

# Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority



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

### Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 6 February 2023 at 10.30am at Fire and Rescue Authority Headquarters

#### Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Bell, Dodds, Flynn, Hunter, Ord, Warne 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 paid tribute to Joe Dixon, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service's oldest former firefighter who had recently passed away at the age of 109 years old. Joe had begun working in the Newcastle City Police, Fire and Rescue Service in 1937 and served for 27 years before retiring in 1964. Joe had been a fantastic ambassador for the Service over the years and the Chair expressed his condolences to Joe's family and friends.

The Chair informed the Committee that he and other Members had attended a webinar on firefighter cancer research which had been very informative and had presented international data on the topic.

The Human Resources Director advised that Professor Anna Stec was on site at the present time and firefighters were providing blood samples at the Occupational Health Unit for use in Professor Stec's research. Councillor Bell said that, having attended a previous webinar, GPs should be made aware of this research and the pattern of illnesses experienced by firefighters. The Chair suggested that this could be taken up through the region's health and wellbeing boards.

The Chair then asked officers to provide an update on the recent attacks on firefighters in West Denton and the Human Resources Director stated that this particular incident involved a petrol bomb being thrown at firefighters and into an appliance. This had not been the first time that there had been attacks in that area and there had also been a serious attack on a police officer on the same evening.

There had now been an escalation of attention by the Police in the area and matters had improved considerably with the additional attention and support from the Police. The Service condemned the incident in the strongest terms and it remained to be seen how things would progress in the coming weeks.

Councillor Dodds asked if there had been any alterations to standard operating procedures in order to ensure the safety of firefighters; individuals could be vulnerable if a petrol bomb came into the back of an appliance. The Human Resources Director did not have specific information regarding appliances but advised that in a defined area, crews would not attend calls for a secondary fire without Police accompaniment. There had been four arrests following the incident but there was no detail on what action had been taken. The individuals arrested were understood to be juveniles.

Councillor Bell queried if there was anything else that could be done by the Authority to demonstrate their feelings on this matter and highlighted that Newcastle City Council had agreed a Notice of Motion requesting that the courts take stronger action in relation to attacks on firefighters. He went on to say that whereas West Denton had always been a hotspot for such incidents, there were others across the brigade area. Staff should not have to think about their personal safety when attending calls and he also felt that the media had a role to play in publicising penalties for such attacks.

The Chair commented that what was most shocking was the pre-meditated nature of the incidents which were a deliberate ploy to get firefighters to attend. He was also concerned about the powers of the courts and there had often been discussions on increased punishments for attacks on blue light responders; he suggested that local MPs could be asked to raise this in Parliament.

Councillor Dodds highlighted that the idea of 'setting people up' was not new and firefighters had required Police escorts in the 1980s. He agreed that the Authority needed to lobby for action in relation to attacks on all blue light services.

The Chair requested that this issue be raised at the forthcoming Fire Authority meeting on 13 February 2023.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Bell and Dodds declared that they were out of trade members of the Fire Brigades Union in relation to item 6 on the agenda 'National Grey Book Pay Negotiations – Possible Fire Brigades Unions Industrial Action'.

## Minutes

21. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 3 October 2022, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

### **Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade – Gap Analysis and Action Planning**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report briefing the Committee on the recently published Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade (LFB) and outlining the actions being taken and planned by the Service in relation to the Review's recommendations.

The Independent Culture Review had been a recommendation of an internal investigation within the London Fire Brigade after the death of a firefighter in development. The review was intended to give current and former staff and community groups an opportunity to give feedback on the Brigade's culture and obtain independent analysis to drive improvement. The Human Resources Director highlighted that there had also been recent media reports on issues within the South Wales and Dorset and Wiltshire fire services.

The Independent Culture Review had taken 12 months and had heard from more than 2,000 people and it had highlighted that people with protected characteristics did less well in their careers and received poorer treatment in the organisation. The Review contained 23 recommendations covering a wide range of issues and the London Fire Brigade had published a list of immediate actions which they were taking in response.

There had also been a range of public responses from the Fire Minister, the Mayor of London, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Brigades Union and Asian Fire Service Association amongst other bodies. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue had announced that London Fire Brigade was to be moved into the category of 'Enhanced Monitoring' from 'Requires Improvement'.

The Human Resources Director reminded Members that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had been rated as 'Good' in relation to the People element of the HMICFRS inspection in both 2019 and 2022 and considered that it had a good level of self-awareness, however the Service had already decided in 2022 to procure a new staff survey tool which would include an independent cultural audit. Intelligence gathered through the audit and the recommendations of the independent survey provider would be fed into the Service's Inclusion and Organisational Development plans.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service was undertaking an exercise to review each of the 23 recommendations of the LFB Independent Cultural Review to identify:

- (i) any evidence of similar issues in the Service;
- (ii) any actions which were in place/underway/planned to address the recommendation; and
- (iii) any gaps of potential blind spots the Service may have.

Councillor Bell noted the involvement of Staff Network Groups and asked if it was to be a full staff survey with all employees given an opportunity to share their views. He also asked if it would be part of mandatory training and the Chair queried if the survey would be anonymous.

The Human Resources Director clarified that the employee survey and cultural audit would be open to all staff and would be anonymous, however it would be difficult to make this compulsory. The gap analysis exercise would involve the Staff Network Groups and the trade unions.

Councillor Bell felt that the anonymity of respondents was very important and the Human Resources Director advised that the survey would be conducted by an external provider so the Service would receive the information but not the details of the employees. Respondents would be asked if they were confident in providing feedback on the Service.

In response to a question from Councillor Flynn, the Human Resources Director advised that the survey would not be wholly online and there would also be face-to-face focus groups for the cultural audit.

Councillor Dodds highlighted the importance of publicising the action which the Service was taking in response to the Independent Cultural Review but also emphasising that the observations in relation to the London Fire Brigade were not something which was recognised in the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

Having considered the report and noting that the Fire Authority would also receive a report on 13 February, the Committee: -

22. RESOLVED that: -

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

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

23. 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