



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 13 November 2024 at POs Conference Room - Fire Service HQ, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 12.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Stef Nelson (Chair), Rachel Bailey, Gina Lewis, Karen Mundry, Margaret Simon, Peter Wheeler and Mick Warren (Councillor Phil Marshall was in attendance as an observer)

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that this meeting would be audio recorded.

B Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

D Minutes of the Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 1st December 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 ANNUAL WORKFORCE PLANNING UPDATE

The Head of Service Delivery presented the report which provided an update as of October 2024 of the current operational staffing levels and overview of the workforce planning process that was used to plan for and recruit the required number of operational firefighters.

It was noted that there continued to be an increase in staff leaving the Service to other fire and rescue services, careers and retirements. The total number of retirements for 2023-24 was 17, whilst other leavers for the same year totalled 6. The total retirements for 2024-25 to date was 12, with other leavers to date totalling 6.

The anticipated retirements until March 2027 was 36 and other leavers estimated 10 per annum. In response, officers had developed a detailed medium term workforce model which forecasted the recruitment and training requirements up to March 2027.

In the last 12 months the Service had recruited 6 wholetime firefighters, with 8 further firefighters joining through On-Call Migration. Further recruitment was planned to fill a course in 2024-25. To date there had been 26 leavers 21 due to retirements, 4 transfer to other fire services and sadly, there had been a death of a serving member of staff.

The latest round of promotion boards for Crew, Watch and Station Managers were completed in October 2024 which had resulted in 1 permanent Group Manager and 1 temporary Group Manager appointment, 3 permanent Station Manager appointments; 10 permanent Watch Manager appointments; and 11 permanent Crew Manager appointments.

The Community Risk Management Plan 2024-28 was approved by the Fire Authority in February 2024. This involved the inception of the four Weekday Pumps and the reversion of Knutsford to the day crewing duty system. A significant amount of work had been done to secure on-call redeployment, preferencing and relocation of staff.

Members were advised that On-Call Recognition Events had been arranged to recognise the commitment of colleagues who had staffed the on-call fire engines that were being converted to the new duty systems. Special events had been organised at Stockton Heath, Winsford, Northwich, Runcorn and Knutsford.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Workforce Planning Update be noted.

3 DISCIPLINE AND GRIEVANCE UPDATE

The HR Business Partner presented a report which provided an update on discipline cases, grievances, dignity at work complaints and performance improvement/capability procedures within the Service.

The HR Business Partner reported that the discipline figures for 2023 showed an increase in discipline cases when compared with the data for 2022. However, although the data for 2024 was incomplete, to date (pro-rata) already appeared to be a significant decrease in discipline cases compared with the previous years. There also appeared to have been a decrease in grievances submitted in the past two years, with the number of grievances submitted in 2024 and 2023 looking like they had returned to pre-2022 levels. The level of discipline and grievance cases appeared to be comparable with other similar services.

During 2023 and 2024 there had been four Dignity at Work cases. The Service continued to promote its 'Who do I turn to?' campaign which seeks to heighten awareness of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and how to report it, and to encourage managers to manage such matters appropriately. It was felt that this effort was now being reflected in the consistently low number of Dignity at Work complaints in recent years.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Discipline and Grievance Update be noted.

4 PRESENTATION ON THE PEOPLE STRATEGY 2022-25

The Head of People and Organisational Development gave a presentation which provided an update about developments associated with the People Strategy 2022-25 (the Strategy).

Members were informed that the Strategy was predicated on the 'Steps Framework' which now consisted of four main elements: Step In; Step Forward; Step Up; Step Away. An overview was provided in respect of each of the elements, confirming activities carried out to-date and future intended activity.

The presentation provided further information on the following:-

- Step in – Recruitment and Training;
- Step forward – Performance and Development;
- Step up – Progression and Leadership
- Step away – Workforce Planning and Retirement
- Future people priorities – to develop a new People Strategy 2025- 28

A Member welcomed the work experience initiative and asked how this was publicised. In response, the Head of People and Organisational Development advised that the offer was communicated to local schools, and that details were published on the website and included in social media posts. Further information would be provided to the Member outside the meeting.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the People Strategy Update be noted.

5 RECRUITMENT OF HEAD OF GOVERNANCE (MONITORING OFFICER)

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive presented a report which provided an update on the arrangements for the recruitment process for the Head of Governance (Monitoring Officer) post.

It was confirmed that on 2nd December nominated Members of the Staffing Committee would conduct the final interview.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the recruitment process be noted; and

[2] Councillors Stef Nelson (Chair), Rachel Bailey, Gina Lewis and Mick Warren be appointed to sit on the interview panel.