

Status of Report: Public

Meeting: Combined Fire Authority

Date: 10 February 2021

Subject: Whole-time Recruitment

Report by: The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

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For: Information Only

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Combined Fire Authority with an update of the Whole-time recruitment campaign.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Combined Fire Authority note the update provided on the Whole-time Recruitment campaign, particularly that recorded data shows that selection methods have not negatively impacted on diversity statistics.

Executive Summary

3. Following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the subsequent national lockdown and local restrictions, urgent action was taken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, to commence recruitment for whole-time firefighters on the earlier date of 25 November to enable the appointment of new recruits from May 2021.
4. The positions were advertised on 25 November 2020 and 370 applications were received. Following job related testing, 48 will now be invited to interview comprising 28 external delegates plus 17 migrations and 3 transfers.
3. Data on diversity, media effectiveness and the origin of candidate (external, migration or transferee) has been recorded for the receipt of applications and following shortlisting and will continue to be recorded at each stage of the campaign.

Background

Recruitment at Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

4. As at 31 December 2020, the actual staff establishment was 347, with a further 3 retirements predicted before 31 March 2020.
5. Based on the current establishment and predicted leavers for 2021/22 (as outlined in the report to the Combined Fire Authority on 16 December 2020), it is intended that 20 new recruits will be appointed. At this stage, the proposal includes the appointment of 16 external recruits and the remaining from migrations and transfers. This will be dependent on the numbers and balance of successful applications.
6. A total of 370 applications were received and after shortlisting, the number of candidates reduced to 81. 52 external applicants attended the job-related testing session and 28 people were successful. These people, plus 17 migrations and 3 transfers, means 48 will be now be invited to interview.
7. The Appendix contains the full breakdown of data detailing diversity, media effectiveness and the type of candidate (External, Migration and Transferee) has been recorded at each stage of the campaign. In summary this shows:
 - i. The total number of applications from non-male groups was 48 which represented 13% of applications. This rose to 15% post shortlisting and on-line testing;
 - ii. The total number of applications from BAME candidates was 62 which represented 17% of applications. This rose to 20% following the shortlisting process and post on-line testing;
 - iii. The total number of applications from the 17-24 age group was 107 which represented 29% of applications. This decreased to 24% after shortlisting and on-line testing;
 - iv. The total number of applicants declaring a disability was 31 which represented 11% of applications. This rose to 11% after shortlisting and on-line testing;
 - v. The total number of applications non-heterosexual groups was 44 which represented 12% of applications. This rose to 13% after shortlisting and on-line testing;
 - vi. External applications represented 87% of applications and that number reduced to 75% after shortlisting. Applications from White British migrations moved from 8% to 20% after shortlisting;
 - vii. When asked where they found out about our recruitment campaign, the data suggests that the top three media methods were the Service's

recruitment website (54%), Facebook (18%) and word of mouth (13%); and

8. The data recorded so far suggests that the Whole-time recruitment campaign did not adversely impact any applications from underrepresented groups and a full review will be carried out at the end of the process.

Covid-19

9. Covid-19 impacted on the Service's ability to carry out numerical and verbal testing face-to-face. The recruitment team engaged with an independent advice service which provided advice and support to the testing sourced on-line. This gave greater reassurance that these tests would not adversely impact underrepresented groups than the previous tests which were conducted face-to-face.
10. Face-to-face testing of aerobic (endurance) fitness was cancelled due to the move into lockdown and the venue provider (a local university) no longer offering LFRS the use of their facilities due to Covid-19 restrictions. This was replaced with a blood pressure test completed at the start of the job-related tests.
11. Interviews will be held face-to-face at Service headquarters. A risk assessment has been completed and control measures designed to ensure compliance with Government guidance on Covid-19 safety.

Next steps

12. Interviews will be held between 1 to 5 February 2021 and selection recommendations will be reviewed in the second week of February. Conditional offers will be made between 8-31 March, following medicals. New recruits appointed from outside the fire and rescue service will join on 4 May 2021.
13. These new recruits will again complete the Firefighter Apprenticeship programme delivered through the Fire Service College.
14. The recruitment portal has enabled a review of the data at each stage of the process. A full debrief of the process will take place after 4 May 2021 to capture lessons learnt that will feed into future processes.
15. To further mitigate the risks associated with the potential staff projection, a plan is being put together to keep in touch with all candidates who are deemed appointable but not included in the 2021 intake. They will be asked if their information can be retained on file and at agreed points over 2021 as vacancies arise, these future potential recruits will be contacted, enabling potential efficiencies to be made in the next round of recruitment.
16. The intention is to ensure positive action to recruit is embedded across the Service in all aspects of community interaction and it becomes a year-round activity. The findings of the multicultural research project and the introduction

of cultural awareness training will ensure positive action is embedded. Links with community groups continue to be built, together with the promotion of the Fire Cadets as a career pathway into the Fire Service.

Report Implications/Impact

17. Legal (including crime and disorder)

The Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, Part 2, section 7, paragraphs 1 and 2, places a requirement on Fire Authorities to make suitable provision for Fire and Rescue Services, including staffing and training of staff to respond to emergency incidents.

The Equality Act 2010 generally prohibits positive discrimination i.e., treating a person with a 'protected characteristic' more favourably than people who do not share that characteristic (unless it is an occupational requirement or the protected characteristic is disability).

The Act does however permit "positive action" in recruitment and promotion to overcome or minimise disadvantages that the employer reasonably believes are faced by persons with a protected characteristic but this is subject to certain conditions being met to avoid any such favourable treatment from constituting unlawful positive discrimination.

18. Financial (including value for money, benefits and efficiencies)

The adaptations to the whole-time selection process will create increased financial costs (extra equipment, extra assessment schedules, increased staffing), however as the impact is caused by Covid-19, Government grant funding will be used to meet these costs.

19. Risk (including corporate and operational, health and safety and any impact on the continuity of service delivery)

Not having enough and sufficiently skilled operational resources at the right time could impact on the delivery of services and the Integrated Risk Management Plan improvement projects

20. Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders (including the Equality Impact Assessment)

Open and transparent promotions and recruitment processes are taking place with plans that will be publicised.

Equality Impact Assessments have been completed in the separate stages of recruitment and any issues identified were addressed.

21. Environmental

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

22. Impact upon “Our Plan” Objectives

The recruitment of staff across the Service is key to us delivering the highest levels of response. By recruiting high quality, talented and motivated staff, not only will the operational requirements be met but prevention, protection and engagement with the community will also be improved. This is covered in Our plan and specifically contributes to Response and people elements.

Background Papers

Report to the Combined Fire Authority 16 December 2020 – Wholetime Recruitment – Urgent Action Taken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

<https://leics-fire.gov.uk/your-fire-service/decision-making/cfa-meetings/>

Appendix

Appendix – Recruitment data up to point of entry in text format.

Officers to Contact

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