



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 23 June 2023
from 10.05 am - 11.02 am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Nick Raine (Chair)
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Damien West - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tracy Crump - Head of People and Organisational Development
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

None.

2 Declarations of Interests

None.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 21 April 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4 Human Resources Update

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report which informs the Committee of the key human resources metrics for the period 1 April

to 31 May 2023, with the exception of absence data, which is for the reporting period 1 January to 31 March 2023.

Following points were highlighted and Members' questions responded to:

- a) Paragraph 2.1 of the report sets out the approved and in-post staffing figures for Wholetime, On-Call, and Support staff, it being noted that while 18 people left the Service, 14 have joined, but there still remains 18 vacant Wholetime posts, a deficit of 63.5 units of On-Call posts, and 7 vacant Support posts;
- b) Recruitment was paused last year with the potential need to cut services to enable the Authority to produce a balanced budget, against a predicted deficit. This has now been resolved and recruitment has commenced;
- c) Sickness absence has decreased in the last quarter and from the same period last year and is currently just below the national Fire Service average;
- d) Covid related sickness absences are included in the overall figures but also separately at 11.5% of the overall figure;
- e) Work-related sickness absence is generally fairly low, further detail can be provided to a future meeting;
- f) Overall, there has been a whole-year sickness absence decrease of 11.5% across all groups, with long-term sickness absence accounting for 61% of the overall figure;
- g) The report provides further detail of sickness absence for staffing groups, and a comparison to the national Fire Service trends;
- h) The Service maintains an Occupational Health Team on site which enables staff experiencing health issues to be brought into the system quickly and given appropriate support, which may include counselling, physiotherapy, or a range of support mechanisms;
- i) Appendix E to the report sets out the most common reasons for sickness absence, in which mental health and musculoskeletal issues rank high in most groups and so preventive measures/support have been put in place;
- j) The sickness absence statistics across all services nationally do not present a like-for-like comparison.

Members welcomed the additional 12 apprentice firefighters starting the two-year apprenticeship in September, with another Wholetime recruitment campaign commencing in 2024 for a total of 40 posts.

Identifying areas of work-related stress in the workforce could help prevent stress related sickness absence.

Resolved to note the report.

5 Workforce Plan 2023-2025

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the updated Workforce Plan, which contributes to the business planning process, which, in turn, supports the Community Risk Management Plan.

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

- a) The Workforce Plan looks ahead for up to two years at what will be required at that time and ensures that the workforce needs can be met;
- b) The Plan takes into consideration the following with regard to future planning and ensuring that staffing numbers are stable:
 - i. Workforce reductions through retirement, projected turnover and other factors;
 - ii. Workforce increases resulting from delivery of new Service requirements;
 - iii. The need for succession planning for specialist and managerial roles;
 - iv. Particular areas of concern within the Service;
 - v. Resourcing requirements
- c) Recruitment is a national issue for Fire and Rescue Services, particularly with On-Call roles and specifically in some areas of the county. However, the On-Call working model will be reviewed to try and address some of the issues to better suit modern living patterns;
- d) The Service aims to maintain full complement of 431 full-time firefighters, including increased cover at Ashfield Fire Station;
- e) As part of Futures25, the initial focus was on ensuring the Service could set and operate within sustainable budgets. The next phase will look at change and models of delivery across the Service, ensuring efficiency and sustainability;
- f) Workforce diversity is an ongoing issue for the sector as a whole, but the Service continues to try and diversify the workforce. One of the aims for the coming year is to improve engagement with and understanding of communities, and in addition to promoting the range of services provided and strengthening prevention work, to also promote the service as an employer of choice across a range of roles;
- g) The full Workforce Plan is attached as an appendix to the report;
- h) With regard to increasing diversity in the appropriate cohort, there is some evidence that potential applicants who engage in the Service's pre-recruitment positive action activity are successful in the recruitment processes. Work will continue to ensure that more people from diverse backgrounds are attracted to roles in the Service.
- i) Members should be assured that the Service will be focusing on communities in more deprived areas in forthcoming recruitment activities.

- j) The Service needs to ensure that the breadth of the roles available within the Fire Service is better understood by citizens, beyond that of frontline firefighter. It is anticipated that this will then support interest applications from the wider community.

Comments from Committee members included:

- k) The more the Service goes into communities, the better the response and awareness of the work it does will be. The Vice-Chair is working with members of the Equality Team to ensure the Service accesses a wide range of community events and activities to raise awareness of the Service and the potential opportunities;
- l) Whilst the City may have a broader range of BAME citizen diversity, other areas in the county, such as Ashfield and Mansfield, have a greater inequality in economic diversity. The Service also needs to focus on engaging with the longer term, lower income communities to promote prevention and protection work, but also the opportunities within Service;
- m) Members are asked that if they are aware of any community events, such as the Ashfield day or the Filipino Barrio Fiesta event in Nottingham, would they please inform the Service's Community Engagement Officer, so the Service can ask to be involved and have an engagement presence.
- n) The Chair agreed that the inclusion of social economic background as a target group engagement and recruitment was a valid point, adding that progress would be welcomed;
- o) Consideration should be given to the methods used by other Services and their achievement in broadening their engagement and recruitment. This includes the social media campaign to recruit more male nurses and female medical staff, or even the successful promotion of women's sport, such as football and cricket, and strengthening public support.

Resolved to note the report.

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

Tracy Crump, Head of People and Organisational Development, presented the report, which updates Members on the 'area for improvement' (AFI), which has been allocated to this Committee to address.

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

- a) The Service should assure itself that staff understand how to get well-being support;

- b) The report summarises the work undertaken so far, including:
- i. Review of post critical incident support;
 - ii. Updates on well-being provision;
 - iii. Information on how to seek information support;
 - iv. An independent employee survey;
 - v. A daily briefing on mental health information during mental health week;
 - vi. Suicide prevention crisis line developed by the National Fire Chiefs Council and The Firefighters Charity (to be launched later in the year);
 - vii. Provision and promotion of the 'Your Care' portal and app;
 - viii. Extended employee access to salary deducted purchases of home electronic equipment;
- c) Further proposals include:
- i. Review of the Well-Being Strategy;
 - ii. Briefings to duty officers on the revised post critical instance support process;
 - iii. Training for mental health advocates;
 - iv. Promotion of well-being by the Occupational Health Team, including easy access to clinics and a roadshow;
- d) Progress will be measured through a staff survey which is undertaken every two years, but engagement will be monitored regarding the numbers of people that services are supporting;
- e) The current added pressure of the cost of living crisis is acknowledged. The Service provides trauma counselling, anonymous counselling sessions, and support teams are in place to provide help and advice in confidence for broader mental health concerns. The feedback from peer support is that it has been really helpful to those engaged.

Members welcomed progress and emphasised the need to ensure that staff are aware of the different options available for mental health support.

Resolved to note the report.