

Wholetime Recruitment

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides Committee members with information to allow them to agree the most appropriate method of recruiting ten Wholetime Firefighters in 2018

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the use of the Fire Service College managed electronic system as the preferred method of recruiting ten Wholetime Firefighters in 2018;
- b) Consider and make a recommendation to the full Fire Authority on the proposed use of post code restricting the campaign to the West Midlands region, in order to support our ambition of becoming a more inclusive employer;
- c) Note the various options being tried to improve on the recruitment and targeting of our under-represented groups.

3 Background

It was agreed by the Service Management Team on 18 October 2017 that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) will recruit ten Wholetime Firefighters during early 2018 to commence on Watches in August 2018.

The last external recruitment for Wholetime Firefighters into the Service took place in 2016. On that occasion SFRS used an online system purchased from West Midlands Fire Service for a sum of £7,000 (excluding VAT). The system worked well, however West Midlands are no longer using their system for Wholetime recruitment and have used the Fire Service College online system in their latest campaign.

4 Considerations for Recruitment

A number of options have been considered for the recruitment processes, to ensure it is run as effectively and efficiently as possible. The various options that were explored are listed below, with the reasons for the preferred provider being chosen also being explained.

Method	Comments	Outcome
In house – use electronic application form and consider a means of setting up the written tests online	This would entail additional pressures on our already stretched ICT team. The application system is not robust enough to deal with the high volume of applications that a Wholetime Recruitment Campaign attracts.	Not recommended
Consider working with another service who have existing system in place which would meet our needs	West Midlands Fire Service no longer use their in-house system and utilise the system provided by the Fire Service College	Not applicable
	Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (along with other regional brigades) have used WMJobs. Shropshire have used WMJobs previously for other recruitment campaigns and found a number of issues with their system. Staffordshire's feedback was that for a recruitment board allowing candidates to apply it was a positive experience, however when it came to additional questions these had to be marked and shortlisted separately, which was highly onerous and resource intensive on their teams. The Brigades that used WMJobs have a contract with them that would include costs for undertaking this piece of work. Shropshire does not.	Not recommended
	The following Brigades all use the Fire Service College system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ South Wales ▪ Humberside ▪ North Wales ▪ London Fire Brigade ▪ Mid & West Wales ▪ Devon & Somerset ▪ West Midlands ▪ Durham & Darlington ▪ West Yorkshire ▪ South Yorkshire ▪ North Yorkshire ▪ Northamptonshire ▪ Kent ▪ Cheshire 	See recommendations below

<p>Consider working with an external provider</p>	<p>The Fire Service College offer an online attraction and selection process, piloted by Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service who highly recommend the system.</p> <p>The system is also being used by a number of other Brigades (as listed above) and presently the feedback is that the system has been very well received.</p> <p>The system provides an online service for the entire process, from candidate registration through the completion of all online assessments. The system can then provide us with a 'top slice' of candidates who should proceed to the next stage, e.g. job related physical tests.</p> <p>The system runs across two platforms. The first is the SIFT system which includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial candidate registration ▪ Realistic job preview ▪ Eligibility screening ▪ Behavioural styles questionnaire ▪ Situational judgement test <p>The next platform is the FRS Ability tests which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Verbal reasoning ▪ Numerical reasoning ▪ Mechanical reasoning <p>There would be little impact on the HR team and no additional resources would be needed to cope with workloads</p>	<p>Preferred option</p>
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The Service has therefore decided to use the Fire Service College system for its recruitment process for the following reasons:

- All sifting will be done electronically
- The SIFT platform was designed and tested in partnership with Fire Service personnel such as Firefighters, Crew Managers, Watch Managers and Station Managers to ensure a fair and realistic process
- Content of the assessments has been reviewed, and approved, by a diversity expert to ensure a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory process
- Scoring is automated through the system, reducing the need for additional staffing to mark/verify the scores

- There will be no impact on current resources as the Fire Service College will manage the online process and provide a shortlist of applicants to progress through to job related tests.

This system has been trialled, and adopted, by a number of Brigades who have all found it successful. It is the least resource intensive of the systems currently available, reducing the need for extra support during the campaign, and the Fire Service College will provide advice, support and assistance throughout the period that the campaign is open.

5 Area restriction

Another consideration within the application process is whether a geographic restriction on the pool of applicants might support the Service in realising its ambition to ensure its workforce is more representative of the communities it serves. Such a restriction would also support the principle of local jobs for local people. For example, should the recruitment process only be open to people who live in Shropshire? This sort of approach has been adopted by a number of neighbouring services. The legal position on this type of restriction is that it would not be considered to be discriminatory because it does not relate to any of the protected characteristics. However, would it help the Service to secure a more representative workforce and would it provide the Service with the best possible firefighters?

In the last wholetime recruitment campaign 1,541 applicants registered for the application process. Of these, only 35% (543) were from the Shropshire area. On completion of all of the processes, of the 11 candidates who were successful in obtaining a post, only 27% (3) were from the Shropshire area. This demonstrates that if the recruitment process only selected from the Shropshire area, then the Service is unlikely to be recruiting from the best candidates that are available to it.

In relation to better representing the communities we serve, with approximately half of Shropshire's population being female, attracting women into the Service could be possible if we were to limit applicants purely to those that live in Shropshire.

However, it should be noted that Shropshire's wholetime firefighters are based in the more urban areas of the county, in Shrewsbury and Telford. Although they do provide response cover to other parts of the county, especially in their specialist response roles, in relation to their prevention activities, much of their work is carried out with the populations in these major towns. In these areas the BME population is much higher than that found in the more rural parts of the county (e.g. The Wrekin area of Telford and Wrekin Council where the BME population accounts for 12.4% of the population). By limiting the recruitment pool to the county of Shropshire, where the overall BME population is only approximately 7%, the Service is unlikely to attract a good proportion of candidates from this particular under-represented group.

However, if the pool was widened to include the whole of the West Midland Region, where the pool of people is significantly greater and the non-white British population accounts for approximately 20% of that larger population, then this is more likely to attract more of the better quality applicants and more candidates from the BME population, whilst continuing to be relatively 'local'.

Members are therefore asked to consider approving a recommendation to the Fire Authority, that applications should only be sought from those people who have a West Midlands Region postcode.

6 Positive Action

Prior to a recruitment campaign going live a number of different options will be explored to help the Service to achieve its ambition of its workforce being more reflective of the communities they serve. These activities are detailed below.

a) Job Share

The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer has indicated that certain BME groups cannot commit to the full time hours of a firefighter. By offering a number of job share contracts the Service would hope to attract these groups.

The Service currently has a female firefighter on a part time contract, agreed through the Flexible Working Policy, and this has been well received. It is hoped that by offering job share contracts at the recruitment stage we would be able to attract more women into the Service.

Offering the opportunity for people to work more flexibly makes the organisation more attractive to prospective candidates. It is proven to increase morale and makes the organisation more resilient.

The Service will therefore look to offer a set number of vacancies on a job share contract. It should be noted that Job share contracts have not been offered to new recruits in the past. As with the case mentioned above, alternative working arrangements have historically only been considered for existing staff through the Flexible Working policy. Another point to note is that job share contracts will incur a higher cost at the initial training stage, as each part time recruit will need to undergo the same training as their full time colleagues. However, this should be balanced against the need to attract currently under-represented groups.

b) Targeting under-represented Groups

The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer has undertaken research into the demographics of the Shropshire area to identify our under-represented groups. This will then assist us in putting together a targeted campaign to assist in attracting, specifically, BME and women into the Fire Service.

The current plan is as follows:

- Host a number of taster sessions in locations where we can target our under-represented groups
- Re-visit current publicity articles (i.e. leaflets and posters) and update them to assist in targeting under-represented groups
- Target leaflets drops in areas where we can capture our under-represented groups
- Target under-represented groups through social media
- The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer will host talks and give general advice to members of under-represented groups (i.e. mosques, temples etc.)
- In previous recruitment campaigns it has been highlighted that BME and women fail on certain written assessments. We will explore with the Fire Service College the option of having practice test assessments available through the website that potential applicants can be directed to in order to give them an idea of what the tests entail. This will be opened up to all candidates but we will also explore having hard-copy test papers that can be circulated at taster days targeted at BME and women to support our positive action campaign.

7 Conclusions

From researching the systems available, taking into consideration the timescales we are working to, it is considered that the system delivered through the Fire Service College is the most efficient and cost effective system to use. The Service will need to work with the Fire Service College with regards to our branding and have been advised to allow 2 to 3 weeks for this to happen. A suggested recruitment timeline is listed at Appendix A.

From discussions with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer, a more strategic and targeted campaign will allow better attraction from our under-represented groups.

8 Next Steps

A consideration for 2018 is to look at the possibility of recruiting apprentice firefighters. This is a method that Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service have adopted and it will be something that we will look to replicate for going forward.

9 Financial Implications

The cost of using the system promoted by the Fire Service College would be approximately £10,500. A breakdown of what is included in that cost can be found at Appendix B

10 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

11 Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has been completed.

12 Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

13 Appendices

Appendix A	Wholetime Recruitment Timeline
Appendix B	Fire Service College Campaign Cost

12. Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Wholetime Recruitment Campaign 2018 – Proposed Timetable

Event	Date	Duration
Positive Action	As soon as approved	Until campaign opens
Social media campaign	Mid December	Until campaign opens
Campaign Opens	29-01-2018	7 days
Successful candidates invited to undertake Assessment 1	05-02-2018	7 days
Successful candidates invited to undertake Assessment 2	12-02-2018	7 days
Successful candidates invited to undertake Ability Tests	19-02-2018	7 days
Campaign Closes	26-02-2018	
<i>1 week (invite successful candidates to JRT's)</i>		
Job Related Tests	05-03-2018	1 week
<i>1 week (Invite successful candidates to interview)</i>		
Interviews	19-03-2018	2 weeks
<i>1 week (invite successful candidates to medical)</i>		
Medical & Fitness	11-04-2018	5 days
<i>8 days (inform successful candidates)</i>		
Induction day	30-04-2018	1 day
Recruits Course	01-05-2018	
On the run	01-07-2018	

****a recruitment campaign timetable will be published on our website informing all applicants at the start of the process, the dates of each stage of the campaign**

Cost of Fire Service College Online Recruitment System

Section	Cost	Includes
Campaign licenses	£7,150	All online stages from registration through the online assessments and automated scoring
Branding	£600	Amendments and additions to the FSC platform to brand in line with SFRS
Set up fee	£1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up all aspects of the online system • Provide links and information for our website • Manage online applications • Deal with all technical queries • Deal with reasonable adjustments where necessary for online assessments • Administration of all online assessments • Shortlisting
Weekly campaign support	£750	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support on communications to candidates • Support on all aspects of the online system during length of campaign
Campaign summary	£500	Downloading of all results, scores, shortlisting in format to fit our needs
Total	£10,500	