



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

**Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom and live-streamed on YouTube on
Friday 22 January 2021 from 10:04am to 11:33am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Shugftah Quddoos (Chair)
Councillor Vaughan Hopewell
Councillor Jawaid Khalil
Councillor John Longdon
Councillor Salma Mumtaz

Absent

None

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
Tracey Stevenson - Assistant Head of Finance

1 Apologies for Absence

None.

2 Declarations of Interests

None.

3 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020 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 for the period of 1 April to 31 December 2020. The following points were discussed:

- (a) sickness absence in Quarters 1 and 2 (1 April to 30 September 2020) has seen a significant decrease in comparison to previous years, even taking into account absence in the period as a direct result of Coronavirus. This decrease in sickness may be attributed to a reduction in social contact and an increase in personal hygiene during the Coronavirus period, lowering the transmission of regular illnesses. In addition, staff working from home may have continued to work in a flexible way. Absence relating to Coronavirus is recorded specifically, and there is a requirement to report on cases at the national level. A full analysis of the sickness trends due to Coronavirus is underway, to improve planning and support;
- (b) there has been a small increase in sickness absence towards the end of Quarter 2, and numbers are likely to rise slightly due to seasonal factors. However, it seems probable that absence will continue to remain lower than normal – though instances of long-term sickness still remain a factor. The Service's absence figures are below the national average, which represents a good performance, and strong support structures remain in place for staff;
- (c) many support staff are now working remotely, and structures are in place from Occupational Health and HR to assist staff working in the new circumstances arising from the Coronavirus pandemic. Online workshops addressing mental health in yourself and others have been commissioned, and sessions have been run for managers on how to identify and approach mental ill health amongst staff;
- (d) the Committee thanked Service staff for their exceptional work during the Coronavirus period, and for the substantial improvement in sickness absence in the context of significant pressures. It requested that its written thanks are passed on to staff as part of the Chief Fire Officer's regular feedback to employees, to acknowledge their hard work during the Coronavirus period;
- (e) between 1 April and 31 December 2020, 33 new employees started work at the Service. The current whole-time staffing is 3 below the establishment level. A recruitment campaign (carried out completely online and with a strong focus on positive action) has been completed, resulting in 28 offers of employment, so the Service should be at a full establishment by April. Apprentice firefighters are starting their training programmes in April and September;
- (f) two recruitment campaigns for on-call firefighters have been carried out, with 20 new trainees coming in, and the next training course is now being advertised. The recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters remains a national challenge, and work is underway to try to develop local agreements that are as sustainable as possible. Work is also underway to seek to mitigate staffing issues arising from sickness absence amongst dual-contract staff, where a firefighter has both a whole-time and on-call role;
- (g) there have been a number of new starters amongst the support staff, though many of these are on fixed-term contracts funded through the Transformation Budget. Ultimately, the recruitment team have been working hard on various campaigns, despite the difficulties caused by the Coronavirus pandemic;

- (h) one redundancy occurred due to the restructuring of the Equipment Section, and preparation is taking place for an Employment Tribunal case scheduled for later in the year.

The Committee noted the report.

5 Equalities Monitoring Report

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the breakdown of the workforce by protected characteristic between 1 January and 31 December 2020, and the work being done to improve diversity within the Service. The following points were discussed:

- (a) since 2018, the Service has seen an increasing number of both female and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) employees. The increase in the last 12 months has not been large, but the recruitment campaigns that took place during the summer were preceded by an early period of positive action, and this should have an impact on the workforce from later in 2021;
- (b) as part of the role of HR and Service Delivery functions in engaging with communities more effectively, a Community Engagement Manager has been appointed to provide support, engage with positive action to bring greater representation into the Service, and lead consultations with BAME communities on service delivery for their areas. The post-holder will also work closely with the current BAME staff, including in the context of the Future Leaders programme. Training is in place to assist managers with talent-spotting and supporting staff progression;
- (c) a BAME forum was brought together in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, and a BAME Action Plan is being developed, including processes to increase representation on interview panels. The learning from this forum will be applied more broadly to other areas of inclusion. The forum continues to meet in an informal style every other month, with the Action Plan now integrated into the Service's formal reporting;
- (d) the Committee felt that the appointment of the Community Engagement Manager was a positive step forward, and that this would be important in promoting organisational engagement with BAME staff and communities;
- (e) a great deal of inclusion training is now online. A pilot course has taken place as part of the development of e-learning relating to faith training, and the feedback from this is being used to make improvements for the delivery of more sessions in the future. Staff podcasts on faith are being developed, and greater engagement with places of worship is being planned;
- (f) the rates of declaration of disabilities remain level. Training is underway for managers on supporting mental health needs and on ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made to create a suitable work environment for staff with a disability. The number of employees who declare as identifying as LGBTQ+ also remains level, so development work is underway with staff to enhance awareness and understanding. However, of the new intake of staff for 2021, 18% identify as LGBTQ+.

The Committee noted the report.

6 Apprenticeship Update

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on apprenticeships within the Service. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the Service pays into a national levy for apprenticeships in the Public Sector. It can then draw down funding from this apprenticeship levy to provide training, which is regulated and inspected by Ofsted, and this counts toward the Public Sector apprenticeship target of 2.3% of the workforce. Currently, the Service has eight apprentices in support roles, who have passed their courses with good scores. Managers are encouraged to recognise the value of apprenticeships in recruitment, as a great deal of work has been put into establishing a strong scheme that results in a level 3 qualification;
- (b) consideration has been given to apprenticeships for on-call roles, but creating a suitable scheme is proving to be complex and difficult, so this is not being progressed further at this time.

The Committee noted the report.

7 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Update

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the Service's response to the outcomes of its 2019 inspection report. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the 2019 inspection of the Service raised 25 headline areas for improvement (AFIs). Of the eight AFIs falling under the remit of the Committee, only two remain to be signed off, relating to the creation of a training plan that clearly aligns and supports the workforce plan, and the introduction of processes for the development and support of high-potential staff and aspiring leaders;
- (b) a new leadership and behavioural framework is in place to help staff advance through progression opportunities via a number of training routes, including formal qualification development programmes. This approach has seen good engagement from staff, and has aided actual progression. The framework is robust and has a number of strands for growing potential, including an aspiring leaders programme, and staff are being supported actively in moving forward. Diagnostic work is carried out with staff on an individual basis to establish their best training and progression approach, and work has been carried out to ensure that as many potential pathways are in place as possible;
- (c) due to the relatively small size of the organisation, it is difficult to implement a viable high potential development scheme. Nevertheless, mentoring and coaching provision is being brought in and embedded. Clear progression pathways are available for staff to pursue, including opportunities for temporary promotions, to try advanced roles and gain experience. Unfortunately, due to organisational size, it is difficult for support staff to follow a straight line of upward progression. However, processes are in place to develop opportunities for support staff to move laterally to different roles, to gain wider experience;

- (d) ultimately, the right building blocks are in place, but continual work is required to spot and nurture talent, give staff the confidence to seek progression, and achieve effective institutional culture change. A significant amount of work has been put into delivering the AFI targets, including across the Coronavirus period, to take these AFIs to a point where they can be signed off. Following a very strong effort, the Service has responded well to the AFIs. It has a good relationship with the Inspectorate, and has been able to maintain positive relations with staff unions and communities while making improvements in a very difficult period. However, the Service cannot afford to be complacent, and must continue to work hard to maintain the current standards and deliver on the remaining AFIs;
- (e) the Committee was heartened by the establishment of these progression opportunities for staff at all levels within the Service, and considered that it is vital to ensure that diversity is embedded within the organisation through effective and proactive support. It noted that close attention must be given to ensuring that the opportunities established are fully accessible to all staff;
- (f) the Inspectorate carried out a thematic inspection of the Service's response to Coronavirus at the end of 2020, and the report will be published later today. During the inspection, the response from the inspectors was positive. A date for the next inspection has not yet been confirmed, but the Service has alerted the Inspectorate to the planned timetable for its relocation to a joint headquarters with Nottingham Police, and requested that this is taken into account when setting the next inspection date.

Resolved to approve the closure of Area for Improvement (AFI) 20 and 25, within the overall AFI Action Plan.

8 People Strategy 2020-22

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented a report on the Service's People Strategy for 2020 to 2022. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the People Strategy has been reviewed and updated for the period of 2020 to 2022, to set out and address the current priorities, workplace matters and new issues that have arisen since the creation of the previous plan. The People Strategy is key to the delivery of the 2019-22 Strategic Plan, and the People Strategy will be updated again when a new Strategic Plan comes into effect from 2022. The People Strategy is intended to be owned by all managers and departments as a fully-encompassing workforce strategy that needs to be embraced by everyone. The strategy is ambitious and will be reviewed regularly, with clear measures of what success looks like in place;
- (b) the Strategy continues to focus on the key priority areas of: Delivering our Services; Shaping our Workforce; Inclusion; Outstanding Leadership; Workforce Development; Workforce Engagement; Positive Workplace and Culture; and Employee Well-Being. These priority areas are to help ensure that the workforce is effective and sustainable; that the organisation can work differently to provide a better service; that the workplace is founded on respect and the acceptance of individuals; that the Service understands the needs of its communities; that the Service grows its own future leaders; that accessible development opportunities are available to all staff and that staff are

confident to access them; that there is a strong relationship between the organisation and its workforce and stakeholders; that there is a strong set of core values and behaviours of acceptance, inclusion and involvement that are lived by staff; and that staff have available and accessible support in the workplace;

- (c) the Committee noted that the move to a joint headquarters with Nottinghamshire Police will have a significant impact on staff and their working environment, and that this should be given full consideration in the Service's strategic planning;
- (d) ultimately, the joint headquarters project is a major priority in the overall Strategic Plan. Engagement with staff will be carried out under the People Strategy to give them the opportunity to contribute to planning, and to address any concern or anxiety. Consultation is underway with staff representative bodies, and a formal process will start shortly to work with them on how the workforces will come together at the new headquarters;
- (e) as the Coronavirus pandemic has changed the world of work considerably, and has brought forward changes to ways of working that will have benefits going forward, the People Strategy will be used to consider agile working, and what form flexible working will take in the future organisational culture. The move to the new headquarters represents a significant opportunity to re-think how people can work in the future, and the learning generated during the Coronavirus period will be given full consideration as part of this.

Resolved to endorse the People Strategy 2020-22, and to receive six-monthly updates on the progress made against it.

9 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.

10 Exempt Minutes

The Committee confirmed the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

11 Changes to the Permanent Establishment

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

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

12 Regrading of Posts

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Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the outcomes of the latest job evaluation process.

The Committee noted the report.