



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters -
Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on 29 April 2022 from 10.00 am -
10.56 am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora (Chair)
Councillor Bethan Eddy
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor John Lee

Absent

Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor Toby Neal

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell – Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tracy Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Matt Sismey - Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

30 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Toby Neal
Councillor Roger Jackson (Councillor John Lee substituting)

31 Declarations of Interests

None.

32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

33 Human Resources Update

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides a detailed update on key human resources metrics for the Quarter 4 period from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022.

The following points were highlighted and Committee members' questions responded to:

- a) whilst the Whole-Time approved number of posts is 431, there are currently only 427 in post. This is in line with planning forecasts;
- b) the number of vacancies within the On-Call and support cohorts are higher than anticipated but is a reflection of a national trend;
- c) excluding Covid related illness, the sickness rates for Quarter 4 are higher than anticipated by 65% on the same period last year, although last year's figures were particularly low, and work is underway to address this trend. Comparison with 2016-20 (pre-Covid) figures are a more accurate benchmark and represent an increase of 2.4% and a reduction of 3.1% for On-Call staff.
- d) last year 28% of absences were due to Covid related illness, but since the change in national guidance, this figure has reduced significantly;
- e) during the pandemic, absence rates were significantly reduced, but now that staff are mixing there has been a rise in sickness absence;
- f) in terms of national absence figures for the sector, whilst NFRS are relatively high in comparison to other services, this is partly due to the way that different services have recorded Covid related illness. This should be addressed in next year's figures;
- g) Appendix A to the report provides sickness figures for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022 to illustrate how absence has fluctuated for all work groups over the past three years;
- h) absence rates are closely monitored with a focus on tracking and addressing muscular-skeletal and mental health issues which can result in longer term absences of 28 days and over;
- i) internally and externally provided preventative support and mechanisms are in place for staff to assist recovery and return to work, including a helpline for mental health and physio therapy;
- j) the higher rate of absence amongst retained/ On-Call staff may be a reflection of them often having a second job, but they still have full access to all support mechanisms.
- k) the recruitment of Whole-Time staff has been paused, but is provisionally scheduled for August 2022, and will include a concerted effort to promote the Service in areas likely to attract applications from those who are currently under-represented in the operational workforce, such as women and BAME;

- l) recruitment to support roles has been difficult and is a national issue across the whole of the public sector;

Committee members commented that it's important to closely monitor retained firefighters and ensure that the Service understands their needs and can respond to them.

Resolved to note the report.

34 Equalities Monitoring

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides an update on the breakdown of the workforce and applicant analysis by protected characteristic the period 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The following points were highlighted and responses provided to committee members' questions:

- a) the number and variety of protected characteristics recognised by the Service has changed to reflect characteristics more representative of the broader communities across the whole county, but there is still work to be done as the Service continues to rely on 2011 information until recent census data is published;
- b) On-Call communities may often be less diverse than those of the City and so it may be more difficult to recruit staff with protected characteristics;
- c) one of the benefits of this type of committee is that it further empowers members to promote the Service within their communities;
- d) of the 61 Service leavers, 5 were BAME which is broadly in line with the workforce profile;
- e) whilst operational roles require a specific minimum level of fitness, if a member of operational staff then becomes ill or disabled whilst in service, the Service do try to support them in their role, or seek to redeploy them to a non operational if this is not possible.. The Service would work through all options with staff to help them return to the work place, but if that's not possible, then retirement is considered;
- f) if the Service is of aware of potential problems like dyslexia, mechanisms can be put in place to help individuals cope and/or address the issue. Software is available on all systems and can be accessed by everyone for speech to text and also document summaries. These functions are particularly helpful for those with dyslexia, and the Service may consider funding workplace dyslexia assessments;
- g) staff are encouraged to declare disabilities and illness and a lot of work has gone into creating a culture in which they can feel comfortable to come forward. 'Disability Matters' is a new employee network which highlights the range of support available with the aim of improving confidence of staff. Where staff are identified as needing support or adjustments the Service will ask what is required and what is needed by the employee;

- h) the Service is currently reviewing its reasonable adjustments process including the use of a disability passport;
- i) the power of employee networks is phenomenal. Employees being open and speaking out about their issues has made a big and impact and is helping influence culture;
- j) the new website will be fully compliant with disability needs, is public facing and hopefully will help with recruitment, even with the ability to translate documents. It will also include religious/faith pod casts;
- k) there is an opportunity to celebrate religious festivals and landmarks with Police colleagues at the new Joint Headquarters;
- l) with regard to recruitment, substantial improvements have been made with the introduction of incremental training to improve the attractiveness of On-call posts. 'Have a go' days will be trialled at different sites across the county;
- m) female recruits can be supported through positive action such as helping build fitness and upper body strength in preparation for the application fitness tests. Social media and radio raising the profile of the role and that it is not just for men;
- n) applications are shortlisted in a process where managers do not see anything to identify the applicant. This process has been independently assessed and the Service is confident that it works well.

Members of the committee welcomed the work Inclusion and Diversity Team and noted the level of social deprivation within an area does impact on the ability to recruit.

Resolved to note the content of the report and support the Service's continued commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce.

35 People Strategy

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which informs members of the progress of the People Strategy 2020-2022 a copy of which is attached as Appendix A to the report.

The following points were highlighted:

- a) in spite of a couple of challenging years due to the pandemic, the Service has achieved progress against all the following key criteria;
 - i. delivering our services;
 - ii. shaping our workforce;
 - iii. inclusion;
 - iv. outstanding leadership;
 - v. workforce development;
 - vi. workforce engagement;
 - vii. positive workplace and culture;
 - viii. employee well-being;

- b) the Service needs to ensure it has a workforce that is robust and able to respond;
- c) a revised rostering and collective agreement to improve efficiency within Whole- Time shifts has been introduced along with new crewing arrangements;
- d) the move to the new Joint Headquarters is ongoing and won't be complete until the end of summer, but is proving successful and very positive so far, despite initial employee concerns;
- e) agile working practices for office-based staff, for which Covid acted as a catalyst, are making the workplace more flexible and having a positive impact on employee well-being;
- f) engagement forums have been set up to help better understand the needs of the BAME, LGBT+ workforce, along with women's issues, and will continue to be developed;
- g) the Workforce Survey of 2020 highlighted that a notable number of employees wanted the opportunity to advance within the Service. This is being addressed, but there is still further work is to be done;
- h) the Firefighter Apprenticeship Programme, to which five support staff are committed, passed an OFSTED inspection in 2021;
- i) the Leadership Programme has been refreshed and expanded;
- j) the Well-Being Strategy reflects the Service's commitment to supporting the physical, mental and emotional health of the workforce.

Resolved to note the report and the progress made against the objectives of the People Strategy 2020-2022.

36 Change to Permanent Establishment

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report, which proposes the creation of six new roles as part of the budget setting process which supports the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan.

Resolved to support the following changes to the permanent establishment, subject to Fire Authority approval:

- i. the creation of a new role of Fire Investigation Dog Handler;**
- ii. the creation of two Equipment and Fire Hydrant Technician roles;**
- iii. the creation of a Rostering Manager role;**
- iv. the creation of a Pensions Officer role;**
- v. the dis-establishment of a HR Business Partner role and creation of an HR Officer as a career-graded post.**

37 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining item in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, under Schedule 12A, Part 1, 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.

38 Regrading of Posts

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which details the regrading of posts as a result of the Job Evaluation process.

Resolved to note the report.