

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No. 4

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: 1ST FEBRUARY 2021

SUBJECT: FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, / CHIEF EXECUTIVE (CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY), FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on progress and future plans relating to Firefighter recruitment initiatives. The Committee last received a formal update in July 2020.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Recruitment of Firefighters is critical to ensuring the effective management of operational deployment, in-line with budget and risk critical activities. The service is currently under establishment and recruitment is required to balance operational deployment within the current challenging financial environment, to support the delivery of the Strategic Community Safety Plan (SCSP).
- 2.2 An inclusive campaign is essential particularly in the national context. For a number of years Fire and Rescue Services across the UK have found diversifying the workforce to be a challenge. Whilst Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) has a long-standing commitment to diversifying the workforce through inclusive workforce campaigns, the ability to attract a diverse workforce remains a national challenge. TWFRS has had relative success across the recruitment of all roles, as we strive to recruit people that represent the communities we serve, whilst ensuring we attract the highest quality of candidates as future employees.

3. RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN – WHOLE TIME TRAINEES

- 3.1 In 2018 and in collaboration with County Durham and Darlington and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, the campaign resulted in the appointment of 24 Trainee Firefighters, 23 successfully passed the course and commenced employment with TWFRS.
- 3.2 In September 2019 a further cohort of Trainee Firefighters commenced their training with TWFRS and 14 passed the course and became operational in January 2020.
- 3.3 In April 2020 another cohort of Trainee Firefighters commenced their training, in a Covid19 secure, redesigned format, and 23 successfully completed the course to become operational in August 2020.

- 3.4 As the April 2020 course was delivered on a reformatted model which incorporated extensive health and safety measures to ensure the health and safety of both the trainers and trainees a full debrief was completed to understand any lessons learned for incorporation into future training courses required under pandemic conditions.
- 3.5 In September 2020 a second cohort of Trainee Firefighters commenced a Covid19 secure training course and 18 successfully passed the course and became operational in December 2020.
- 3.6 In October 2020 the Service commenced a new campaign to recruit trainee firefighters for a course commencing April 2021. The advertisement attracted 1,612 candidates. All recruitment processes and assessments were again constructed to maintain Covid19 pandemic related health and safety priorities. This campaign introduced an additional assessment to test candidate fitness, through the use of the bleep test, prior to individuals progressing to the Role Related Tests. Due to the new and more transmittable variant of Covid19 the Service has decided to amend the assessment programme slightly to ensure the safety of candidates and the workforce. Subsequently virtual interviews, through the use of MS Teams, will be undertaken before the RRA's rather than afterwards. This allows the service to maintain engagement with the candidates rather than deferring the process for an unquantifiable period whilst Covid19 lockdown is still in place. Clearly the Covid19 situation remains fluid and the Service is adopting a flexible and pragmatic approach to making progress as and when it can.

4. INTER SERVICE TRANSFERS

- 4.1 Successive advertisements for the recruitment of experienced Firefighters from other Services (Inter Service Transfers) were published in September 2019, March 2020 and June 2020 which resulted in the recruitment of a combined total of 34 additional Firefighters and Crew Managers. The service has decided to defer utilising this source of recruitment for an interim period as it considers it has exhausted the supply pool of quality IST's.

5. DIVERSIFICATION ACTIVITIES

- 5.1 In October 2020 an advert requesting expressions of interest to participate in a diversification working group was launched. The advert attracted a number of volunteers representing a cross section of the workforce from services such as BTC, Service Delivery, and recent whole time and inter service transfer recruits, Trade Union representatives and members from the HR team. The objective of the working group is to initiate and debate short and long term improvements to the current selection testing processes which would increase applications from underrepresented groups, ensure their continued engagement and provision of support through not only the recruitment and selection testing process but also during subsequent careers with the Service. This will directly support the Inclusion pillar of our TWFRS 2025 Vision.

- 5.2 The diversification working group is currently developing problem statements which outline the recruitment barriers identified (with specific focus on those directly impacting applications from underrepresented groups), activities required to address the barriers and associated financial and resource investment needed to deliver the project(s).

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 Risk management has been adopted throughout the campaign to date and will continue to be monitored throughout.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 To deliver Covid19 secure recruitment and training activities PPE is required at additional expense to the service however funding for this is met from a Covid19 specific budget assigned by the Service. All other recruitment related costs are met from the relevant budgets.

8. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment and Adverse Impact Assessments have been undertaken at each stage of the campaign and will continue to be reviewed throughout.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The HR Committee is requested to:
- a) Note the contents of this report;
 - b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned background papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- N/A

