



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on Friday 28
January 2022 from 10:00am to 10:56am**

Membership

Present

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

Absent

Councillor Tom Hollis

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance

Tracy Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Craig Parkin - Deputy Chief Fire Officer

22 Apologies for Absence

None.

23 Declarations of Interests

None.

24 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

25 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 October 2021 to 31 December 2021. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the number of whole-time firefighters is above the approved establishment level currently, due primarily to trainees having started their training now so that they are ready to fill upcoming vacancies in the whole-time establishment, as set out in the Workforce Plan. On-call staffing (which is measured in units of time, rather than on a full-time equivalent

basis) is below target, and this represents a significant challenge at both the local and national level;

- (b) positive action for recruitment is being carried out in all areas. The Service is a relatively small organisation, so it is vital that the offer to staff is competitive and encourages them to stay in the sector, within the context of the nationally-set terms and conditions of employment. An updated staff benefits package is in place, and an agile working policy has been adopted;
- (c) it is also important that staff have access to relevant development and progression opportunities, wherever possible. A training needs matrix is in place to support staff in their broader development. The Service works hard to retain the people that it trains, with significant investment in continuing professional development, including the offer of bursary schemes;
- (d) absence levels have risen in comparison to both the previous quarter this year and the same quarter last year, and are being monitored closely. However, the current absence figures do now reflect sickness levels pre-Covid. Members of staff having to self-isolate due to Coronavirus is not recorded as a sickness absence, though a sick note from a doctor will be required for more than seven days' absence. Coronavirus accounted for around 34% of absences at its height, but this figure is now decreasing. Both Covid and winter pressures are affecting absence levels, so a full assessment of the trends will be carried out in the spring. Unfortunately, there is not a standardised measure of absence across the sector, so it is not always possible to compare performance directly with other Fire and Rescue Services;
- (e) long-term absence due to musculo-skeletal injury remains a significant challenge. Appropriate care support is in place, including a dedicated Occupational Health team. As much communications work is carried out as possible to ensure that all staff are aware of the full support offer, which also includes mental health provision. The Service works to provide early assistance to staff in as proactive a way as possible, to seek to address physical and mental health issues before they develop into more significant problems requiring long-term sickness absence. A 'return to work' support process is also in place, including assistance in rebuilding fitness levels;
- (f) most staff injuries do not occur at work, and there is a very close focus on preventing injuries in the workplace. Many issues leading to long-term sickness can also arise through personal circumstances, so managers should seek to be aware of any problems that might affect a member of staff's work life and provide support where needed. Due to teams being relatively small, long-term absence can have a significant work impact on colleagues, so all reasonable steps are taken to provide early support to prevent sickness absence. Absence amongst firefighters on dual contracts can present particular challenges in covering the affected shifts;
- (g) the process of moving staff to the new Joint Headquarters is now starting. There are some anxieties amongst staff regarding this change, and the return to an office space in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. Managers are working hard to ensure that effective occupational support is provided, and a policy for agile working has been introduced to enable as much flexibility for the workforce as possible. It is important that staff continue to be kept fully informed about the move to the Joint Headquarters, and there is a desire to return to a more 'normal' way of working – though to a slightly different structure to that

pre-Covid. It is vital that the Service resumes its face-to-face engagement work with communities as soon as possible, and tailored risk assessments are carried out for those staff who have particular concerns so that they can carry out their work safely;

- (h) there has been one dismissal due to capability and ill health issues. In these cases, support work is carried out with the individual for a long period of time before a dismissal process is considered. An employment tribunal case has now been completed where the Service was successful in defending a claim. The case did attract media coverage, and an appropriate communications was put in place;
- (i) the Committee considered that it is important to set out how workforce productivity is measured, in order to be able to identify when productivity has returned to normal levels following the Coronavirus pandemic – particularly in the context of face-to-face community engagement work, such as 'safe and well' visits. It noted that it will also be important to monitor how staff respond to the return to a more 'normal' way of working, and how they are affected by new working structures.

The Committee noted the report.

26 Updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statements and Review

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the updates made to the Service's Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the Joint Commitment on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity statements. The following points were discussed:

- (a) a great deal of progress is being made to bring about organisational cultural change through EDI activity, with a range of staff networks now established and more conversations taking place to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. It is vital that effective communications work is carried out to ensure that staff are aware of and understand the associated policy documents, and embed inclusion in everything that they do. It is important that staff are not just trained in EDI, but also enact it in their work;
- (b) an external evaluation has been carried out for the Service's EDI framework. A draft report has been produced and a paper on the actions arising from it will be presented to the members of the Authority in due course. The strategic leadership team is working hard to define what EDI means for the organisation, and that the Service listens effectively to the voices of under-represented groups;
- (c) the Service has a commitment to understanding all of the communities that it serves and to learn about them, to identify effectively where the greatest risks are. Positive action is carried out as part of all recruitment, and it is important to give people from all groups the confidence that a role in the Service is something that they could do. This has resulted in trainees coming into the Service from a wider range of backgrounds and groups. However, EDI must be embedded in everything that the Service does, and so needs to be resourced in a sustainable way, going forward;
- (d) a disability and neuro-divergency network is in place, and it has a strategic champion. The Service has encouraged more people to come forward for support with issues in this area, which can often be hidden, and is providing assistance in areas such as literacy and numeracy. The Committee requested that more information on the work being carried out in this area is brought to a future meeting, for discussion.

Resolved to endorse the updates to the Service’s Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Joint Commitment on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity statements.

27 Apprenticeship Update

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

- (a) there are 27 apprentice firefighters progressing through the two-year programme, for which the Service is drawing down funding from the national apprenticeship levy. There are no fixed age requirements for becoming a firefighter apprentice. Currently, the apprenticeship scheme is for whole-time firefighters, and does not extend to on-call roles;
- (b) the Service also has 5 current apprenticeships in support roles, which are primarily focused towards younger people seeking to gain starting vocational qualifications through a two-year course. In the current period, 14% of all new starters were apprentices, making up 2% of the total staffing. Ultimately, apprenticeships are a good means of introducing more people to the Service and managers are being encouraged to consider apprenticeships for entry-level roles;
- (c) apprentices carry out an end-point assessment and are being successful in passing their courses. The Service’s apprenticeship provision has also been inspected by Ofsted, which returned a good report. Although there is a good gender balance for apprenticeships in support roles, there are more male apprentice firefighters than female – primarily due to there being more male applicants. As such, more work is required to engage with women to build their confidence in applying for a role as a firefighter.

The Committee noted the report.

28 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.

29 Exempt Minutes

The Committee confirmed the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.