



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at the Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on Friday 5
November 2021 from 10:00am to 11:35am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
(Chair)
Councillor Bethan Eddy
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Toby Neal

Absent

None

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance

Adrian Mann - Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Craig Parkin - Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Matt Sismey - Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager

10 Apologies for Absence

None.

11 Declarations of Interests

None.

12 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair. The following matters arising from the minutes were discussed:

- (a) best practice for on-call contracts is being reviewed at a national level, but very different issues affect different areas. Following discussions with staff and trade unions, a pilot for a new form of on-call contracts is underway and a report on the outcomes will be produced for the second half of 2022;

- (b) the pilot will be taking place at a couple of different stations. It is hoped that the more flexible offer will attract a wider range of people and positive engagement is underway with the communities around those stations. It is important that all communities local to the stations are engaged with effectively, particularly those that are most disadvantaged;
- (c) a communications programme and 'have a go' days are in place to help communities understand what it means to be an on-call firefighter. Engagement is also in place with employers, including local authorities, to help raise awareness. However, resources are limited, so careful consideration will be required as to where these resources can be best deployed to achieve the greatest effect.

13 Human Resources Update

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the key Human Resources metrics for the period of 1 June 2021 to 30 September 2021. The following points were discussed:

- (a) wholetime staffing is above the approved establishment level currently, in preparation for upcoming leavers – with a number of the new wholetime staff going through initial training. There are 79 firefighters on dual contracts to support on-call provision, but this can cause coverage issues if a dual contract firefighter has an unexpected absence, such as due to sickness. As such, there is a significant focus on on-call recruitment. Numbers in the support staff are also above the approved establishment level, but this is because several people in this area are carrying out temporary roles on fixed-term contracts;
- (b) the Workforce Plan has been accurate in forecasting the number of leavers and starters. However, there have been resilience problems caused by the departure of some specialist support staff;
- (c) the rate of sickness absence has risen to above the national average, which is an unusual result for the Service. The primary causes of long-term sickness absence are musculo-skeletal injuries and mental health, and the two issues can become connected where long-term physical illness gives rise to mental health problems. A well-established 'return to work' process supports staff in coming back after a long period of physical injury, guided by medical advice. There is also provision for returning to a modified role, to facilitate the transition back into work;
- (d) sickness absence has also been increased due to some operations that would have taken place during the Coronavirus pandemic being delayed, and staff found it more difficult to get medical appointments during the pandemic. Good internal mental health and wellbeing assistance continues to be in place to support staff. The reasons for poor mental health are varied and can relate to non-work issues, but the Coronavirus pandemic has worn down staff resilience and may have made some mental health problems worse;
- (e) although sickness absence is unusually high, particularly as it was so low during the pandemic, the reasons behind the sickness absence do not appear to be out of the ordinary. However, the position will be monitored closely over the coming reporting periods, to ensure that the right provision is in place;

- (f) currently, there are no disciplinary, grievance or harassment and bullying cases underway;
- (g) steps are underway to manage any tensions or anxieties that might arise as more staff return to working in the office more regularly. All firefighters continued to operate throughout the pandemic, but are now returning to other face-to-face frontline functions such as 'safe and well' visits and fire protection activity. Managers are having ongoing conversations with teams and individuals on the impact of returning to the office, particularly in the context of moving to a new headquarters site. A policy for agile working is being developed. Staff morale is being monitored closely, and the current feedback is largely positive.

The Committee noted the report.

14 Equalities Monitoring

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented a report on the breakdown of the workforce and applicant analysis by protected characteristic for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021. The following points were discussed:

- (a) there has been a small, gradual increase in staff numbers in the underrepresented groups in the Service, with a particular increase in those identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual, particularly amongst new starters. The Service's figures for underrepresented groups are broadly in line with the national average for the sector. However, the number of staff who are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) remains low, and the Service is finding it challenging to encourage BAME people to apply for roles in the organisation;
- (b) work is underway with communities, with a Community Engagement Manager and BAME community advisory group in place to ensure that this engagement is done continually and through all interactions with the Service, rather than just in recruiting periods. It is the aim to continue to integrate inclusion into everything that the Service does. Positive action opportunities are being developed across all teams, and 'safe and well' visits represent one, important channel for raising awareness about the Service in communities;
- (c) the Service is taking a broad approach to positive action and developing internal employee networks, which are now becoming more integrated. The number of women in leadership roles still needs to grow and, primarily, this will be enabled by recruiting more female firefighters. As such, the current focus on bringing more women into operational roles in the Service is at the entry level, though work is being carried out nationally to seek to develop appropriate avenues for direct entry to management positions;
- (d) the declaration rate amongst support staff is consistent with the national average. The Service is working hard with existing staff on encouraging declarations relating to disability to ensure that all staff can be properly supported, and there is funding in place to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace for disability. Specific work is underway with personnel with dyslexia. The policy and provisions for supporting

employees with disabilities is included in recruitment-related communications, to try to ensure that potential applicants are aware of the assistance that is available;

- (e) much more of the workforce has now been engaged on LGBTQ+ issues the Service continues to work with Stonewall to improve its approach in this area. Steps have also been taken to develop staff knowledge of religion and how to engage with citizens with different beliefs effectively, through podcasts and both face-to-face training and e-learning. There is a growing confidence amongst staff to be themselves in the workplace;
- (f) preparation is underway for a new stage of firefighter recruitment, and a number of awareness days will be held. It is intended to challenge the traditional narrative around who firefighters are and what they do, to attract as wide a range of applicants as possible;
- (g) the Committee noted that strong staff networks, along with effective strategy and policy, is important in attracting the widest possible range of people during recruitment activity. It is vital that the Service seeks to engage actively with the most disadvantaged communities that it serves, and be aware of their needs;
- (h) the Committee queried whether there is a specific engagement plan for Nottingham City itself, as it is where a large number of the BAME people within the Service's area live, and asked that the Service's community engagement plans are discussed in more detail at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the report.

15 Equal Pay Audit

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the findings of the Equal Pay Audit, gender pay gap reporting and ethnicity pay gap information. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the report has been carried out in line with the Gender Pay Gap Regulations to identify any inequality issues in pay. Currently, there are fewer women in senior and on-call roles, so positive action and talent spotting in the workforce is underway to grow the number of women in these areas;
- (b) investment is being made in 'future leaders', to support female firefighters in training for supervisory and senior management roles over the next few years. Structures are needed to help overcome any potential barriers, such as returning to work following a period of maternity leave. Flexible working continues to develop, but this can be challenging in the context of ensuring fully-crewed wholetime firefighter shifts, so provision needs to be considered carefully. A women's network is in place, to develop engagement on these issues;
- (c) ultimately, the Service operates a grading system whereby each type of role has a set salary. The identified gap is because there are more men than women in the Service, and in its senior roles. However, all staff members holding the same role earn the same salary;

- (d) the Committee noted that, as such, the Equal Pay Audit must be understood within the wider equality context. Primarily, the issue that the report identifies is that there is an imbalance in the number of men and women that are recruited into the Service, which the Service should seek to address, rather than that there is a disparity in how men and women are paid for carrying out the same role.

The Committee noted the report.

16 Agile Working

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on proposals for implementing agile working arrangements for Service employees. The following points were discussed:

- (a) a policy for agile working arrangements has been developed, following the experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic and in the context of the upcoming move to the new joint headquarters. The Service moved to remote working during the pandemic rapidly, and it is clear that it is not necessary for all office staff to work from their main office for all of the time. As such, staff will be able to apply for agile working, creating a balance of office-based and remote working. However, it will be vital to manage business continuity and both individual and team performance closely in this context, to ensure that services continue to be delivered as effectively as possible;
- (b) the representative bodies of both uniformed and non-uniformed staff have been engaged with fully as part of the development of the policy, and have been supportive of the proposals;
- (c) the new joint headquarters was designed before the Coronavirus pandemic. Although the office working space will be shared, it will still have the capacity to accommodate the current headquarters workforce numbers in full. However, discussions are underway with the Police on how to use the shared space as effectively as possible in an agile working context.

Resolved to support the Service's implementation of the Agile Working Policy.

17 Review of the People Strategy

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the progress of the People Strategy for 2020 to 2022. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the People Strategy is key to the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2019-22, and sets out how the Service will address and prioritise workforce issues to meet the Plan's aims and objectives. In terms of key activities, the firefighter apprentice scheme is progressing well and has had a good first Ofsted report. The Workforce Plan has been refreshed to inform recruitment planning, and recruitment and promotion processes are in place. A Community Engagement Plan and Equality and Inclusion Plan have been produced, and a report on the on-call position is underway;
- (b) strong employee networks and champions are in place. A new Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Community Advisory Group has been established to engage with

how services are delivered to communities. Engagement is also underway with both Service and Police staff networks on the upcoming move to a joint headquarters. The focus on supporting both good physical and mental health and wellbeing continues, and the Service is working hard to support staff on maintaining their needed fitness levels and physical conditioning.

The Committee noted the report.

18 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.

19 Exempt Minutes

The Committee confirmed the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

20 Changes to the Permanent Establishment

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

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

21 Regrading of Posts

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the outcomes of the latest Job Evaluation process, which has led to permanent changes to the non-uniformed establishment.

The Committee noted the report.