



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

UPDATE ON WORKFORCE PLAN 2022-24

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 13 January 2023

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on progress against the Workforce Plan 2022-24.

Recommendations:

That Members note the content of the report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Workforce Plan 2022-2024 forms part of the business planning process which supports the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and is undertaken by the People and Organisational Development (POD) department to establish workforce trends, identify potential workforce planning issues and formulate an action plan to address these issues. The plan is based upon projections of anticipated turnover and information received from all departments regarding their workforce needs for the forthcoming year.
- 1.2 The plan seeks to forecast:
- Workforce reductions through retirement, projected turnover and other factors;
 - Workforce increases resulting from delivery of new service requirements;
 - The need for succession planning for specialist and managerial roles;
 - Particular areas of concern within the Service;
 - Resources requirements.
- 1.3 By anticipating the needs of the Service through the business planning process, the Service can ensure that the foundations are in place to deliver on key Service objectives and commitments which will underpin the Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Community Risk Management Plan. These needs can then be factored into the budget planning process.
- 1.4 The latest Workforce Plan (“The Plan”) for 2022-24 was considered by this committee at its meeting on 1 July 2022. This report provides an update on progress.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The primary aim of workforce planning is to ensure that the Service can anticipate and plan for levels of turnover. This is mainly due to projected retirements but also reflects a prediction about leavers based on previous figures and known issues. There is no compulsory retirement age and therefore projections can only be estimated.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 22 July 2022, authority was delegated to the Chief Fire Officer to appoint, establish, and disestablish and manage all staff positions within existing budgets. Permanent changes to establish levels will therefore be reported on an annual basis to the Authority. This report sets out an overview of the existing establishment and workforce issues.

Wholetime Establishment

- 2.3 In The Plan, it was predicted that up to fifty-four Wholetime operational employees could leave the Service before April 2024. As an average, this

represents 2.25 leavers per month. During the period April-September 2022, 16 wholetime operational employees have left the Service, the majority (62.5%) due to retirement. Overall, resulting in a turnover rate of 3.9%. This is slightly lower than the average predicted. However, it should be noted that retirement decisions tend to increase in the final quarter of the year (Jan-March) and therefore the expectation is that the anticipated turnover figure will be at or just below the predicted level.

- 2.4 During the course of the year, the Service has appointed to six Wholetime roles as a result of transfer of competent Firefighters and the migration of On-call employees. The Service is currently in the final stage of Wholetime recruitment for a course commencing in April 2023 which will see a new cohort of Apprentice Firefighters posted to station from September 2023. This flow of new entrants is essential to protect future resilience, bearing in mind that it takes at least 24-months for an Apprentice Firefighter to reach full competence.
- 2.5 Wholetime establishment is currently 431 operational posts, ranging from Principal Officers to Firefighter roles. Outcomes from the Fire Cover Review, which forms part of the Efficiency Strategy ("Futures 25"), may lead to a reduction in the number of wholetime positions as part of budget savings for 2023-24. For this reason, the timing of the firefighter recruitment process was delayed, and the operational workforce is currently 20 posts below establishment to ensure that any workforce reductions can be achieved through natural attrition rather than redundancies.

On-call Establishment

- 2.6 In The Plan, it was predicted that up to 52 On-call employees could leave the Service before April 2024. As an average this represents 2.2 leavers per month. During the period April to December 2022, 17 On-call employees left the Service, whilst 23.5% (4) were due to retirement the majority were due to resignation. Overall, resulting in a turnover rate of 7%. This is slightly lower than the average predicted.
- 2.7 Due to the nature of the On-call model, it is not unusual for changes to work or home location to result in people leaving the Service as they are required to live or work within ten minutes of their station base. Therefore, this level of turnover is anticipated.
- 2.8 The Service runs recruitment campaigns throughout the year to attract new candidates and have run two appointment processes during 2022.
- 2.9 The Service have appointed to 19 new On-call firefighter roles during 2022.
- 2.10 In previous updates, reference has been made to an On-call Pay and Contracts review which commenced in 2021 at two pilot stations at Bingham and Stapleford to trial changes which offer more flexibility to On-call employees as part of recruitment and retention measures. The pilot ended in August and the pilot stations have now returned to their normal contractual

arrangements. The lessons learned from the pilot will be reviewed and form the basis for any future changes to On-call contracts and ways of working.

Support Establishment

- 2.11 In the Plan, it was predicted that 52 support staff could leave the Service before April 2024. This was predicated on higher than anticipated turnover levels during 2021 and 2022 and a national trend for higher turnover in the post-Covid period. This has previously been reported to Members as a risk identified on the corporate risk register.
- 2.12 In the event, 30 employees have already left the Service since April. This is higher than the predicted level. Analysis has shown that turnover is now abating, with five leavers in Q3 (Oct-Dec) compared to ten leavers in Q2 (Jul-Sept) and 15 leavers in Q1 (Apr-Jun). It should be noted that, of these, six were due to the ending of fixed-term contracts. Overall, equating to a turnover rate of 19.3%.
- 2.13 A recruitment and retention review has been undertaken and measures put in place to make the Service more attractive to potential applicants by enhancing our employee brand, making recruitment adverts more attractive, increased use of social media to advertise roles, and emphasising the benefits of working for the Service. Actions have also been taken to reduce vacancy time by applying a 2-month notice period to new contracts and revising the selection and appointments process. This means that when vacancies arise, there is less impact in terms of maintaining service delivery.
- 2.14 In terms of retention, a review of reasons for leaving showed that salary and lack of development opportunities were cited as the main reasons for seeking alternative employment. Clearly in the current economic climate, there is limited scope to enhance salary, although the recent national pay award has been implemented and has seen an average uplift of 4.04% from April 2022. The Service has also increased the honoraria payment which can be made to staff undertaking higher level duties as this had not been updated for some years and reflects the contribution of staff who go beyond the requirements of their substantive role.
- 2.15 The Service will also be reviewing the use of retention measures such as flexible leave, career graded roles and skills payments, as well as developing internal skills, via apprenticeship roles and development pathways as part of the Workforce Review over the coming year.
- 2.16 To provide some context to the level of turnover during this same period, the Service has appointed to twenty support roles across all functional departments. At the end of 2022, there were 6 active vacancies on the support establishment.

Futures 25 Efficiency Strategy

- 2.17 The Futures 25 Efficiency Strategy was approved by the Authority at its meeting on 13 May 2022. This report set out the financial challenges for the

Service during the term of the current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-25 and referenced a wider workforce and Fire Cover review to align resources to the delivery of the CRMP and to identify potential savings from both pay and non-pay budgets.

- 2.18 Further information in relation to the workforce review was provided to the Authority at its meeting on 23 September 2022. This set out a proposed saving of £250,00 through the disestablishment of support posts across several departments, to be realised in 2023-24. The next phase of the review will undertake an in-depth review of departmental structures to identify improvements, efficiencies, and potential savings.
- 2.19 The report also set out the recommendation of the independent Fire Cover Review regarding proposed changes to operational response to achieve a saving of £2m. The proposals are currently subject to public consultation, finance settlements and, if approved by the Authority, could result in a reduction of up to 44 operational posts through natural attrition during the life of the CRMP.
- 2.20 There are clearly workforce implications arising from the need to achieve savings and deliver a balanced budget, whilst maintaining essential services and CRMP commitments. These will form part of the next Workforce Plan 2023-25.

Other Workforce Plan Priorities

- 2.21 The need to make the workforce more representative and diverse continues to be a priority for the Service, with the aim of improving the current workforce profile to better reflect the local population. Positive action has been undertaken to encourage applicants who are under-represented in our workforce to apply for Wholetime fire-fighter positions and success rates will be reported to committee at the end of the current process. Equalities monitoring information is contained within a separate report on the agenda.
- 2.22 A focus on employee well-being and improved sickness absence rates were also identified within the workforce plan. In addition to the wide range of well-being provisions in place, the Service has recently implemented a well-being platform which is available through our Employee Assistance programme and provides information on a range of health issues and self-help support mechanisms. Sickness absence rates have decreased since last year (2021-22) and monitoring information is contained within the HR update report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The management of establishment levels is key to the overall management of staffing budgets which constitute 79% of the overall revenue budget. Accurate predictions are always difficult but are still essential to budget setting with issues such as the overall establishment, the distribution of staff within roles and the numbers of staff in development all having considerable influence on budgets.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Human Resources implications are set out within the report. There are no Learning and Development implications.
- 4.2 Outcomes from the Workforce and Fire Cover reviews will be subject to consultation with the representative bodies in terms of potential workforce impacts, in line with local agreements and statutory responsibilities.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken as this review does not represent a change to existing policy or service delivery. However, it is a stated objective within the Workforce Plan to make the workforce more representative and diverse, with the aim of improving the current workforce profile to better reflect the local population. Updates on progress against this aim is reported through a bi-annual equalities monitoring report to this committee.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The Workforce Plan forms a key part of the Service's planning process and ensures that the Service has the requisite number of skilled employees, deployed to achieve, and maintain the delivery of corporate objectives, within approved budgets.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no implications.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER