

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority**



**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 5 February 2024 at 10.30am at Fire and
Rescue Authority Headquarters**

Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Bell, Dodds, Hunter, Patterson, Welsh and Wood.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Chair's Announcements

Prior to the commencement of the business of the meeting, the Chair referred to the recent death of Councillor Carole Burdis and paid tribute to her contribution to the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority. Councillor Burdis had been a loyal and supportive member of the Authority and would be a sad miss to the Authority, North Tyneside Council and to all of her family and friends.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

10. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 2 October 2023, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Cultural Review Progress Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report proving the Committee with a progress update on the Service's Cultural Review.

ACO McVay advised that of the three service priorities within the Strategy TWFRS 2025 was Inclusion and the focus of this was to further diversify the workforce, ensure there were fair and transparent routes to both employment and progression and to have a positive culture where everyone was valued and took ownership of their actions and behaviour.

The service awarded a contract to a platform called 'Hive' which provided an opportunity to carry out an annual survey of all staff with feedback being reviewed and interpreted by occupational psychologists. Jagtar Singh Associates (JSA) were also engaged to provide an opportunity for staff to feedback to independent facilitators. Reports had been received back from both Hive and JSA and the Executive and Senior Leadership Teams had taken part in follow up sessions in relation to these.

ACO McVay reported that there had been some 'quick wins' as a result of some of the areas highlighted, including uniform contracts, the staff feedback platform and updates to policies and processes. The Executive Leadership Team would have a meeting later in the month to discuss the consolidated recommendations from both pieces of work and develop an action plan and the involvement of staff.

It was highlighted that there was a risk within the Corporate Risk Register around the 'Risk that the culture and behaviours within TWFRS do not fully align with the Service's commitment to its values and the employees Code of Conduct leading to reputational damage' and this work helped to mitigate that risk.

The Chair commented that he has asked for updates on this work to be presented to the Authority regularly and Councillor Dodds agreed that regular reporting was a positive demonstration of the importance of this to the Service.

The Chair asked if there was a statement ready to release if there was any negative press as there was a likelihood that any national reports which were issued could be associated with Tyne and Wear. ACO McVay noted that they had been prepared for this after the report had been published in December 2023 but there had not been any particular press enquiries. DCFO Nicholson added that there had been a press statement ready for publication, in the light of the recent tragic news from the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service.

DCFO Nicholson went on to say that the JSA report had been published openly and nothing had been picked up by the press. In the context of the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service report being published just a few weeks prior to Tyne and Wear issuing their report, it was felt that the silence from the media spoke volumes.

11. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the content of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

People Services Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report updating the Committee on the workplace activities undertaken by the Human Resources department.

The Director of People Services highlighted that this report set out the 'business as usual' activities which were essential to maintain legislative requirements and continuous improvement.

64 Firefighters were currently going through apprenticeships and there were 10 grey book apprentices; this was a well-established process and was in a good place moving forward.

The Director of People Services provided an overview of Human Resources related activity which had taken place since April 2023 which included the management of long-term absences so that individuals could be supported into returning to work and alternative duties when they were unable to fulfil their full role.

There had been five applications for ill health retirement during the year which had now been concluded and there had been 20 discipline cases and 19 grievances. It was noted that these were small numbers in a workforce of over 900 but these cases could sometimes be demanding on the workforce.

Two employment tribunal claims had been made during the year, one had been settled and the other was still ongoing. There had been 12 applications for flexible working, eight had been accepted and four declined.

The Service had undertaken a number of green book recruitment campaigns and grey book promotion processes resulting in 20 new grey book employees and 28 new green book employees. 24 new firefighter trainees would begin their course this month and there would be another cohort in September 2024; 50% of the new trainees were from diverse backgrounds.

A total of 43 individuals had left the service since April 2023, this was in comparison to 38 in the previous year. There were various reasons for this and the Service could sometimes come under pressure from private industry. It was important to reinforce the salary and working conditions in the Fire Service and also to encourage exit interviews and leaving procedures.

The Human Resources department had also supported and attended 20 external events which helped to promote the role of a firefighter through community engagement and provided support to network colleagues.

A new Head of Human Resources had recently been appointed and brought with her a wealth of experience and knowledge. The immediate focus for the Service looking forward was to address the recommendations highlighted in the Cultural Audit along with themes identified through the Hive survey.

With regard to those that had left the Service, Councillor Dodds commented that it would be interesting to know which part of the organisation they were from and how long they had been with the Service.

The Director of People Services noted that the organisation was very different from what it had been in the past when pension provision could be a major factor, and the workforce was now more transient; he likened it to the military where an individual would have a period of time in the Service and then move on.

Councillor Dodds agreed that some firefighters might have been 'pension prisoners' in the past and noted that spending time with the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service would look good on a person's CV. However, it was unfortunate that significant time and money was spent on training individuals who may then leave the Service in a short space of time. Councillor Dodds commented that retirees received some form of certificate and maybe those leaving the Service should also receive something to show that their contribution was recognised.

The Director of People Services said that this was something which could be looked into and some leavers may have had a significant period of time with the Service.

The Chair commented that the Committee had received a presentation in the past which looked at the reasons for leaving as well as joining the Service. He suggested that it might be appropriate to revisit having new recruits attend the Committee for a Q and A session.

Councillor Bell highlighted that incentivisation was important to keep people in the job and to encourage them back to the Service. The job had changed and the career path and specific requirements had changed too. Councillor Bell suggested that firefighter fitness would be a significant factor going forward. He went on to ask if there was a common denominator in the flexible working requests which were refused.

The Director of People Services stated that this depended on the request, service delivery could be more difficult than day shift requests but he would seek further information on this. Councillor Bell added that flexible working might come more to the fore in the future.

The Chair noted that the pattern of transience was not just observed in the Fire Service and young people did expect to move around from jobs. Employees joined the pension scheme because it was a good scheme but it was expensive.

He went on to ask about the ill health retirements and the nature of those, for example if they were related to specific working practices. The Director of People Services explained that of the five applications, these were not all grey book, and there was a process which was undertaken to look for alternatives before ill health

retirement was granted. There was no real pattern but the workforce was getting older and a potential increase in requests was something to be mindful of.

ACO McVay stated that exit interviews had always been offered to staff who were leaving and a survey was sent out, however there had not been a huge take-up previously. In the past the Chief Fire Officer had offered an exit interview but information was not captured from those sessions; exit interviews were now offered with a line manager, a senior manager or any other officer. Feedback was encouraged as much as possible.

In relation to the cost of training, ACO McVay advised that a policy position had been introduced so that if a significant amount of investment was put into a role and the individual left the organisation in up to two years, the Service would look to recoup their costs. This had also been looked at for trainee firefighters.

ACO McVay highlighted that long service and good conduct awards had been reinstated as a means of acknowledging service for corporate staff and grey book employees. Some of the work around the disciplinary matters and grievances had been commissioned out to ensure that complex issues were dealt with appropriately.

Councillor Patterson queried if any human resources matters were benchmarked against the Police and ambulance services. ACO McVay said that due to their greater numbers of staff, the Service would not benchmark against those organisations but could do this with neighbouring and metropolitan fire authorities and did so in relation to sickness absence.

The Chair commented that it might be useful to have some data on sickness absence so the Committee could understand the nature of absence in the Service.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

12. RESOLVED that:

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Organisational Development Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing a summary of the proposed 'Development Pathways' which staff within the Service would follow, to provide those within leadership roles with underpinning Leadership and Management development as they progressed through their career.

The Director of People Services advised that the Service had previously had the Engage Leadership Programme and was now looking to introduce a new process following the National Fire Chiefs Council leadership development programmes.

It was highlighted that each new recruit would be assessed for their learning style from day one and would be developed in such a way to maximise their capabilities. All programmes were consistent with the national approach to develop aspiring, new and existing managers, regardless of role, contract type or location. There would be four modules: -

- Personal Impact
- Outstanding Leadership
- Service Delivery
- Organisational Effectiveness.

Alongside the NFCC framework there would be in-house courses for policies and procedures specific to the Service. A learning hub was also in development which would highlight the learning events available and allow individuals to book on to training.

The use of the NFCC learning development programmes would enable the Service to have a minimum benchmark of staff who were to be promoted to their next role, whilst following a national standard.

Councillor Dodds commented that in the past, if an individual aspired to do something which was not in their role map, they were restricted. The Director of People Services confirmed that this was no longer the case and the pathway was not restricted and an individual could reach their desired role through applying themselves to the pathway.

ACO McVay reiterated that if an individual wished to reach the next level of development, then the service would support them in achieving that. She added that there were opportunities to identify high potential staff and for the Learning and Development teams to support and develop them.

DCFO Nicholson referred to two recent Fire Standards publications about leadership which lined up directly with the content of the report. It was good to see these links being made and the Community Risk Management Plan consultation was also gathering information about 'people' within the Service.

Councillor Bell welcomed the report and its links to the matters raised in the previous report. He noted that it was refreshing to hear that skills were identified early; people entered the Service from all walks of life and could bring in valuable experience. He went on to say that the ideal was for people to stay in the job for a longer period so that they helped develop the organisation and experience and expertise was not lost.

ACO McVay advised that all line managers were having 'career conversations' with their staff including those who were new to the organisation or possibly not performing, valued contributors in their current role and those who want to progress. These conversations would help to direct the development of the staff concerned.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

13. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

14. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person or in relation to consultations/negotiations in connection with any labour matter arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (including the Authority holding that information). (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 3 and 4).

Minutes

15. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 2 October 2023, Part II, be confirmed as a correct record.

(Signed) G HALEY
Chair

