



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Joint
Headquarters - Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on 13 January 2023
from 10.01 am - 11.02 am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Dave Trimble (Chair)
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Nigel Turner

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Mick Sharman - Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tracey Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Matt Sismey - Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager
Damien West - Area Manager Head of ICT, Corporate Support
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

8 Apologies for Absence

None.

9 Declarations of Interests

None.

10 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 1 July 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

11 Human Resources Update

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report which provides the Committee with an update on key human resource metrics for the period 1 June

to 30 December 2022 for establishment figures, and for the period 30 April to 30 December for absence data.

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

- a) The Service currently employs 804 staff, including 70 dual contract individuals who are Whole-Time firefighters and also provide On-Call cover;
- b) There were 20 full-time equivalent firefighter posts, and 10 full-time equivalent support role posts vacant, some of which have since been filled;
- c) The rates at which firefighters have left the Service is as predicted, but as is the national picture across public services, there are higher levels of turnover within support staff (Green Book roles). However, the rate of turnover is slowing down and recruitment increased following targeted work. The quality of new starters has been very high;
- d) Appendix A to report provides a breakdown of the sickness absence levels for Whole-Time staff, which shows a reduction of absence overall across all work force areas compared to last year's figures;
- e) Absences due to COVID-19 sickness are still recorded, and for this reporting period accounts for 17% of absence. Absence data will continue to be considered both with and without COVID-19 absences;
- f) This Service is above national absence rates against other Services, but only marginally for support staff. This is being considered in detail and solutions sought;
- g) Appendix C to report provides a breakdown of the top 10 reasons for absenteeism for Whole-Time, On-Call, and support staff, with regard to overall days lost to absence, short-term and long-term absences;
- h) There are different reasons but muscular-skeletal and mental health absence continues to rank highest but targeted support is ongoing for these areas;
- i) There were no significant areas of concern regarding disciplinary cases, grievances raised, harassment cases raised, dismissals, appeals and active employment tribunal cases;
- j) Long term absence does have a significant impact on the statistics and accounts for between 62%-71% of absence. Long term is defined as off work with a GP note for more than 28 days consecutive absence. Such staff are referred to the Service's Occupational Health Section to be able to access support with the view of enabling them to return to work when appropriate;
- k) Flu is predicted to be a massive problem nationally this year, with several deaths already having occurred within the county. Seasonal Flu cases have increased but it is anticipated that absence due to flu will have an impact on the Service and will be evident in the next reporting cycle.

Members commented as follows:

- l) It is a concern that Covid rates appear to be increasing across the population;
- m) With regard to the national sickness absence comparisons of other Services, once the anomaly of Cambridgeshire is removed along with non-comparable London, Nottinghamshire isn't far off the overall average sickness rate;
- n) The higher rates within Nottinghamshire are largely attributed long-term sickness of just a few individuals.

Resolved to note the update.

12 Update on Workforce Plan 2022-24

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report which provides the Committee with an update on progress against the Workforce Plan 2022-24.

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

- a) The workforce plan sets out an ongoing two-year plan to assist in predicting staffing numbers to inform recruitment and ensure that establishment planning is in place to maintain the required staffing;
- b) Last reported in July, consideration of 2025 workforce predictions will commence shortly as it takes approximately two years from the start of the recruitment process for operational firefighters to be considered fully competent;
- c) Recent turnover rates up to December 2022, have been as predicted at 3.9-4% for firefighters, most of which were due to retirements which are generally known in advance;
- d) A whole time recruitment campaign has just been completed and appointments will be made shortly. Nearly 400 applications were received with just over 100 applicants interviewed, which is very positive;
- e) Whole-Time posts have been recruited to annually, mainly through the migration process of enabling On-Call firefighters to apply to Whole-Time roles, but also via the transfer process of staff from other Fire and Rescue Authorities to fill gaps in Whole-Time establishment;
- f) With regard to the Whole-Time establishment, there has been the backdrop of some uncertainty with the Efficiency Strategy, and unpredicted elements, such as budgetary impact, have complicated workforce planning;
- g) It is anticipated that by the middle of next year, staffing will be at the current establishment levels;
- h) Turnover of the On-Call establishment is slightly lower than initially predicted, at approximately 7%, but recruitment takes place throughout the year and 11 trainee firefighters are currently working their way through the training program. Work continues

with crews of On-Call stations encouraged to locally promote the Service and benefits of the role;

- i) There has been a fairly high turnover of support staff. Exit interviews found that pay issues and the inability to progress through the organisation were the most predominant reasons for leaving. There is frustration that the pay issue is guided by the national pay awards, but since the Committee last met, there has been agreement of the Green Book pay award, which has helped bring the sector more in line with other employers. It is hoped that this will support staff retention but work is underway with regard to career grading to provide clearly defined routes for career progression, including the potential to move between departments;
- j) Apprenticeship routes continue to be developed, including development of 'home grown' in-house employees;
- k) Work has been undertaken to professionally promote the Service as an attractive employer of choice, with what the Service can offer employees, including long-term well-being welfare support, which has had a positive impact with 20 vacant support staff roles being filled this year;
- l) The Efficiency Strategy is having, and will have, an impact going forward. It was impossible to predict some of the budgetary pressures which the Service now faces. The workforce review is ongoing and will address some of the issues raised, including employees desire for more flexibility. The results of the review will be presented to members in due course;
- m) The potential for industrial action had not been predicted, but will be factored in moving forward into next year's plan;
- n) The Service regularly attends school career events across the county, including where possible, accompanied by an operational presence, with the intention of promoting the Service and positively embedding its presence within local communities;
- o) Everybody has at least a basic understanding of what the operational firefighter role is, but the Service is also trying to promote that there are other possibly less glamorously perceived, but still important roles within the Service, such as within Fire Prevention and Protection.

Members of the Committee commented as follows:

- p) The report is welcomed and provides assurance with regard to workforce planning;
- q) It's important to engage with schools and young people, to build intelligence and awareness from a young age to ensure the Service is seen as a positive presence, but also to raise the profile and awareness of the Service as a potential employer.

Resolved to note the report.

13 Equalities Monitoring Report

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented the report which provides a detailed breakdown of the workforce and applicant analysis by protected characteristic for the period 1 April to 30 September 2022.

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

- a) The numbers of female firefighter remains steady, but there is a slight reduction in the numbers of BAME employees;
- b) There was an increased reporting on LGBT numbers by 2.85% as of 30 Sept;
- c) Disability numbers reduced but the Service is actively trying to provide an environment in which staff feel comfortable disclosing disabilities. Work is ongoing to establish 'reasonable adjustment passports' which also ensure that disability information is appropriately shared, and managers receive appropriate training;
- d) A firefighter has been seconded into the EDI team for 6 months to assist in the development of positive action measures in the community. This includes promoting the Service at career fairs, festivals and community events such as the recently attended female football tournament.
- e) Regular fitness sessions were held focusing on fitness activities prior to the recruitment process;
- f) Work is ongoing to further promote the employer branding unique selling point of the Service as an attractive employer for both operational and Green Book roles;
- g) Exit interviews are held, in which their reasons for staff leaving the Service are requested. Resignations can be for a range of reasons, including a career change or personal circumstances;
- h) The Service is working with the Karima Institute, Radio Dawn and Radio Kemet, with further work planned from April to encourage applications and try and determine the reasons why people are not applying to join the Service;
- i) The Service's female Muslim Fire Fighter, Uroosa Arshid, wanted to be a firefighter following a school visit by the Service when she was 5 or 6 years old. As previously mentioned by members, there is value in reaching out to young people from an early age to establish a relationship and achieve longer-term engagement benefits;
- j) Of the 384 applicants for a Whole-Time posts, 50 were women, but proportionally this needs to be near a half to reflect the population balance. Work is ongoing to find new ways of raising women's interest in working for the Service;
- k) The revised census information from 2021, is being considered in detail and will be submitted to the Policy and Strategy Committee in June. Following members comments, social economic deprivation information can be included as an equalities metric.

Councillors commented:

- l) The value of engaging a truly diverse workforce is not just about statistics, but the importance of having employees who understand communities and are also able to promote the benefits of working for the Service;
- m) In some less diverse communities within Nottinghamshire, such as Ashfield, economic equality may be considered of greater relevance. Promoting the Service within some of the more deprived communities, such as council estates, will help people relate to the work of the Service, and feel that they realistically can work for the Service. Inclusion should be about all elements of the community, including economic scales, and not just focusing on BAME and sexual orientation representation;
- n) Councillor Gul Khan informed the Committee that he had promoted the Service on several occasions on the local Asian Radio Station and was disappointed that more applications from BAME community had not been received.

Resolved to:

- 1) **note the content of the report and support the Service's continued commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce;**
- 2) **agree that as there is cross-over and duplication between this report and the workforce planning report, to maximise efficiency, the data provided in this report will be combined with the Workforce Plan report and subsequent Human Resources Update after a six month period.**

14 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, Areas For Improvement

Damien West, Area Manager Head of ICT, Corporate Support, presented the report which provides an update on addressing the 'Areas For Improvement' (AFI) allocated to this Committee for monitoring and scrutiny.

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

- a) The last HMICFR inspection identified 4 areas for improvement, compared to the 24 identified by the initial inspection;
- b) The only AFI allocated to this committee for monitoring and scrutiny, is AFI 3, 'AFI3 - The Service should assure itself that staff understand how to get wellbeing support';
- c) The Service currently offers a range of information regarding broadly available support, but some crews had expressed concerns on the availability and access to post event support consistency;
- d) A gap analysis has been undertaken to consider this, and also examine the support offer at other services, including how it is promoted and exactly what is provided;
- e) As a result, the service is to take the following action:

- Meeting with the Communications Team about developing a communications plan to raise awareness of Vivup (The Service employee benefit and EAP provider);
 - Refresher training on post-incident support has been completed for Station Manager roles and above;
 - A task and finish group to review the post-incident support process has commenced with support from a Service Delivery District Manager;
 - Work with the communications team to promote wellbeing support. Occupational Health to take a lead role in promoting the support available and a wellbeing message to all staff by, for instance, having more visibility on stations and other sites;
 - The Occupational Health team will promote and deliver a well-being message through activities such as station hubs (holding clinics at different locations) and a Wellbeing roadshow to raise visibility and access.
- f) to ensure that progress to address this AFI can be evaluated, questions will be included within staff survey and staff engagement events, from which feedback can be tracked.

Resolved to:

- 1) **note the 'Areas for Improvement' delegated to the Committee for scrutiny and monitoring;**
- 2) **agree the approach of the Chief Fire Officer for addressing the 'Areas for Improvement';**
- 3) **note the actions undertaken to date.**

15 Apprenticeship Update

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report, which, in line with public sector reporting requirements, provides an annual update on apprenticeship provision within the Service for the period of the 2021/22 financial year.

Following points were highlighted and responses provided to members' questions:

- a) The Service's apprenticeship scheme has been subject to an OFSTED inspection, which provided an overall assessment outcome of 'good' with some elements rated as 'outstanding', which is a very welcome result;
- b) Due to the 'good' 'assessment outcome, OFSTED will not inspect the Service again for at least five years, maybe longer;

- c) The Service is intending to develop a further 6 apprenticeship opportunities, predominantly in the ICT Department, but also including Finance, Fire Protection and Corporate Communications;
- d) Whilst many large employers are struggling to utilise their apprenticeship levy, it is not the case for the Service, which is able to utilise 100% of the levy.

Members of the Committee welcomed the report agreed that the provision of apprenticeships is massively important.

Resolved

- 1) **to recognise the progress made in the employment of apprenticeship roles within the Service during Financial Year 2021/22 including the Service exceeding the public sector targets relating to apprenticeship delivery;**
- 2) **to note the positive outcomes of the recent OFSTED inspection.**

16 Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade (LFB)

Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, presented the report which informs the Committee of the outcome of the Independent Review into the culture of the London Fire Brigade.

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

- a) This review is the result of an internal investigation into the tragic death of firefighter Jaden Matthew Francois-Espirit, who took his own life in August 2020. The review took place over 12 months with more than 2,000 individual interviews of staff, former staff and members of the community;
- b) As a result of the review, further cases of concern, including harassment and bullying have been identified nationally within the sector;
- c) Members are assured that this Service has considered the recommendations of the review and is examining the culture and development of the organisation, and points which may be relevant to this Service, and employee networks. The report sets out the changes proposed as a result;
- d) London Fire Brigade have responded to the recommendations (as set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report) and NFRS has set out the context relevant to this Service (which are set out in 2.4 of the report) which are summarised as follows for consideration and discussion by the Strategic Leadership Team and employee networks:
 - i. an acknowledgement that diversity work needs to improve and maintain momentum;
 - ii. staff networks have been helpful in moving forward culture change and identifying behaviours which had not been apparent to the Service;

- iii. a review of training and a new action plan was developed in 2022, including the mainstreaming of equality issues into operational training, and consideration of different identity and background when providing rescue, care and support;
 - iv. a staff survey is undertaken every 2 years and specific monitoring is included to ensure that issues raised and identified are addressed. The results of the survey have shown that line manager and teams are generally looking after each other and working well together, with good morale and job satisfaction, but some issues which were identified are being addressed;
 - v. an inclusive leadership programme for middle managers is to be provided, starting this week;
- e) the Chair and Chief will release a joint statement about culture, to ensure there is awareness and assurance that the Service is taking issues seriously.

Members of the Committee welcomed the report, acknowledged the importance of learning, and the work to ensure that the Service is a good employer, for which people want to work.

Resolved

- 1) **to note the content of the report;**
- 2) **to support the Service's commitment and approach to developing an inclusive culture at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.**

17 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, 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.

18 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held 1 July 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.