



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 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters - Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters,
Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on 2 July 2021 from 12.00
pm - 1.07 pm**

Membership

Present

Councillor Bethan Eddy
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Chantal Lee (Chair)
Councillor Toby Neal

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Nick Linthwaite - Human Resources Manager
Leila Henry - Head of Risk Assurance and Operational Training
Emma Powley –Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire 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 the 23 April 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

4 Human Resources Update

Nick Linthwaite, Human Resources Manager, presented a report on the key Human Resources metrics for the period of April 2021 to 31 May 2021.

The following points were discussed:

- a) Since the Committee last update, there has been 7 leavers and 18 starters. These included 14 Wholetime firefighter apprentices who had started their initial training in April 2021.
- b) Absence across the workforce (excluding On-Call employees) decreased by 267.36 days (20.15%) compared to the previous quarter; 59.28% of these absences was of a long-term nature. The pandemic contributed to 1177.48 days of absence during the year which were attributed to COVID related reasons.
- c) Support was provided to employees through a number of avenues including Occupational Health and Fitness Team and the Employee Assistance Programmes. Focus was also placed on the two primary reasons for sickness absence; musculo-skeletal and mental health issues. Support that was offered to staff included access to counselling, fitness advisors, on site gyms and physiotherapy.
- d) It was noted that a part-time mental health practitioner would be appointed as part of a pilot scheme. This would assess the need for in-house support in reducing mental health related absences. The Service also offered access to self-help organisations, mental health charities and also offered peer support and cognitive behavioural therapy
- e) Other workforce metrics were considered the Committee were informed that the 1 case of Harassment and Bullying has been dealt with through the Harassment and Bullying policy and a satisfactory outcome had been reached; an Employment Tribunal was currently being dealt with by Human Resources. In reference to the number of leavers (7) it was explained that this was across the non-uniformed area and included a small number of retirements. The number of leavers was regarded as standard and was not considered unduly concerning.

The Committee commended the Fire Authority on their provision of mental health support.

The Committee noted the report.

5 Apprenticeship Update

Leila Henry, Head of Risk Assurance and Operational Training, presented a report outlining the delivery of the operational firefighter apprenticeship programme within the Service.

The following points were discussed:

- a) Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services was one of very few Services nationally to offer an apprenticeship for wholetime firefighters which began in January 2019. The apprenticeship scheme was initially delivered in conjunction

with Sheffield College, however in September 2019, the Service became a registered employer provider for operational firefighter apprenticeships which allowed the Service to run and administrate in house courses which subsequently allowed the Service to utilise the apprenticeship levy rather than incurring costs from the use of a third-party provider.

- b) As an apprenticeship provider, the Service is now subject to OFSTED inspections. Following an inspection carried out in March 2021, OFSTED reviewed the quality of the in-house programme; the subsequent successful OFSTED report meant that the apprenticeship levy could continue to be drawn down by the Service for in-house firefighter apprenticeship provision.
- c) Since the start of the apprenticeship programme, the Service has had 11 competent firefighters that have successfully passed through the programme, with a further 8 anticipated to undertake their end point assessments in July 2021.
- d) Additional training was provided for those needing to focus on English and mathematics skills through supported learning.

In response to questions asked by the Committee the following information was given:

- a) The majority of apprenticeships were from Nottinghamshire, with the exception of those applying under the 'Armed Forces Covenant'.
- b) Whilst there was not targeted recruitment for apprenticeships, the Service participated in a lot of community engagement, including within schools across the City.
- c) Further consideration would be given in accessing areas (for apprenticeship recruitment) in more deprived areas of the City.

The Chair congratulated the Service officers who took part in the OFSTED inspection and the Committee offered their congratulations to the newly qualified previous apprentices.

The Committee noted the report.

6 Workforce Plan 2021-23

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the Workforce Plan for 2019-2021 and informed Members of the updated plan for 2021-2023.

The following points were discussed:

- a) The plan was based upon projections of anticipated turnover and information received from all departments regarding their workforce needs for the forthcoming year.
- b) Overall, the staffing levels had remained relatively stable over the last financial year, with the number of leavers during 2020-21 being slightly less than

predicted. This reflected a general reduction in turnover across the national workforce during a period of uncertainty, in part due to the pandemic. It was anticipated that that levels of turnover would increase during 2021-23.

- c) Retention of on call staff had posed some challenges and a number of on-Call recruitment programmes had been carried out.
- d) On-Call recruitment and retention remained a challenge for the fire service nationally due to the limitations of recruitment pools of applicants who live or work within the required five-minute response time of a station and the commitment required to attend incidents and training whilst undertaking a primary employment. In response to this, a project to review On-Call Pay and Contracts project is being piloted, with the aim of improving recruitment and retention, by offering greater flexibility to existing and prospective employees.
- e) It was noted that women account for 16.53% of the workforce with the largest proportion of women being employed in support roles (54.49%). The number of employees from BAME backgrounds has slightly increased from 37 to 40 equating to 4.72% of the total workforce. Positive action measures were undertaken to encourage applications from BAME applicants as part of the 2020 firefighter recruitment process.
- f) The number of female recruits and apprenticeships were seeing some improvements and it was explained that female candidates were being given additional support with their strength and fitness as this was identified as a time when a number of female recruits would drop out or fail to continue. Females were tested at the same level as men and there had been a transition away from the traditional concept that fire-fighting was a job for men.
- g) The Committee noted that Fire Cadets were still functioning, which also offered younger people awareness around fire-prevention. Whilst the Fire cadets did not involve direct access to the Fire Service there was a drive to strengthen and improve this to enable young people to grow into the role of fire-fighters including on-call and wholetime.

Resolved that information on the Fire Cadets be circulated to the Committee.

Resolved that a report be presented at the next Committee to assess the outcome of the review of On-Call Pay and Contracts.

The Committee noted the report.

7 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.

8 Exempt Minutes

The Committee confirmed the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

9 Regrading of Posts

See confidential minutes