



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 19 July 2021 at 10.30am at Fire and Rescue Authority Headquarters

Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Taylor, Warne and Woodward.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dodds, Flynn and Hunter.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 1 February 2021, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair officially welcomed the new Members of the Committee, Councillor Jimmy Warnes, Councillor Ged Bell and Councillor Janet Hunter who would be the new Vice-Chair of the Committee. The Chair extended thanks to Councillors Stephenson, Pickard and Butler for their service over recent years.

It was noted that this was the first face to face meeting which had taken place in over a year and the Chair paid tribute to the hard work and extra effort that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service staff had made to support the community during the pandemic.

Councillor Taylor echoed the words of the Chair and stated that the work of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service staff who had gone above and beyond should be recognised and asked if there might be any process by which individuals may receive a special award for their efforts. He suggested that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer could look into this.

DCFO Heath commented that the organisation had seen some exemplary examples of individual service over the last year and a half and would be happy to discuss the possibility of a recognition event with the Chief Fire Officer and the Human Resources Director.

The Chair said that he would not want to lose inclusivity and that Meritorious Conduct awards were made from time to time. There had also been recognition from MPs when people had volunteered and this would be something to look at and reflect back upon. Councillor Woodward suggested that a type of Chairman's Commendation could be awarded and there should be some discussion about what might be appropriate.

The Chair wondered if there would be an opportunity for an item to be placed in the Chief Fire Officer's blog or newsletter and if the views of elected Members could be included in this. The Human Resources Director commented that something could be placed in the weekly ELT communications.

2. RESOLVED that the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Human Resources Director discuss how the exemplary service of staff during the pandemic might be recognised.

National Core Code of Ethics

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), Finance Director and Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with information about the recent launch of the new National Code of Ethics (Core Code) and the implications for the Service.

The Code had been launched in May 2021 by the National Fire Chiefs Council, The Local Government Association and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. It had been developed in response to Sir Tom Winsor's recommendations in the State of Fire report 2019 and it was expected that everyone in every fire and rescue service in England would follow the Core Code.

The Core Code sets out five ethical principles which provide a basis for promoting good behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour. These included: -

- **Putting our communities first** – we put the interest of the public, the community and service users first.
- **Integrity** – we act with integrity including being open, honest and consistent in everything we do.
- **Dignity and respect** - making decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.

- **Leadership** – we are all positive role models, always demonstrating flexibility and resilient leadership. We are all accountable for everything we do and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)** – We continually recognise and promote the value of EDI both within the FRSs and the wider communities in which we serve. We stand against all forms of discrimination, create equal opportunities, promote equality, foster good relations and celebrate difference.

The author organisations recognised that the Code needed to be flexible for adoption by different organisations. The service had decided to formally adopt the Code in principle and would prepare a gap analysis and Implementation Plan which would set out the ways in which the Code would be embedded in policies, practices, communications and training and how the service would migrate from existing values in a managed way. Success would be measured by how staff would understand the migration of one thing to another.

Councillor Warne asked how the migration would be managed and the Human Resources Director advised that the detail had not yet been worked up. The gap analysis would look at the existing policies and training and produce new documentation to reflect the new Code and it would be embedded in all training from now on.

DCFO Heath commented that the service was not starting from zero, it already had a committed workforce and this was a realignment of an existing package.

Councillor Taylor queried if there was a timeframe for the implementation and the Human Resources Director stated that this would be derived from the gap analysis when the scale of work was known.

Councillor Woodward felt that the gap analysis would not take too long as it was, in effect, one code superseding another and the organisation was well aware of issues around ethics and standards. ACFO Heath agreed that the gap analysis should not be onerous and updating documents would be the lengthy process.

The Human Resources Director advised that it would be necessary to refresh the Code of Conduct in line with the new Core Code and this would have to be taken to the main Authority for approval.

Councillor Taylor enquired if an eLearning course would be used once the Code had been implemented and the Human Resources Director noted that this would be how initial awareness sessions would be carried out.

The Chair asked to what extent the Inspectorate would look at the Core Code and the Human Resources Director stated that the guidance said that the Inspectorate would 'have regard' to this. The timing was awkward as phase one of the inspection regime was underway but it was felt that the service had a strong narrative showing what had been achieved already.

Having considered the report it was: -

3. RESOLVED that: -

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

Firefighter Recruitment

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Adviser to the Authority submitted a joint report providing an update on progress and future plans relating to Firefighter recruitment initiatives.

Firefighter recruitment was essential to ensure the effective management of operational deployment, in line with budget and risk critical activities. After a long period without recruiting new firefighters, in 2018 a campaign was launched in collaboration with County Durham and Darlington and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Services which resulted in the appointment of 24 trainee firefighters. 23 individuals successfully passed the course and were employed by TWFRS.

A further cohort began training in September 2019 with 14 individuals becoming operational and a further 23 firefighters became operational in August 2020 after undertaking Covid-secure training from April 2020. There had been a second Covid secure training cohort and this had led to a further 18 operational firefighters in the service in December 2020.

24 recruits had begun training in April 2021 and 23 were due complete the course on 23 July. Selection and assessment of the next cohort of trainees had been taking place and up to 34 trainees would start in September 2021. Planning was now underway for the recruitment campaign in 2022.

A diversification working group had been launched in October 2020 to initiate and debate improvements to current selection testing processes which would increase applications from under-represented groups. This would directly support the Inclusion pillar of the TWFRS 2025 Vision. There was no specific data to be presented at the current time, however the Annual Equality Data report would be brought to the next meeting.

The Chair noted that there had been well in excess of 100 new recruits over the last few years; he looked forward to seeing the report on diversity and felt it would be good to see a comparison of where the service had been and where it was now.

Councillor Taylor commented that the retention rate of recruits seemed to have improved and queried if changes had been made so that they were supported to complete the course.

The Human Resources Director advised that the number who did not complete the course did vary considerably and it was difficult to draw firm conclusions based on

small numbers. Drop-outs tended to be related to the failure of a key stage assessment, illness or injury. The fitness testing before recruits started the course had been revised, as had how much detail was paid to the pre-employment health screening. The support which trainees received from instructors had also been amended; the service was on a learning journey with the recruits and was working to reflect the learning styles of the trainees.

Councillor Taylor highlighted the importance of recruits having someone they could speak to who has been through the process and the Human Resources Director said that there were people within the training centre who could fulfil this role. Recruits were also introduced to the Chairs and Co-Chairs of the Staff Network and there were a range of different sources of learning and pastoral support.

Councillor Woodwark noted that recruitment had changed the make up of the Service and he would have been interested to see some figures on diversity and also how the service linked up with other communities. The Chair commented that as there were only small numbers in each recruitment process this might lead to more questions and it might be more beneficial to have the annual picture instead.

DCFO Heath stated that the service had employed an exceptional workforce, the need for diversity was clear but the financial restrictions of the last ten years had made this very difficult. A career in the Fire Service was now once again an option but it was a slow process to diversify the organisation as a whole.

It was acknowledged that a small number of trainees had been lost through the process and staff from the training centre did everything they could to support recruits but sometimes drop-outs were unavoidable. The Workforce Plan would continue to see more opportunities to invest in staff through the IRMP and diversify the workforce.

Upon 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.

TWFRS Mentoring Programme

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a report updating Members on the current position in relation to the development and launch of the TWFRS Mentoring Programme.

Mentoring was a tool for personal development which allowed for experiences and knowledge to be shared and maintained. Mentoring happened naturally within the Service but the value of creating a programme was to formalise this, improve the quality of mentoring conversations, open up the opportunities and benefits of the

mentoring right across the Service and understand the impact of the approach through evaluation.

To support the development of the Mentoring Programme the Service had: -

- Developed a Mentoring Programme Overview document which sets out guidance and principles of the programme as well as the application and matching process
- Created a promotional video to introduce the programme and invite applications
- Developed a Mentoring Training Package for mentors and mentees to get the most out of the time they invest.

The ownership of the programme was transferring to the Learning and Development department to be rolled out with the Organisational Development team being able to advise and guide accordingly. The full detail of the Mentoring Programme was attached as an appendix to the report.

Councillor Taylor asked if the current cohort of trainees would be allocated a mentor once they were posted to their role. The Organisational Development Manager advised that the Watch Manager and Crew Manager would look after a new recruit as part of the on-boarding period and mentoring could happen naturally at any time. DCFO Heath added that trainees were very well supervised and the process was embedded in the Watch; mentorship was available for both on the job activities and quiet periods.

Councillor Woodward noted that 'what does the mentee want from this?' was a difficult question and this was not an easy exercise to undertake but did formalise the existing good work of the Service.

The Organisational Development Manager commented that the Service would not lose the existing informal arrangements as this was engrained in the culture and DCFO Heath said that the programme was strengthening this rather than taking anything away.

Following consideration of the report it was: -

5. RESOLVED that: -

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

Personal Development Review (PDR) Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Strategic Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report updating Members on the progress of the Performance Development Review (PDR) as it had now completed its first full cycle from April 2020 to March 2021.

There had been a focus during the first year on compliance and completion and the Service had been very pleased to achieve an overall completion rate of 84%. An evaluation had been launched to employees at the end of April 2021 to find out what had gone well and which aspects could be improved. The key themes had included: -

- The PDR gave a structure for regular and useful conversations but in some cases, the process felt too long winded
- Needing more familiarity of the Core HR system, which through support and continued use will improve
- Training and support from the IT Trainer was highly valued and refreshers of the system for 2021/22 would be welcomed.

These themes had provided an informed starting point for future work around the PDR, the effectiveness of support provided and to what extent it might need to evolve in the future. For the second year the focus would be on the quality of objectives and conversations through the Core HR system. As employees became more familiar with the process and developed their understanding of PDR, sufficiently challenging objectives should be agreed which supported learning and development and helped employees to reach their own and the Service's goals.

Councillor Taylor noted that the Service offered a training programme for new Members of the Authority, however not all Members attended and he queried if this had been offered again.

DCFO Heath stated that Members who could not make the session were contacted with availability for individual sessions. Councillor Taylor was happy to contact Members as he felt they should lead by example and the Chair supported reinforcing the messaging that Members needed to engage with training and awareness sessions. Councillor Woodward added that long standing Members could also be offered refresher training.

It was noted that there would be an HMI Briefing session after the next main Authority meeting in September and a session on Standing Orders in October. The Chair commented that Member links were discussed at the last Authority meeting and some district based training might be considered. DCFO Heath advised that this had been discussed with the Chair of the Fire Authority and substitutes were being allocated for a buddy-up arrangement.

In reference to the completion rate of 84%, Councillor Woodward felt that this could be considered quite low, depending on the context. The Organisational Development Manager advised that it had to be taken into account that some individuals would have been on long term sick leave or undergoing a change of roles. It was not possible to compare to others as the context was different but there may be a more informed picture after the PDR had been in operation for three years.

6. RESOLVED that: -

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

Information Governance Annual Report 2020/2021

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide Members with an overview of the activities relating to the Information Governance over the 2020/2021 fiscal year.

The role of the Information Governance Advisor sat within the Risk and Information function and incorporates the role of Data Protection Officer (DPO), which reported directly to the Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO), a reference held by the Assistant Chief Officer for Organisational Development. Compliance against the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was audited by Sunderland City Council during Q4 2020/21 and a 'Substantial' level of assurance was awarded. The audit did not reveal any matters which were considered to be high or of a significant risk.

A considerable amount of work had been undertaken to refresh and update the Information Asset Register which was a list of personal or otherwise sensitive information assets held by the Service. The launch of the new Information Asset Register would be alongside the ICT department's roll out of Microsoft Teams.

The Service had received a total of 93 FOI requests during 2020/21 (129 received in 2019/20). The most common sources of FOI requests were members of the public, journalists and enquiries related to contractual arrangements. 81% (75) were responded to within the 20 day requirement and the remaining 19% (18) required further clarification and were answered within a communicated extended time limit.

There had been nine Subject Access Requests (SAR) in 2020/2021 from nine individuals (14 received in 2019/20 from eight individuals) and the Service achieved 100% compliance against the ICO guidance of one calendar month. Every SAR actioned had come from either current or serving members of staff.

Councillor Taylor asked how much manpower and resources was involved in dealing with FOI and SAR requests and the Human Resources Director explained that one employee worked full time on all information governance work including requests. The volumes were relatively small and the workload was proportionate.

Councillor Woodward commented that nine SARs would be considered a comparatively small number in some organisations. He noted that historically this area had been spotlighted for the organisation and internal audit work had been flagged to the Governance Committee. It was vitally important that the Service got this right and previous issues had been addressed and the Service was doing the best job it could.

DCFO Heath said that it had taken work to get where the Service needed to be but there had been a significant improvement over recent years.

7. RESOLVED that: -

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

Executive Leadership Team – External Appointments

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), Finance Director and Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of 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 posts were not regulated by the Authority and could be undertaken by an individual whilst operating within FRS policy. To support transparency, Members were provided with the following detail for information only.

- Chief Fire Officer Chris Lowther was a Member of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Chair of the NFCC Operations Coordination Committee (OCC), Member of the NFCC Community Risk Programme Board, NFCC Steering Group, NFCC Strategic Resilience Board (SRB) and NFCC New Dimensions II Board (ND2). In addition, he was Chair and Board Member of the Together for Children Touchstone Group Sunderland, Trustee of the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE), Member of the Institute of Directors (IoD) and Member of the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit Strategic Board. All of these appointments were unpaid.
- Deputy Chief Officer Peter Heath was the Regional Representative of the NFCC OCC, NFCC Lead on COVID-19 Committee, Chair of the NFCC Scientific Advisory Cell and Regional NFCC Lead for National Interagency Liaison Officers. 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 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 was 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, Regional Representative of the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Program (ESMCP), Chair of Welfare for TWFRS Sports and Welfare Club. All of these appointments were unpaid.
 - Area Manager Richie Rickaby was a Member of the Liberty Project Strategic Board for Modern Day Slavery, regional representative for the National CBRN Group, regional representative on the National USAR working group, Chair of the Risk Group for the LRF Chair of the TCG for Covid and a mentor with the Boys Network.
 - Human Resources Director John Rawling was an elected Public Governor of the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. This appointment was unpaid.
 - Finance Director Dennis Napier and Area Manager David Leach had no external appointments at the current time.
8. RESOLVED that:
- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
 - (ii) further reports be received as necessary.

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

9. 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 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, Paragraph 4).

(Signed) G HALEY
Chair