mann	- Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Craig Parkin	- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Matt Sismey	- Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager

13 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jawaid Khalil

14 Declarations of Interests

None.

15 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

16 Human Resources Update

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report on the key Human Resources metrics for the period of January 2021 to 31 March 2021. The following points were discussed:

- (a) sickness in the third quarter (1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020) has increased compared to the previous two quarters across all work groups – although it should be noted that sickness absence in these preceding periods was much lower than

usual. A seasonal increase would normally be expected in the third quarter.

However, absence was still lower than in the same quarter in the previous year, and was below the national average;

- (b) absence due to Coronavirus has been significant in this quarter, with just under 400 working days lost through positive cases or a requirement for self-isolation. A strategic plan for supporting and managing sickness due to Coronavirus is in place and is updated regularly. A business continuity plan is in place, and the strategic intentions are brought forward into delivery. A full risk assessment has been carried out for staff vulnerable to Coronavirus, and for the potential long-term effects of having had Coronavirus, as this could have an impact on the ongoing physical health of employees. A health and wellbeing strategy for both physical and mental health is in place, and healthcare support for staff is available both internally and via an external helpline;
- (c) otherwise, the primary case of illness for operational personnel was musculo-skeletal, while mental health represented the main reason for absence for support personnel (though the total number of staff affected by this in the period was 4). Both of these can represent long-term health issues, which accounted for 60% of all absence during the period. Support is available to staff through the Occupational Health team, HR and line managers, and the Service's long-term absence is lower than the national average for the sector;
- (d) ultimately, the absence statistics during the Coronavirus lockdowns are likely to be anomalous in the context of the long-term trends, so careful consideration is needed on what a reasonable baseline for sickness absence will be, following the pandemic. An overview of sickness absence figures will be prioritised as part of the normalising of working arrangements;
- (e) currently, there are four vacancies in whole-time operational roles. However, recruitment continued across the board throughout last year and 28 new firefighters have joined the Service, with the first cohort starting training this month, and the second starting in September. There has been an increase in on-call firefighters, and a number of new support staff have been appointed, mostly on fixed-term contracts. The Workforce Plan has been reviewed, and a new plan to take the Service through to 2023 will be brought to the next committee;
- (f) there have been no new employment disputes or grievances. There is one outstanding Employment Tribunal case, which will be heard later in the year. Currently, there are no formally recorded cases of harassment or bullying. A staff survey undertaken last year did find that some employees reported feeling that they have been subject to harassment or bullying in the workplace, and the Service is proactive in dealing with such issues. Support is provided to managers at all levels in addressing these issues at an early stage, and very few incidents have become formal cases. However, this area will be kept under close review.

The Committee noted the report.

17 Co-Location to Joint Headquarters

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report the progress towards co-location to a joint headquarters with the Nottinghamshire Police. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the relocation to a joint headquarters represents a key change for the organisation. The Service is very aware of the significant impact it will have on staff who will be moving their work base, and to the need for the change to be managed in a sensitive way. Currently, a Programme Board is managing the approach to the logistical issues, while HR is focusing on supporting staff through the transition as positively as possible. The relocation process will take place between January and April 2022;
- (b) there is ongoing communications and engagement to ensure that staff are kept informed about the current plans, and it is intended to carry out familiarisation visits to the new HQ when this is possible. There is an open forum where questions can be raised, and a Joint Employee Forum has been set up between both Services to explore how the two organisations will interact communally at the new HQ;
- (c) there will be some employee contractual considerations to resolve due to the move to a new work base, and engagement is underway with the staff unions on policy and management issues. However, there are no redundancies or team structure changes planned as part of the move. Team work areas are being established at the new HQ, and staff from both Services will be working together in the same spaces, so it is hoped to carry out in-person visits in the summer. The Occupational Health team will be co-locating with the equivalent Police team, and work will be carried out to ensure that there is no disruption to occupational health provision during the transition period.

The Committee noted the report.

18 Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment 2020

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the whole-time firefighter recruitment process that took place during 2020. The following points were discussed:

- (a) a full whole-time recruitment campaign was carried out during 2020. Firefighter recruitment is a challenging process, and it was made more difficult than normal due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, it was possible to carry out much of the recruitment process in a virtual way;
- (b) a lead for positive action was seconded to the campaign. Although there were fewer opportunities to carry out in-person positive action, there was targeted advertising for BAME communities, women and other groups that are under-represented in the Service. Online sessions were held to tell people about the role, which were very well attended. Mentoring sessions for interviews were provided, in addition to sessions to help improve literacy and numeracy skills. Socially-distanced fitness sessions were also provided;

- (c) the recruitment process began on 24 August 2020, and there were 646 applications submitted within the first week. The diversity of candidates was good, with 15% BAME, 12% women and 8% identifying as LGBTQ+. Success rates for these groups were good, with 5 women and 4 people from a BAME background appointed. Being a firefighter requires a certain level of physical ability, health and fitness. However, the Service needs to take full account of all people who aspire to become a firefighter, and neuro-diversity and mental health conditions should not be a barrier to this. As such, reasonable adjustments for disability are made, whenever possible;
- (d) more work is required to achieve a Service that is fully representative of its communities, but the results of the recruitment process were positive – particularly in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. It is important that positive action and proactive engagement is now carried out continually going forward, in preparation for future recruitment, and a Community Engagement Manager is in place to further develop these links;
- (e) in addition to the recruitment process, a migration process was held to enable on-call firefighters to apply to become whole-time. It is important to balance Service needs and to retain the right level of skills and experience in the on-call teams, as well as working to increase the diversity of the workforce through an open selection process. As such, this is a challenging area in terms of workforce management.

The Committee noted the report.

19 People Strategy 2017-20

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report on the outcomes of the People Strategy 2017-20. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the highlights and lessons of the previous People Strategy are now being brought forward into the new strategy document, and there is a focus on culture change within the organisation. There are likely to be upcoming challenges across the sector, so it is vital that the Service identifies what needs to be delivered to its communities, with the resources available. There is a continuity between the plans, to work toward excellence. Departmental restructures have been carried out to ensure that the organisation has the optimum number of people in the right places, and with the right skills, to deliver a service effectively;
- (b) the creation of the Joint Control Centre with the Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service has worked well, as has the introduction of mixed crewing models and changes to on-call crew structures. A cadet scheme has been established with the Police to engage with young people, while development processes are in place for current and future leaders, including an Aspiring Leaders programme. A middle manager scheme has also been set up, with a focus on coaching, mentoring and self-development;
- (c) there is a full commitment to workforce development and training, with updated performance development and review processes. An e-learning platform has been established, and there is a strong focus on ICT training. The Service is very involved

in the implementation of the national Operational Guidance. Apprenticeships have been championed for apprentice firefighters;

- (d) it is vital to have a fully informed and engaged workforce, and the results from last year's staff survey were positive on this point. There is a focus on achieving a positive engagement and a workplace with a culture of inclusion. A wellbeing strategy and support structures are in place. Equality, diversity and inclusion are promoted and, currently, work is underway to make it easier for service users who are deaf to contact the Service. Work is also needed to raise awareness and understanding around faith and culture.

The Committee noted the report.

20 Organisational Development and Inclusion Update

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the organisational development and inclusion work-streams that form part of the People Strategy. The following points were discussed:

- (a) a substantial amount of work is underway in the context of the People Strategy, and a new Organisational Development and Improvement Officer is in place. The latest staff survey received a good response rate and had some positive headlines. Take-up and living of the organisation's values has been strong, and the staff response to the situation caused by the Coronavirus pandemic was good;
- (b) the results show that the level of harassment experienced by staff has decreased, both within the workplace and from service users. Some staff report experiencing discrimination, however, and work is underway to address this, including through a BAME forum. It is important that equality impact assessments are used to ensure that services and policies are analysed in the context of potential indirect discrimination. A deaf communications tool has been developed to help frontline staff communicate more effectively with deaf service users;
- (c) a multi-agency Future Leaders programme is in place, and participating Service staff are performing well. The staff Personal Development Review process has been reviewed and is progressing well, with a simplified and shortened form, and improved objective setting. Coaching and mentoring are being embedded, including reverse mentoring. A competency framework is also in place to develop staff in Green Book roles, with more competencies to be developed for staff in uniform roles over the next twelve months. In terms of good governance, the sector's Code of Ethics is a vital document, and the Fire Authority's member Code of Conduct is being reviewed. Both of these documents will be covered during member induction.

The Committee noted the report.

21 Exclusion of the Public

The Committee decided to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining agenda items in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the basis that, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the

public interest in disclosing the information, as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

22 Exempt Minutes

The Committee confirmed the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

23 Changes to the Permanent Establishment

The Chair of the Committee agreed that this item, although not on the original agenda, could be considered as a matter of urgency because there is a pressing need for the amendment of the current establishment to better support the effective delivery of services, and this decision should not be deferred to a later meeting.

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on proposed changes to the Service's current permanent establishment.

Resolved to approve the recommendations as set out in the exempt report.