



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 21 April 2023

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on the priorities for the People Strategy 2022-25

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 A People Strategy forms part of the delivery mechanism for the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), setting out key workforce issues and commitments to ensure that the Service can deliver on its strategic objectives.
- 1.2 The people elements of the CRMP are set out within Strategic Goal 4: "We will continue to support and develop our workforce and promote an inclusive service" and are inherent in the four pillars of the Service's approach. Specifically, those of equality, diversity and inclusion and a professional and committed workforce.
- 1.3 The People Strategy is underpinned by national standards and workstreams developed through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). A revised NFCC People Strategy is currently in development and will inform and influence the future people priorities for the sector. The Strategy will continue to be reviewed and adapted to reflect emerging national and local issues.
- 1.4 This report provides an overview of those areas of priority for the Service and how it is addressing these within the term of this Strategy. Actions will form part of the Service's Annual Delivery Plan. Supporting people is not just a human resource issue, but translates to the physical workplace, leadership, behaviours and communication.
- 1.5 The four focus areas for the People Strategy are:
 - Shaping our workforce;
 - Positive workplace and culture;
 - Inclusion;
 - Health and wellbeing.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 **Shaping our Workforce to Deliver our Services:** a key component of any People Strategy is the way in which the Service continuously reviews its workforce model to ensure it has the right people, with the right skills, in the right places, at the right times. An annual Workforce Plan is refreshed and published each year, with a two year lookahead at projected turnover, new or changing demands and specific workforce challenges. The current Workforce Plan 2022-24 is currently being revised. This Committee reviewed the Plan at its meeting in January 2023.
- 2.2 Within the Plan, predictions are made regarding future turnover, recruitment and succession planning. The regular human resources update reports to this Committee maintain an overview of workforce issues and how the Service is managing its resourcing requirements. During 2022-23 the Service has

undertaken a wholetime recruiting campaign, appointed to 61 roles across all work groups and undertaken promotion processes at all levels of the organisation. This has placed the staffing establishment in a sustainable position to meet demands and to deliver on the Service's commitments.

- 2.3 The Service has undertaken a workforce review during 2022-23 as part of its Futures 25 efficiency planning, and the next phase of this review will continue into 2023-24. This is a significant review of current structures, systems and processes and will align resources more closely with current and future demands. The outcomes from this review will be reported to the Fire Authority.
- 2.4 The Committee has been made aware through the human resources update reports of the challenge posed by higher-than-expected levels of turnover within support roles over the last two years. This has impacted on administrative, professional and technical roles, and a review of recruitment and retention has been undertaken to address these issues. The level of turnover has reduced in the latter half of 2022-23, which has resulted in better workforce stability and a reduction in the vacancy rate. The Service remains mindful of the need to promote itself as an employer of choice in the employment market through innovative recruitment, positive engagement and competitive employee benefits.
- 2.5 The challenge of recruiting and retaining to on-call roles is a perennial issue, although the Service did appoint 33 new firefighters during 2022-23. The nature of the role leads to historically higher levels of turnover than for wholetime roles and a dedicated on-call recruitment team works throughout the year to attract and recruit new firefighters.
- 2.6 An emerging challenge for the sector is the change to fire safety regulations and the shortage of professional fire safety officers nationally. The NFFC is working to address this shortage and the Service is actively working to increase its capacity in this area. This includes the sponsorship of employees to gain professional qualification through the Institute of Fire Engineers and in-house development to upskill operational employees to undertake fire safety audits.
- 2.7 As part of succession planning, a review of the leadership programme has commenced to ensure that current and future leaders have the skills and knowledge to undertake and develop into higher level roles. A talent management and career conversation process will be introduced to ensure that all employees have access to development opportunities.
- 2.8 **Positive Workplace and Culture:** the Service's aim is to ensure that all employees experience a positive working environment where they feel engaged, motivated and recognised for their contribution to making communities safe. This entails good communication networks where information is shared and feedback encouraged, good performance is recognised and behaviours are in line with Service values and ethical framework.

- 2.9 It is important that employees feel supported to work at their best, with effective training, development, leadership, and welfare support when they need it. It also links to the physical environment and ensuring that employees feel safe and can expect to be treated fairly. Building an effective psychological contract based on mutual trust and expectation.
- 2.10 The Service has developed an effective internal communications network which provides engagement at several different levels so that employees are informed about the issues affecting them. These range from news items on the intranet, employee newsletter and weekly updates, workplace visits by senior managers, staff conferences, Chief's address, involvement in working groups (for instance station refurbishments, new equipment and uniform), as well as the more formal engagement with representative bodies. An internal staff survey every two years also provides a way of gauging how employees feel about the Service and identifying the issues that need to be addressed. This level of internal engagement is central to an effective people strategy and will continue to be developed.
- 2.11 **Values and Culture:** the values and ethical standards that underpin the Service's culture have been reinforced by the NFCC Code of Ethics. Over recent months, external events and reports have provided a focus on the fire service nationally, with the London Fire Brigade (LFB) Independent Culture Review report representing a seminal moment for the sector.
- 2.12 The importance of creating a positive workplace which is free from harassment, discrimination and bullying has been a long-standing commitment for the Service. The Service's Behavioural Framework was revised in 2022 and sets out expectations about conduct and the ways in which values and the NFCC Code of Ethics should form part of how the Service does things – at an individual, managerial and community level. Work to embed these core principles will be on-going over the course of this plan.
- 2.13 The Service has undertaken a gap analysis of issues raised following the LFB review, to add to its own independent equality review undertaken in 2022, to establish the actions that need to be taken and this will form a key element of the People Strategy over the next two years. Ensuring that the experiences recounted in the review, and those raised by subsequent media reports, cannot happen in the future.
- 2.14 **Inclusion:** a positive workplace has inclusion at its heart. It is important that employees understand different communities and service users, that the Service welcomes those from different backgrounds, beliefs, genders, sexual orientation, or those with disabilities into the workplace.
- 2.15 Whilst training and awareness raising is the cornerstone of creating understanding and is built into development programmes, it also means forging relationships with local communities, asking for their views and integrating inclusion into every aspect of business – whether this is operational response, prevention, protection or working with our partners.

- 2.16 It is also important that Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's workforce reflects the communities it serves. The Service has undertaken positive action over many years to encourage women, and those from Black, Asian and minority groups to apply for roles with the Service – particularly operational roles. This has met with some success, but women still represent only 6.7%, and BAME employees 5.88%, of the wholetime workforce. As part of a review of the last recruitment campaign, the Service will seek to understand any barriers for female and BAME applicants and measures that we can take to increase the number of applicants and their success rate in the process.
- 2.17 The Service has seen significant development of its employee networks over the last year and this is making a positive impact in terms of engagement, understanding and decision making. These networks will continue to receive support and recognition for the value that they bring.
- 2.18 The Service's Community Engagement Plan sets out aims and objectives to enhance relationships with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The Community Engagement Officer and prevention teams work with many different established and emerging community groups across the county to ensure that they remain safe from fire and understand the role that the Service can play in this. Recent census data will help the Service to identify the way that communities are evolving and changing, and the impact of this in terms of providing an inclusive service.
- 2.19 **Health and Wellbeing:** an essential element of creating a positive workplace is the support provided to employees to maintain, enhance and address issues related to their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. This is particularly important in an emergency service environment, and where fitness is integral to the role.
- 2.20 The changes to pension schemes will extend working life to 60 for operational employees and to 67 for other employees, and this is likely to impact upon natural age-related conditions, such as loss of hearing, vision etc., and is likely to increase longer-term fitness and health issues. Adjustments such as hearing aids for operational employees may become more commonplace for instance, and the Service may need to consider non-operational roles for those that are unable to maintain their fitness. This will be considered within the next Health and Wellbeing Plan.
- 2.21 The Service maintains a close overview of sickness absence and work-related injury through its Health and Safety Team and has a dedicated Occupational and Fitness Team to support employees in terms of advice, referral, rehabilitation and support for long-term health conditions. In addition, the Service provides information and access to support for mental health through an external Employee Assistance Programme and counselling. Wherever possible, the Service will seek to enhance the wellbeing support provided to employees.
- 2.22 However, the HMI review of the Service in 2021 highlighted that employees did not always understand how to access this support, particularly following a

critical incident. Work is being undertaken to address this and to ensure that all employees can access this information and understand the support available.

- 2.23 A recent review by the NFCC has produced two foundation documents “Mapping the Health and Wellbeing Across the Firefighting Career and Assessing the Current Demands” and “Key Priorities for the next Fire and Rescue Health and Wellbeing Strategy”. Whilst these are currently under discussion, there are likely to be 13 key priorities for Services. This work will be reviewed and incorporated into a future wellbeing plan.
- 2.24 The people priorities for the next two years are set out within the report and reflect current and emerging issues. A report on progress will be provided to Members on an annual basis, and through the regular human resources update report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from the report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

The human resources and learning and development implications are set out within the report.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An initial equality impact assessment has been undertaken and has not identified any adverse impacts from the Strategy. The commitment to improving the diversity of the workforce and supporting employee wellbeing is likely to lead to positive outcomes for employees and potential employees with protected characteristics.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from the report. However, a range of the activities above demonstrate continued fulfilment of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The development and implementation of a People Strategy forms part of a suite of strategies which underpin the effective leadership and governance arrangements of the Service, establishing a clear direction and priorities for workforce development.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

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

None.

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