Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 24 July 2025 at 10.30am at Fire and Rescue Authority Headquarters

Present:

Councillor Hunter in the Chair.

Councillor Blackburn.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Dodds, Johnson, Patterson and Welsh.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 10 February 2025, be confirmed as a correct record.

Local Culture Talks and Action Plans

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an overview of the culture review process, activity to date and an update on culture Talks and Action Plans.

Leanne Cain, the Director of People Services advised Members that in 2021, the Service launched its TWFRS Strategy 2025, focusing on three priorities, including Inclusion, aimed at diversifying the workforce, ensuring fair and transparent employment and progression, and fostering a positive, values-driven culture.

To support this, the Service had worked over the past two years to improve culture, inclusivity, and transparency, including through the HIVE staff engagement survey. Feedback from the first survey (July 2023) informed the Spring 2024 Culture Talks, which identified strengths and areas for development. This feedback shaped the Strategic Cultural Action Plan, shared in August 2024.

A second survey ran from September to October 2024, with a 56% response rate (492 of 882 staff). Questions mirrored the 2023 survey to enable comparison, with minor adjustments based on staff input.

Members were advised that to sustain meaningful engagement, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) led Local Culture Talks would continue across departments/stations, building on previous positive feedback and aligning with staff-identified themes.

Complementing the Strategic Cultural Action Plan, which was now 85% complete, talks would address local issues and help identify areas for further improvement. Staff would contribute to Local Action Plans, promoting ownership, accountability, and alignment with Service Values and the Core Code of Ethics. Members were advised that sessions would encourage open dialogue, and where appropriate, an alternative SLT or Culture & Inclusion team member may lead the discussion.

The Director of People Services stated that each session would cover four mandatory statements, with flexibility to explore additional team-specific topics. Departments/stations would consider both local and service-wide activity to identify trends and share best practice, while also encouraging resilience in addressing challenges.

It was confirmed that all SLT members had received training and resources to support delivery, with additional assistance available from the Culture & Inclusion team.

All Action Plans were to be completed by the end of September 2025.

Councillor Blackburn queried whether the SLT engaged with public forums.
The Deputy Chief Fire Officer clarified that the culture review process was internally focused, with cultural improvement typically addressed within the fire service. Public forums were generally used to consult on service performance.

The Director of People Services added that the Service did contribute to wider discussions, through the Northeast Strategy Development Board, which facilitated the sharing of best practice.

Councillor Blackburn queried the duration of the contract with HIVE. The Director of People Services advised that the initial contract was for twelve months and subsequently extended for a further twelve months. The contract had now expired, and should the Service use a survey platform in the future, it may be necessary to undertake a full tender process.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer whist noting the positive nature of the report, stated that in relation to people and culture, staff had expressed a desire for a break from surveys, which contributed to the decision not to renew the HIVE contract. Although

staff feedback overall was excellent, there remained scope for continued improvement. The Executive Leadership Team and Chief Fire Officer were supportive of future staff-led survey activity and ongoing cultural development.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether response rates were typically higher for the first round of staff surveys. The Director of People Services confirmed that initial surveys did generally receive a higher level of engagement, adding that survey fatigue was common and that staff tended to re-engage when specific changes within the Service prompt a desire to share their views.

The Chair requested that Members be reminded of the four mandatory statements to be addressed during the Local Culture Talks. The Director of People Services responded by reading out the statements for the Committee's information.

2. RESOLVED to: -

(i) Endorse the contents of the report; and

(ii) Receive further reports as appropriate

High Level Recruitment Plan

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report setting out the high-level recruitment plan that had been designed to support the organisation in its aim to deliver its strategy and organisational goals pertaining to Inclusivity & Culture, and the Service's commitment to prioritise a culture of excellence, equality and inclusivity for our people.

During which, Members were advised that following the HMI Inspection in November 2021, a report was published assessing the Service's effectiveness, efficiency, and approach to staff welfare. In October 2023, the Service commissioned an independent cultural review and conducted a staff survey to gain further insight. Findings highlighted the need to improve fairness and accessibility in recruitment and to continue efforts to diversify the workforce. These areas remain ongoing priorities for the Service.

The Director of People Services delivered a PowerPoint presentation providing Members with an overview of the High-Level Recruitment Plan.

Members were informed that as part of the 2025–2026 People & Culture Departmental Plans, a 12-month recruitment plan was developed to ensure a transparent, consistent, and effective approach to recruitment and promotion, aligned with strategic goals. The plan included measurable outcomes, with progress to be reported at future People & Culture Board meetings. Key tools such as the Recruitment GANTT Chart and Blueprint milestones would also support Workforce Planning and JCF meetings.

The recruitment plan, as detailed in the PowerPoint presentation, outlined objectives, deliverables, outcomes, quarterly milestones (April 2025 – March 2026), recruitment timelines, positive action initiatives, and marketing strategies.

Councillor Blackburn referred to the presentation's mention of social media and asked whether the Service used platforms such as Facebook or the press to advertise vacancies. The Director of People Services confirmed that the Service had begun to make greater use of social media, including LinkedIn and other platforms. Whilst social media was currently utilised, there was recognition that further development in this area was needed.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether young personnel from the armed forces applied to join the Fire Service, as they did with the police. The Director of People Services confirmed that such applicants were indeed received, although the Service was not currently maximising that recruitment avenue. It was noted that would be a focus for future efforts, alongside exploring other potential recruitment sources.

Councillor Blackburn enquired whether the Service advertised vacancies through Jobcentre Plus. The Director of People Services agreed to check and confirm this.

The Chair emphasised the importance of establishing strong foundational elements "getting the building blocks right" before progressing further.

Following this, the Chair inquired about the Teakisi partnership. Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer (TACFO) Leach responded by explaining that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service became involved in the Teakisi partnership through County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. The purpose of the collaborative partnership was to encourage applications from individuals in minoritised communities for the Service's current firefighter apprenticeship programme and support and enhance the Service's ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive workforce.

The Chair suggested that it would be beneficial to receive a future report outlining how the Service engages with young people to inspire interest in joining Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS). As part of this, the Chair proposed that an internally produced promotional video could be a useful tool to help educate young people about the wide range of roles available within the Service.

In response, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer noted that there was a valuable conversation to be had around the diverse opportunities available within the Service. While the cadet programme was often associated with firefighter roles, it was highlighted that there were many other career pathways within the organisation that young people could pursue.

Members noted the report and thanked officers for the presentation. It was then: -

3. RESOLVED to: -

(i) Receive further reports as appropriate.

(Signed) J HUNTER
Chair