

LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Meeting to be held on 30 November 2016

RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

Following the recommencement of wholetime recruitment after a significant period without recruitment, this paper outlines the outcome of the Retained Duty System (RDS) exercise and the learning points being taken forward.

The Authority had endorsed considering expressions of interest from RDS staff first before full external recruitment providing that the individuals met the required Point of Entry Selection Test (POEST) standard as a one off.

In future campaigns, the full standard would need to be met.

The outcome was 27 immediately successful candidates and 5 deferred to the next intake from the RDS cohort.

The process identified areas to be addressed to improve outcomes and measures that the Service needed to take, specifically

- Earlier Workforce Planning (if financially justified);
- Improvements to open advertisement process;
- Positive Action requirement;
- Future consideration of Apprenticeships;
- Emphasis on ongoing RDS recruitment;
- Encouragement of dual contract working.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note and endorse the report.

Information

Following an extended period of no wholetime recruitment in light of the financial challenges and reductions in establishment, the Service embarked on a wholetime recruitment campaign for 2016/17 with a target of up to 30 individuals. It is the intention to continue recruitment in future years to address our future requirements, matching the leaver profile and organisational changes.

Previous papers have outlined the approach and issues taken. This report outlines the outcomes and lessons to be taken forward into future campaigns.

Access for RDS staff

As outlined in previous papers, the Service believed it was desirable to allow our existing RDS workforce the opportunity to transfer to the whole time provided they met the required standards. As a result a bespoke process for RDS was undertaken as a “one off”.

In view of the significant changes in the demands and role of a firefighter since the previous recruitment, the whole process needed to be refreshed. The processes and criteria that have emerged meant that the ability of our existing RDS workforce to meet the criteria needed to be relaxed to recognise their current position, experience and commitment.

The process that was implemented resulted in 27 of the RDS individuals meeting the criteria and being offered positions in the wholetime duty system. A further 5, whilst meeting the POESTs, gave a degree of concern in respect of their ability to meet the immediate onerous demands of the initial training, so they have been advised in respect of addressing their stamina and strength issues and will be included in the next cohort of new entrants.

The other RDS candidates, that for various reasons have not met the wholetime standard, have been offered feedback and advice on where they need to improve their performance.

This outcome was a significant improvement on a similar exercise undertaken in 2008.

Entry Standard

Having a single standard was understood within the Service and provides reassurance to whole-time staff and the representative bodies that standards are not being compromised. The approach taken for RDS staff was they would be assessed against the required criteria. However in terms of the additional criteria identified possible relaxation was allowed where they could demonstrate an ability to undertake that element in their existing role.

The single standard and person specification will now be used for future campaigns.

Equality & Diversity

Adopting a transfer process for RDS has not had and will not have any impact on the need to have a representative workforce. The catchment area for RDS appliances also limits the potential to become a more representative employer.

It is for this reason that the Service is embarking on positive action activity as part of the twin track approach prior to undertaking an open process when the full requirements will be measured.

Future recruitment is to be undertaken on an open competitive basis with the Service expecting that the entry level standards would be met in full and all staff are clear on the standards required.

Entering open competition will also allow any interested Green Book employees and previous transferees to NWFC to apply if they are interested.

Impact on RDS Availability

An inevitable consequence of selecting from the RDS establishment is that RDS availability will be impacted and far more detachments would occur to keep appliances on the run.

Attempts have been made to mitigate this by encouraging successful applicants to continue to fulfil their previous RDS contract as a dual contract member of staff.

The recruitment of RDS staff has always been difficult as the motivation behind providing RDS cover is varied and the catchment area is limited. In order to address this, the Service has tried to combine local effort with a campaign approach and runs 3 training courses a year.

The Service has made changes to the RDS remuneration and conditions of service via its salary scheme which alleviates some of these issues and LFRS has the best remunerated RDS staff in the country (and further changes are being developed to improve this position).

It was not possible to pre-plan for these transfers as until the process was completed it was not possible to determine which RDS stations would lose individuals to the wholetime grouping.

In future recruitment the impact will not be as significant as the individuals will be in open competition although they will clearly potentially be at an advantage due to internal knowledge.

It is further hoped that the significant numbers that have been successful will act as an incentive for individuals to join the RDS Service as a route to a full time fire service career.

A concern to the Service was the potential for individuals who worked the RDS system, who were deselected would tender their resignation but this to date has not occurred.

Workforce Planning

Although it was not possible to predict where the RDS impact would fall, the recruitment of individuals in advance of the requirement in respect of wholetime staff is being considered to alleviate any future issues.

In any event the requirement for workforce planning in a more robust manner has been identified and will form part of the budget setting process.

Testing Processes

As a result of observations and experience gained, the various stages are being reviewed to ensure validity and objectiveness with clear instructions and assessment.

Apprenticeships

The position on apprenticeships still requires more detailed consideration and could be an effective vehicle to enhance improvements in our diversity agenda.

Business Risk

Recruitment into RDS positions is challenging for the Service and transferring individuals to the whole-time will impact on RDS appliance availability and/or incur more detachments to keep appliances on the run. However this would be partly offset by encouraging/requiring staff to maintain dual contracts covering at least part of their existing RDS commitment but emphasises the need to focus on RDS recruitment approaches.

Not applying appropriate standards would subject the organisation to risk in firefighter performance and could potentially result in difficult employee issues in the longer term. Hence any easement needed to be fully recorded and justified. Inappropriate standards would invite external criticism.

The whole area of recruitment is subject to challenge and both positive and adverse comment from stakeholders including Government and employees.

Environmental Impact

N/A

Equality and Diversity Implications

The Police and Fire Minister have made clear statements that Fire Services have to perform better in respect of female and BME representation and has recently adversely commented on a local Fire Service on the outcomes of its recent recruitment campaign.

Concentrating on RDS staff limits the potential to attract the best candidates due to the requirement to have a base within 5 minutes of the Station, limits the potential to address the under-representation in the workforce, and is not in line with the principles of equality of opportunity that we must follow going forward, but it does recognise the commitment of a key segment of our workforce, and is likely to encourage future recruitment into the retained service.

HR Implications

Successfully converting RDS employees into whole-time employees should make recruitment into the RDS or for volunteers more attractive for individuals seeking a career in the Fire Service.

It is hoped that clarity over the driving requirement in the whole-time will encourage more RDS staff to nominate themselves as appliance drivers.

The recruitment of staff and the manner and calibre of that recruitment has significant implications for the HR management of individuals throughout their fire service career.

Financial Implications

The financial consequences of the recruitment are contained in the 2016/17 budget. Additional costs in respect of future recruitment will be included in the 2017/18 budget submission.

The current budget proposed does not contain any allowance for the apprenticeship issue.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate:		