



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 at 10.30am at Fire and Rescue Authority Headquarters

Present:

Councillor Haley in the Chair.

Councillors Bell, Flynn and Ord.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hunter and Wood.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Update from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer

At the invitation of the Chair of the Committee, DCFO Heath provided an update to Members on the response of the Service to the unprecedented heatwave conditions experienced across the country in recent days.

DCFO Heath highlighted that the excessive heat had resulted in many fires, particularly in the South of the country, and sadly a high proportion of these were due to the actions of people. These unprecedented circumstances had resulted in a catastrophic situation not seen since the Second World War. Senior officers had been on national calls with bodies such as the Fire Chiefs Council and staff had not stopped for the last 48 hours; all were dealing with some kind of response.

Across the country there had been a number of firefighter injuries; there had been one incident in Tyne and Wear but the firefighter concerned was now fully recovered.

From a Tyne and Wear perspective, DCFO Heath stated that the Service had prepared for what could be foreseen and every officer was ready. The priority was people and property and on the night of 18 July there had been more calls than would usually be received on the busiest Bonfire Night. There were extra staff on Control and BT filtering was used.

All fire engines were out between mid afternoon on Tuesday 19 July to 10.30pm; 18 Fire and Rescue Services had declared a major incident on Tuesday but Tyne and Wear had not. A call had been received through the National Reserve and two appliances had been deployed to Norfolk to support their response. There were additional concerns in that area due to winds picking up and there would be discussions later in the day about whether the support from Tyne and Wear needed to continue. DCFO Heath expressed his pride in what the staff had achieved and their commitment to the communities they served.

Councillor Bell proposed that the Committee place on record its thanks and congratulations to all operational crews in Tyne and Wear for their response and for providing support beyond the Service area. He also emphasised the message that adequate funding was needed to make sure that appropriate resource was available for such incidents.

He went on to ask if near misses would be recorded and if there had been any issues with PPE. DCFO Heath stated that the PPE for firefighters was the best on the market and kept heat out but also kept it in. Fire and rescue services used varying kit depending on the types of fires most commonly experienced and firefighter safety would always be the priority. He added that through the National Fire Chiefs Council, there were specific committees looking at climate change and were active in lobbying for services on this; it was recognised that the nature of risk was changing.

The Chair asked the Human Resources Director to say a few words about the forthcoming Northern Pride event and the Committee were informed that the Service would have a significant presence including at the 5km race and the Blue Light breakfast at Newcastle Civic Centre followed by the parade. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service would be present on Saturday and all day Sunday with representatives from the Prevention and Education department and Human Resources. The Human Resources Director highlighted that the Staff Network Group had led on the organisation of the event.

The Finance Director provided an update on the Tri-station development and was pleased to report that this had reached a key milestone with planning permission having been received earlier in the week. The site would now be formally acquired and an update would be presented to the Fire Authority in September. It was highlighted that the Police and North East Ambulance Service had reaffirmed their commitment to the site.

Councillor Flynn appreciated the frustrations which had been experienced but commended the effort which had gone in to moving the project forward and he was looking forward to seeing it develop.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 7 February 2022, Part I, be confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair asked if there was any update in relation to Immediate Detriment and the Finance Director advised that the Authority had reaffirmed its commitment to the Framework. The Local Government Association and FBU were still discussing amendments to the Framework Agreement and matters were still on pause. The Fire Authority would be provided with an update in the near future.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarking – Update

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report setting out the results and feedback from the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) 2022 and providing an update on how the Service was currently benchmarking its progress around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and how this could develop in the future.

The Human Resources Director advised Members that Stonewall evolved the criteria for the Workplace Equality Index every few years and the most recent survey had ranked the Service as 185th out of 405 entrants, which was a bronze award. The feedback report from Stonewall was attached at Appendix 1 and suggested areas of improvement included: -

- At the start of policies to include a sentence specifically saying that the policy applies to LGBT+ people, all gender identities, or sexual orientation. (As an organisation this was not something which it was planned to implement as the Service's policies were for everyone for all protected characteristics.)
- Having resources on Intranet pages offering training to all LGBT+ employees, not just Staff Network Groups; Allies in Network Groups having a manageable and empowering pledges such as Watch a documentary, Listen to a pod cast, Attend an event etc. These options would be evaluated in conjunction with Network members.

Staff from across the Service had taken part in a survey about attitudes towards culture, diversity and inclusion and the detailed report showing the results was attached at Appendix 2.

The feedback from Stonewall was considered reasonable in the context of the specific objectives of Stonewall but has also served to highlight the potential advantages of using an alternative benchmarking tool. Staff Networks were content with this proposed shift and the new Inclusion Manager had carried out some research and identified some alternative tools.

One of these tools was Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) from the Employer's Network for Equality and Inclusion. TIDE measured an organisation's approach and progress on diversity and inclusion and supported flexible and inclusive management, moving away from a strand specific language and approach

and allowing organisations to focus on the areas which would make the most difference.

The Service had previously made a submission to the FRS Equality Framework in 2016/2017 and was considering participating in this again. This framework was specifically designed for fire and rescue services.

Whichever option was taken by the Service, feedback on performance around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion would continue to be received from HMICFRS and Investors in People. A comprehensive review of the EDI measures would be undertaken and an options appraisal produced prior to a decision being made on the benchmarking tool going forward.

Councillor Flynn asked what position the Service would be in with Stonewall if it opted to go with another benchmarking tool and the Human Resources Director stated that he anticipated that the Service would no longer be part of the Workplace Equality Index but would not sever ties with Stonewall and would still have their resources available.

The Chair asked if there was view on the merits or otherwise of using the FRS Equality Framework or a broader tool such as TIDE. The Human Resources Director commented that there were potential advantages in a broader benchmarking tool as TIDE had access to a wider membership and consultancy, however they were slightly different offers.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

2. RESOLVED that: -

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

People and Organisational Development (POD) Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to update Members on the creation and launch of the People and Organisational Development (POD) Strategy in Spring 2022.

The Human Resources Director advised that the POD Strategy replaced the previous Organisational Development Strategy. The POD Strategy had been written to reflect the current and future operating context based on the changes which had impacted on the Service since the publication of the Organisational Development Strategy in 2017.

Members were directed to the strategy document which outlined where the Service was, where it wanted to be and how it was going to get there through the five themes

of Leadership; Operational Standards; Talent Management; Employee Experience and Inclusion; and Organisational Development and Design.

The Strategy had been published on the website and Intranet and had been included in the Annual Statement of Assurance. A POD Strategy 'on a page' summary version had been produced and resources developed for Department Heads and Group Managers to enable them to communicate key messages about the strategy to their teams.

The Committee accordingly: -

3. RESOLVED that: -

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

ELT 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 Chris Lowther is 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), NFCC JESIP Interoperability Board and NFCC New Dimensions II Board (ND2). In addition, he is 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 are unpaid.
- Deputy Chief Officer Peter Heath is the Regional Representative of the NFCC OCC, NFCC Regional Lead for National Interagency Liaison Officers (NILO) and NFCC National Lead for Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Strategic representative for TWFRS on Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF). In addition, he is a Member of the Edinburgh Napier University Professional Advisory Group for the Human Resource Master's Degree Programme. All of these appointments are unpaid.

- Assistant Chief Officer Lynsey McVay is 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 are unpaid.
- Area Manager Phil Clark is Co-Chair of the NFCC Research and Development Function, North East 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 are unpaid.
- Area Manager Richie Rickaby is 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 is an elected Public Governor of the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and a Volunteer School Role Model with the charity Diversity Role Models. These appointments are unpaid.
- Finance Director Dennis Napier and Area Managers David Leach and Paul Russell had no external appointments at the current time.

DCFO Heath commented that it was only with the support of the Authority that the ELT could attend these national groups but great benefit was derived from these appointments.

The Chair added that a lot of firefighters fulfilled community roles which could not be listed as part of the report but should also be recognised.

4. RESOLVED that:

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

Firefighter Recruitment

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

The Committee had received regular updates on firefighter recruitment and this report highlighted that three cohorts of trainees had commenced employment following a recruitment campaign in October 2020. The most recent campaign was in February 2022 for courses scheduled for September 2022 and early 2023. For the first time an online test validation had taken place after the interview stage to verify that all tests taken in the process had been completed by the same individual. There was again an additional assessment to test candidate fitness and conditional offers had been made to 24 candidates for the September course.

The former Inter-Service Transfer process had been re-branded as Competent Recruitment and a new campaign had been launched in May 2022, attracting 69 candidates with 67 applications being at Firefighter level. Successful candidates would progress to interview and a conversion course.

Various initiatives as identified in a Positive Action Proposal had been implemented in early 2022 and the Service was currently gathering information, scaffolding support, engaging with the workforce and community via various methods with the aim of being fully inclusive, attracting and retaining employees on all cross sections of the community, including underrepresented groups. This work would influence ongoing recruitment activity into 2023 and beyond.

Members were pleased to note that the Service was able to continue recruiting and Councillor Bell asked if there had been any unsuccessful candidates who had appealed the process.

The Human Resources Manager said that she had not been made aware of any issues and there had actually been a lot of positive feedback about the process.

DCFO Heath referred to the Competent Recruitment campaign and the positive indicator of 69 individuals being interested in joining Tyne and Wear. Councillor Bell asked if there were many staff who wished to transfer out of the service and the Human Resources Director said that turnover of staff was low and DCFO Heath added that it was retirements and positive investment from the Authority which was driving the recruitment campaigns.

5. RESOLVED that: -

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

Employee Fitness Developments

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report briefing Members about the employee fitness developments following the introduction of the new Health and Fitness Advisor role within the Service.

The Human Resources Manager highlighted that there had been a significant national investment and focus on understanding the physical demands of firefighting roles and supporting firefighter fitness.

Fitter firefighters had been shown to perform firefighting tasks quicker and with less physical strain. Those who did not maintain appropriate levels of physical fitness could put themselves at risk of over-exertion, which could lead to exertional heat illness and/or heart attack. Firefighters were also having to work longer in their careers which increased the risk of age related fitness and musculoskeletal conditions.

A Health and Fitness Advisor was appointed in July 2021 and since that time there had been several objectives set relating to improvement activities in support of workforce fitness and wellbeing which included a Health and Fitness Network, new Intranet pages, changes to the fitness module for trainee firefighters and fitness referrals from Occupational Health.

The Health and Fitness Advisor was also developing a fitness programme, in partnership with the Prevention and Education function, specifically designed for the older and more vulnerable in the Service's communities to improve mobility and safety within the home. An audit was also taking place of on-site gym facilities at each location with the Service to ensure that there was consistency and equipment was fully accessible.

The Chair noted that the Service was represented on health and wellbeing boards in Tyne and Wear and that the community work being carried out should be highlighted at these meetings.

Councillor Bell asked if the Health and Fitness Advisor would give advice on other services which were available, for example the National Rehabilitation Centre. The Human Resources Manager stated that there was a link to the Firefighters' Charity through Occupational Health and there was an awareness that these referrals could be made.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

6. RESOLVED that: -

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

Information Governance Annual Report

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 Information Governance over the 2021/2022 fiscal year.

The role of the Information Governance Advisor sat within the Human Resources function and incorporated the role of Data Protection Officer (DPO), which would report 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 2021/2022 and a 'Moderate' level of assurance was awarded. The audit recommended that GDPR audits on stations and departments should be recommenced following their temporary suspension due to the pandemic.

The Information Asset Register was a list of personal or otherwise sensitive information assets held by the Service, including those that were business critical or required for business continuity. The Information Asset Register policy and Retention Schedule Policy were currently in the process of being redesigned and there would now be one overarching policy titled Information Assets, Retention and Disposal.

The Service had received a total of 101 FOI requests during 2021/22 (93 received in 2020/2021). The most common sources of FOI requests were members of the public, journalists and enquiries related to contractual arrangements. 75% (76) were responded to within the 20 day requirement and the remaining 25% (25) required further clarification and were answered within a communicated extended time limit.

There had been seven Subject Access Requests (SAR) in 2021/2022 (nine received in 2020/2021) and the Service achieved 100% compliance against the ICO guidance of one calendar month. Six SARs actioned had come from either current or serving members of staff and one was from a member of the public.

Councillor Flynn commented that he understood staff or former members of staff making a Subject Access Request but enquired what sort of FOIs were received by the Service.

The Human Resources Director said that these could be very wide ranging; some were commercial in nature and related to potential procurement but there were no particular themes. DCFO Heath noted that a number of FOIs could be generated from a national issue and all fire and rescue services would receive the same request which was not necessarily Tyne and Wear specific.

7. RESOLVED that: -

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

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

8. 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