

## **LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**

### **RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Meeting to be held on 28 June 2017

### **WORKFORCE PLANNING**

Contact for further information:

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#### **Executive Summary**

This reports outlines the current position in respect of the recruitment activity and identifies measures being taken to improve the process to assist in meeting the desired outcomes including:

- Ongoing positive action campaign requirement;
- Nurturing candidates;
- Amending processes whilst maintaining appropriate standards;
- Ongoing consideration in respect of role of apprentices.

#### **Decision Required**

The Committee is requested to note the position including the ongoing work being undertaken in respect of apprentices and the measures being adopted in respect of recruitment.

#### **Information**

LFRS prides itself in the provision of an effective and multi skilled workforce and has an extensive training programme to equip our employees to fulfil their roles. The Resources Committee has previously been apprised of the measures being taken in respect of our recruitment activity, which is the first part of the workforce planning process.

The workforce currently stands at an establishment of 1,242 with slight increases in both BME, female and disabled employees since 2010; but the Services work profile remains unrepresentative of our community. On occasions when undertaking previous recruitment campaigns the service has been able to reflect the community, for example the 50 Community Fire Service Practitioners was totally representative. However, when aggregated within the whole establishment, this only reflected a slight overall improvement. Of necessity the RDS recruitment reflects the RDS catchment area which is not representative of Lancashire, and the service has not undertaken any significant wholtime firefighter recruitment for many years prior to this year due to the demands imposed by the austerity measures.

The current recruitment activity is predicated on an ongoing desire to maintain our current operational strength and this meant the Service originally envisaged a recruitment of a further circa 60 firefighters to maintain this level with recruitment in

June (36) and January 2018 (24). Further recruitment programmes would be run on an annual basis. This followed a recruitment exercise focused purely on RDS that resulted in 27 new recruits for the wholetime in November 2016. The actual numbers to be recruited will be adjusted through the campaigns to reflect altered demand, retirement and other leavers to meet the overall requirement in the long term.

This recruitment activity will also be supplemented by an apprenticeship programmed following the imposition on all public bodies of an apprenticeship target of a minimum of 2.3% of headcount annually. This equates to a target of 29 apprentices, with a requirement to report on achievement against the target annually from September 2018. Steps have been taken in respect of green book employees to consider the role that apprentices can undertake and an opportunistic approach is currently being adopted with all positions under grade 4 being considered for possible apprenticeships as they fall vacant with identification of specific areas of additional need such as in ICT.

The associated Apprenticeship levy was implemented with effect from 6 April 2017 which is based on our current pay bill equates to £150k. The Service is currently continuing to determine the best way of drawing down from this levy, but the approach will be a combination of green book apprentices, coupled with higher level apprenticeship training for existing staff and recruiting firefighter apprentices once the issues around the framework to be utilised are clarified. An allocation of £180k has been identified in the budget and more detailed proposals will be brought to a later meeting of the Resources Committee about the utilisation of these funds. Due to uncertainty around the appropriate mechanisms it is feasible that the full allocation will not be utilised in year. If this should occur it is proposed to carry any unspent amount including any set up provision amounts forward as an earmarked reserve as the programmes will require the funding.

The intent is to provide meaningful routes into employment within LFRS and career prospects for young individuals with skills and attributes which will enhance our organisation.

### Recruitment

As the Authority has previously sanctioned, the Service has commenced an ongoing programme of recruitment with primacy being given to meeting the appropriate standards, improving the diversity of our workforce and providing an opportunity for our RDS staff to successfully apply for whole-time roles. This section outlines progress to date and future direction.

### Progress to date

The twin track approach endorsed by the CFA delivered 27 transferees from the RDS in 2016. This was as a bespoke programme to address immediate need whilst enabling positive action to be instigated in advance of subsequent recruitment.

Of the 32 on the current recruits course, 12 emerged from RDS employment, whilst 5 of the 17 scheduled to attend the recruits course commencing in January 2018 are from the RDS. This demonstrates that the standards required have not adversely affected RDS employees (indeed the role naturally gives an opportunity to demonstrate examples of suitability). Also instances exist where individuals have

used the full time standard as a spur to improve their RDS involvement and future employability (driving and enrolment on educational courses being examples). However, this level of success is unlikely to be repeated hence the proposal for additional support.

In effect 44 out of the total of 76 personnel recruited have emerged from the RDS grouping. Transferring this level of resource from our RDS establishment does have performance and organisational issues which increases demands on the Service. In many respects this is a harder recruitment challenge than wholetime exercises. A number of individuals transferred have given a dual contract commitment but this is normally with a reduction in RDS hours of cover and the impact has been felt. Whilst it is believed it will act as a spur for future RDS recruitment this benefit has not been seen yet. It is believed only an isolated individual has left the service following an unsuccessful application.

#### Changes in process

In addition to the positive action referred to in respect of dual tracking, LFRS reviewed the whole process to ensure today's and anticipated future fire service was reflected in the person and job specifications. Similarly the Service considered and adopted some positive action initiatives to facilitate recruitment from underrepresented groups, whilst the key determinate remained meeting the Services' standard.

The result from the current campaign was 32 recruited in June and potentially 17 in January 2018. The standard of successful recruits' attainment is high. However the level of underrepresented groups has however been disappointing with 3 BME and 5 females being within the 32 new entrants, with one BME candidate commencing in January.

The campaign was targeted to improve our diversity and to ensure the anticipated number of applications could be managed. In reality the actual number of applications was lower than anticipated and the rigid standards, set in anticipation of the volume expected, were such that the desired ability to finally select on behaviours was reduced. It is intended to allow some flexibility in future campaigns without compromising the actual standards.

The processes have therefore been reviewed to identify improvements in the ongoing process.

The main change is to adopt the national fitness standards (as opposed to the higher LFRS standards) as the threshold to provide some potential flexibility in final selection.

The Service, based on previous experience, has used higher fitness standards than other services or the national standards require. This has had the consequence of reducing the level of failures on the intensive recruits training programme that immediately follows employment. The decision was also previously influenced by the firefighter pension scheme provisions. In this instance the application of the higher fitness standard had an effect on reducing the numbers to a smaller cohort but potentially had an adverse effect on females. It is proposed to adopt the national standard on the next campaign, but continue to assess individuals overall fitness.

Similarly the equipment assembly element of the process had a significant effect on failure rates, including female applicants and therefore whilst the service still believes the requirement is genuine it is intending to consider an alternative dexterity test rather than the current slightly out of context measure. In addition whether a new test or the current test is used the current practice of a strict pass/fail standard will be modified to give a tolerance.

Neither the ability tests or standard of educational attainment warrant any reduction in standard.

The general principle is to allow flexibility so that one slight fail will not unnecessarily rule out a candidate, when the shortfall can be addressed.

To further assist RDS employees and to potentially address any shortfall in overall operational numbers, it is proposed to offer the opportunity for development contracts of 6 months duration. The purpose being to enable individuals to address any operational gaps that they might have. Experience has shown that the gap in the requirements between an RDS and whole-time employee can be significant and this has endorsed the previous decision for all individuals to undertake the full recruitment course as planned rather than a variance on the abridged conversion course undertaken by the 27. The utilisation of development contracts does not provide automatic progression but should enable an individual to enhance their experience ensuring some continued progression from RDS to whole-time.

A separate review of our positive action campaigning initiatives is being undertaken but the emerging themes are that this needs to be a continuous part of our operations and not a bespoke activity as we recruit. The actual generation of applications from underrepresented groups as a percentage was good; but it is considered that the higher pass figures adopted to manage numbers did not give any flexibility in approach, that a 'nearly there' list needs to be collated and nurtured.

It should be stated that the results experienced by LFRS are similar to other Fire services and demonstrates the need for the development of solutions that work within LFRS, working in partnership where benefits are seen.

Other changes are slight alterations in timeframes.

#### Shortfall in Numbers

Serious consideration was given to revisiting the applications in order to generate further successful candidates but this was not seen as desirable in view of the messages that would send to the organisation, especially those who were still aspiring or felt concerned about the process, the fact that individuals had already been notified, practicality and the stance the service has adopted concerning attainment of the standards. Also depending on the actions taken we would either potentially be moving into positive discrimination or revisiting the whole recruitment process.

Similarly consideration was given to immediately embarking on a further recruitment campaign coupled with more positive action work. However this was seen to be unrealistic due to the limited resource and time available (as well as the effect on

morale in view of the dedicated efforts that individuals had put in) and that the positive action needed to be part of the process if the diversity issue was to be addressed.

The outcome was to focus on positive action and nurturing the nearly there candidates and provide opportunities and feedback to our current employees to gain skills.

### **Financial Implications**

By waiting for meaningful positive action on recruitment to be enacted would produce an underspend on salary spend as the service will be under establishment for a short period. This would be partially offset by the use of overtime and temporary development contracts as an opportunity for RDS staff.

Provision has been made within the 2017/18 budget based on fully populating 2 recruit courses in the year. The shortfall in the number of recruits will result in an underspend on the budget of approx. £300k.

Similarly the budget allowed for the recruitment of apprentices in the second half of the year, and any shortfall in this would result in a further underspend, but obviously at this stage it is too early to anticipate the extent of this.

### **Business Risk Implications**

The recruitment of suitable and adequate numbers of employees is essential for the ongoing delivery of our responsibilities. In addition not increasing the diversity of our recruitment activity will potentially expose the CFA to external criticism.

### **Environmental Impact**

Nil

### **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Implications**

The proposals are to improve the unrepresentative workforce

### **Human Resource Implications**

The proposals are in line with HR practice

### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate:		