



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

Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Joint Headquarters, Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on Friday 1 July 2022 from 10:03am to 10:40am

Membership

Present

Councillor Dave Trimble (Chair)
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Jonathan Wheeler

Absent

None

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tracy Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council

1 Apologies for Absence

None.

2 Declarations of Interests

None.

3 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2022 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

4 Human Resources Update

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the key human resources metrics for the period of 1 April to 31 May 2022. The following points were discussed:

- (a) a successful on-call recruitment campaign was carried out earlier in the year, with ten new trainees starting in April and a further 11 beginning in July, with recruitment ongoing for the following training course to start in January 2023. A whole-time firefighter recruitment campaign will begin in the summer for a training start date in April 2023;
- (b) staff turnover rates have been higher than forecast, particularly amongst support staff, with a number of leavers in early April due to retirement and the completion of fixed-term contracts. However, it is expected that the rate of departures should now slow. Vacancy rates in the sector nationally increased significantly during 2021-22, so a review of recruitment and retention processes is underway to identify and address the issues that may be impacting recruitment and retention levels;
- (c) a working group has been established to engage with staff and consider why people have moved on from the Service, and has been offering structured exit interviews to leavers. Following the Coronavirus pandemic, many people have been reviewing their lifestyles and making changes. The move to the joint headquarters has had an impact on some staff and, as the public sector is currently under a high level of strain, development opportunities can be more limited. However, the response to the new system of agile working has been positive, and steps are underway to establish a clearer development framework for support staff;
- (d) sickness absence is tracked carefully, and is currently running at slightly above the target level. The Service's sickness rates are higher than the national average, but not all Services record their absence statistics in the same way, so it can be difficult to draw like-for-like comparisons. Sickness absence levels vary across different areas of the workforce, with higher rates amongst on-call firefighters. A review is being carried out to identify the trends and address the current issues, to ensure that the right support is in place for staff who are ill, and so seek to reduce the levels of both short and long-term absence. Once the data for the complete quarter is available, a full breakdown will be provided on the particular reasons for sickness absence across all work areas. A 'return to work' interview process is in place, in addition to a 'trigger and review' system for members of staff who have a series of sickness absences;
- (e) the Service's reasons for sickness broadly reflect the national trends, with musculo-skeletal and mental health issues being the main causes of absence. There is strong support available to employees during any period of sickness or injury, and in returning to work. This includes assistance in re-developing physical strength, and the need to sustain core strength throughout a firefighter's career is becoming more and more important as the retirement age increases, so a new programme for regular physical conditioning is being started. There is also a high level of mental health and wellbeing provision in place to support staff across a wide range of areas, particularly as a number of mental health issues can arise due to circumstances outside the workplace. A joint scheme is underway with other emergency services to set a standard of access to mental health support across the sector;
- (f) one grievance case has been heard and one harassment complaint has been received, and is currently under investigation.

The Committee noted the report.

5 Workforce Plan 2022-24

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the review of the Workforce Plan for 2021-23 and the updated Workforce Plan for 2022-2024. The following points were discussed:

- (a) forecasting is underway on the Services' likely overall workforce over the next two years. The whole-time firefighter establishment has been reviewed in detail to ensure the right future provision is in place to mitigate against staffing turnover. Continual work is being carried out to make sure that the on-call establishment is properly staffed, and to address the current high turnover amongst support staff. The sector nationally is facing significant financial pressures and, given that the bulk of the Service's budget is spent on staffing, it is likely that there will be an associated savings requirement in this area. The current funding trends are being reviewed that the impact of any potential costs reductions are being forecast;
- (b) it is vital that the Service reflect the communities that it services, so actions are in place to establish a more representative workforce. Progress is being made, with steps in place to develop diversity through positive action and support wherever possible – but more work is still required. The publication of the most recent national census data is awaited so that the Service can gain a clear picture of the nature of its communities. Positive action has been very effective in the recruitment of whole-time firefighters, but further work is needed to show that there are a wide range of roles within the Service requiring different skills and experience, such as in the expanding areas of fire prevention and protection. The Committee suggested that the visual media used in advertising roles should be designed to be as reflective and engaging as possible;
- (c) a whole-time recruitment campaign starting at the end of July is intended to address any potential gaps in operational capacity both now and in the future. Firefighter training takes two years to complete and, as the retirement age of firefighters has increased, more support is needed for firefighters in maintaining physical conditioning throughout their careers;
- (d) all trainee firefighters are taken on as apprentices, and there is the potential to use more apprentices and graduate trainees amongst support staff, particularly in ICT and Finance. The Service aims to make full use of the Apprenticeship Levy, while balancing the fact that the Levy pays for training costs, but not trainees' salaries. The Committee noted that public sector organisations are able to transfer unspent Levy allocations between themselves, so the Service could seek to benefit from this, if needed;
- (e) following training, development programmes are in place for firefighters to grow leadership skills, and a strategic leadership programme is in place so that frontline managers can develop further into strategic roles. A great deal of work is in place to ensure that the right number of staff are developed and ready for management roles, to mitigate against the impacts of turnover amongst senior staff. A national scheme is also being trialled to support direct entry into certain roles, to seek to broaden the sector's pool of candidates.

The Committee noted the report.

6 Exclusion of the Public

The Committee resolved to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining items 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 outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

7 Regrading of Posts

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the outcomes of a recent job evaluation process that has resulted in a permanent change to the non-uniformed support establishment.

The Committee noted the exempt report.