

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority**



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

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 2 October 2023 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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Warne.

Chair's Announcements

Prior to the commencement of the business of the meeting, the Chair welcomed Councillors Patterson and Welsh to their first meeting of the Committee. He also welcomed Ken Corbett, Director of People Services and Peter Heath to his first meeting since taking up the role of Chief Fire Officer. The Chair took the opportunity to wish the former Chief Fire Officer, Chris Lowther, very well in his retirement.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 6 February 2023, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

Staff Survey 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 high-level findings of the TWFRS commissioned staff survey.

ACO McVay advised that an external company called Hive had been commissioned to undertake a service wide staff survey which had achieved a 62% response rate. The survey was made up of 32 scaled questions, three free text questions and one question which asked whether an existing employee would recommend TWFRS as a place to work.

The scale of answers for questions was between 1-10 and TWFRS average score was 6.7, where between 5 and 6.9 was a moderate score. The Engagement Index for TWFRS was 7.0; this combined how people felt around advocacy, pride and loyalty and a score of 7.0 or above was seen as a positive score. In relation to employees indicating whether they would recommend TWFRS as a good place to work, the scoring fell between a minus and a plus and TWFRS achieved a score of zero which sat favourably against other Government organisations.

The findings from the survey would enable the Service to identify issues or concerns that may be held by employees and introduce a process by which those issues or concerns could be addressed. The survey data was encouraging and a positive starting point for the Service and the outcome of the cultural audit was now awaited. Findings from both the survey and the audit would be published and a set of actions established that would be undertaken to address any areas which needed to be a focus.

Councillor Patterson noted that slightly less than two thirds of the workforce had responded to the survey and asked if non-responders had been contacted and whether any conclusions had been drawn.

ACO McVay stated that the Service had been very conscious that they did not want anyone to be excluded and the survey had been emailed to all staff, including those on long term sick leave. The Service itself did not know who had, and had not, responded but reminders were issued on a weekly basis to those who had not completed the survey. ACO McVay went on to say that anecdotally, feedback was that staff did not necessarily believe that the survey was independent or anonymous. It was hoped that this might improve when people saw that no one had been targeted as a result. Another factor could be that people who were happy did not always tend to provide feedback.

Councillor Patterson acknowledged that there could be many reasons for not responding to the survey, however he queried if there were any gaps that needed to be filled. ACO McVay explained that this was one of the reasons why the Service had been keen to have some focus groups and one to ones were also offered to staff.

Councillor Hunter asked if non-responders would have been aware that it was Hive rather than the Service chasing them. ACO McVay said that all staff were given unique identifier and only Hive had that information; this had been communicated to

staff and was part of vlogs about the survey. All emails sent to staff were headed with 'Hive'.

Councillor Dodds commented that it was a reasonable response rate and what was important was that an honest response was obtained. Councillor Bell noted that it was a relatively good response rate when compared to national surveys. He highlighted that he had been on a recent station visit and this was an opportunity to communicate that the surveys were open and transparent and remind crews that they could always get their views across.

The Chair noted that staff were not shy about contacting representative bodies if they had issues to raise and a score of 6.7 was encouraging. He asked if the results of the HMI staff surveys were consistent with the Hive outcomes and ACO McVay said that HMI were potentially not exploring the same things as Hive.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that the 38% response rate to the HMI survey was the highest in the UK and it did ask very specific questions. Managers did work to encourage the workforce to respond but it was acknowledged that staff may have survey fatigue. Key themes had come out of the survey and this would be published in full after it was presented to the Fire Authority.

The Chair commented that culture and organisation was a theme being addressed across the country in fire and rescue services and he wondered if there was any scope for representative bodies to meet with Authority Members once a year. The Chief Fire Officer said that this was something that could be picked up, however there was already a joint consultative forum meeting with unions and his sense was that the representative bodies did not usually hold back with views and opinions.

Councillor Patterson suggested that, through existing interactions with the trade unions, they could encourage their members to respond to surveys and consultations. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that the trade unions had always been supportive in encouraging responses to surveys.

Councillor Dodds advised that the LGA Safer and Stronger Communities Board was considering a report into the culture within fire services and he would share any information that came from that discussion.

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

Executive Leadership Team – External Appointments

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 Members with an annual update regarding the external appointments undertaken by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

The undertaking of paid external positions or appointments by officers of the Authority was regulated by standing orders and the delegation scheme and approval for such appointments was entirely at the discretion of the Authority. Unpaid (non-political) posts were not regulated by the Authority and could be undertaken by an individual whilst operating within existing fire and rescue service policy. To support transparency, Members were provided with the following detail for information only.

- Chief Fire Officer Peter Heath was the Regional Representative of the NFCC OPRR (Operational Preparedness, Response and Resilience), NFCC Regional Lead for National Interagency Liaison Officers (NILO) and NFCC National Strategic Lead for Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Strategic representative for TWFRS on Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF). In addition, he was a Member of the Edinburgh Napier University Professional Advisory Group for the Human Resource Master's Degree Programme. All of these appointments were unpaid.
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer Lynsey McVay was an Executive Member of Women in the Fire Service (WFS) and NFCC national Lead for Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE), the NFCC Representative on the PH4 group working on national respiratory protection standards for industry, Chair of the NFCC National Command and Control User Group (NCCUG), a member of the National Operational Effectiveness Working Group (NOEWG), a member of the NFCC Recruitment Board, a member of the NFCC Direct Entry Board and she is also a member of the Fires in Tall Buildings (FITB) working group. All of these appointments were unpaid.
- Area Manager Phil Clark was Co-Chair of the NFCC Research and Development Function, North East FRS Regional Chair of the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Program (ESMCP) Board, North East FRS Representative to the NFCC Operational Communications Board, Chair of Welfare for TWFRS Sports and Welfare Club Ltd, Director of TWFRS Sports and Welfare Club Ltd. All of these appointments were unpaid.
- Area Manager David Leach was the NFCC Lead for National Protective Security Operations.
- Finance Director Dennis Napier, Director of Corporate Services Louise Clarkson and Area Manager Paul Russell have no external appointments at the current time.

Councillor Bell noted that the culture in Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had always been that officers were willing to give up their time to support and lift the profile of the service and also to have opportunities for personal development. He asked if there was anything which the Chief Fire Officer would like to move into.

The Chief Fire Officer said that he would sit down with the Executive Leadership Team to see who was covering what and if there were any gaps. The Service did have influence nationally and former Chief Fire Officer Lowther had been able to get through a number of doors. The Service was represented at all the relevant forums in terms of operational themes, people and leadership and two executive leadership team members had gone forward to the executive leadership programme.

3. RESOLVED that:

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

Apprenticeship Provision

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 progress within the Service's apprenticeship provisions and an overview of the recent Ofsted inspection.

The Director of People Services advised that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service were approved to deliver apprenticeships in November 2019 and in-house delivery of the Emergency Contact Handler apprenticeship commenced in January 2021 and the Operational Firefighter apprenticeship began in February 2023.

Ofsted had conducted an initial monitoring visit in July 2022 and the first full inspection took place over three days between 2 and 4 August 2023. The Service was graded as follows: -

- Behaviour and Attitudes – Good
- Personal Development – Good
- Leadership and Management – Requires Improvement
- Safeguarding – Effective
- Apprenticeships – Good
- Overall Effectiveness – Requires Improvement

The judgement of 'requires improvement' in relation to Leadership and Management was disappointing but work had already begun to address this and it was acknowledged that it was early days of the provision and this was the first time that Ofsted had visited a fire and rescue service. The inspectors were happy with the way that the apprenticeships were being delivered and assessment outcomes were positive; the team were confident that they would be ready for the next inspection.

Councillor Wood commented that in his experience with Ofsted, sometimes inspectors did not have any knowledge of the area inspected. The Director of People Services said that this had been the case and there were some frustrations felt which had to be balanced during the process.

ACO McVay noted that the monitoring visit was a precursor but the full inspection happened when the Service had only just gone in-house for Operational Firefighters and the inspectors did struggle but were encouraging throughout. The Service was very happy that the area identified for improvement was senior leaders and managers, rather than the instructors and leaders who were delivering, observing and recording training. All recommendations were just about complete and evidence was being gathered to demonstrate this.

The Chair asked if the other 'Good' ratings were secure and the 'Effective'

Safeguarding judgement. ACO McVay confirmed that they were and that a lot of time had been spent on the Safeguarding element and inspectors had no concerns at all.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

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

Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report presenting the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap report 2022/2023 and requesting approval for its publication.

The Authority had specific duties to publish equality data under the Equality Act 2010 covering Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Data. The Equality Data Report 2022/2023 was required to be published internally and externally before 31 January 2024 and the Gender Pay Gap Report by 30 March 2024.

The Director of People Services stated that report set out the continuing commitment of the Service to equality and diversity and also to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of employees.

Turning to the information within the report, the Committee were advised that the age demographic of the workforce was similar to the previous year with a baseline of 894 employees. The mean Gender Pay Gap had reduced very slightly and was negative in relation to Fire Control and 17% of higher-level management posts were held by women.

The Chair asked if the figures changed if the median rather than the mean was used and the Director of People Services explained that the mean pay gap was 11.19% and the median was 9.0%. The Chair noted that this was an interesting comparison for internal purposes.

The report set out the commitment of the Service to creating an even more inclusive workforce and the network groups were very important to this process. It was recognised that there were still challenges with firefighter recruitment and, while there had been an increase in female recruitment, there would be a focus on ethnicity moving forward. It was noted that safeguarding referrals from the Service had increased in the last year and all new Firefighter recruits received safeguarding training as part of their core programme.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the previous concerns of the Committee in relation to employees who had been transferred from Grey to Green Book around 18 months ago and he was pleased to note that there was no evidence to suggest that this had impacted on the pay gap.

He went on to say that targets in relation to recruitment had to be carefully managed and there was an aspiration for 30% diversity on each Firefighter course. It was also highlighted that the Safeguarding lead was driving the increase in referrals and he was presenting on this nationally; there were people all over the organisation who were championing causes.

5. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the Authority's draft Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report 2022/2023 be approved for publication; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions

The Finance Director submitted a report requesting that the discretion to establish Shared Additional Voluntary Contributions scheme was exercised.

Members were advised that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) had a provision within its regulations to allow an employee to enter into an agreement in which the employer could decide to also contribute to their employee's AVC arrangement. This was known as a Shared Cost AVC (SCAVC).

The current policy was to not allow an employee to enter into an agreement in which the employer could decide to also contribute to their employee's AVC arrangements. It was recommended that this discretion was now adopted and that this measure would be implemented under a voluntary Salary Sacrifice arrangement. If an employee entered into a SCAVC Salary Sacrifice arrangement with their employer, the employers National Insurance (NI) contribution returns to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) would be reduced and the employee would make a saving on both NI contributions and income tax.

6. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be endorsed and the discretion in relation to the proposed SCAVC be approved.

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

7. 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).

(Signed) G HALEY
Chair

