

**Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority**

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

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| Meeting | **Service Leadership Team** | Agenda Item | 9 |
| Meeting Date | 17 July 2018 | Report Number | 18-157 |
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| Presented By | Colette Black, Assistant Director of HR | | |
| Subject | **Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment Planning** | | |
| Type of Report: | Information | | |

This briefing paper provides an update on the 2018 Wholetime Recruitment process and sets out the plan for activity ahead of the proposed Wholetime Recruitment in Spring 2019.

1. **Background:**

The recruitment campaign and attraction strategy used during the 2018 Wholetime Recruitment process was designed to recruit firefighters from a diverse range of backgrounds with the personal qualities, skills and attributes needed to become competent firefighters,. The campaign was designed to change perceptions of the role of a firefighter, and who can apply to become a firefighter. This was an opportunity to undertake ‘positive action’ to increase our diversity. This paper sets out the outcomes of the campaign, our current workforce makeup, candidate performance at each stage split by gender and recommendations for future processes.

The actions we took were cognisant of the Local Government Association (LGA) memorandum of understanding in January 2017 on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the fire service. The existing national firefighter workforce was just five per cent female and overwhelmingly white. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) mirrors the national statistics and does not have a great density of BME and Female Operational employees. The LGA memorandum committed to raise awareness of the role of positive action and the law around it in addressing diversity in recruitment and progression.

**Outcomes of the 2018 Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment Process**

Our campaign engaged with thousands of potential candidates (9,241 visitors to our website) and resulted in 1128 applicants who applied within 3 hours on the day that we opened applications. As planned, we closed the application window at this point because we had the number of candidates that we needed. A greater number would have applied if we had not closed the window of opportunity.

From those candidates we have been able to make offers to 5 firefighting squads starting in:

June 2018 (12)

July 2018 (8)

October 2018 (5 on-call conversion)

January 2019 (12)

March 2019 (12)

This covers all of our wholetime recruitment needs for the next 12 months and brings the cost per hire to less than £1,500.

There are more candidates that passed the process and who could be in the talent pipeline for a further year. This has the benefit of continuing to bring down the cost per hire. However, it does not allow us to build on the interest in the Fire Service shown by a diverse range of people and benefit from the learning of this recruitment process. We are therefore likely to advertise again circa April 2019; this date is dependent on whether those that can retire do retire.

* 1. Current ECFRS Workforce

Our success in employing a diverse group of employees is dependent on the effectiveness of the way in which we develop our existing people and recruit our new employees. Encouragement of gender balance is included within this. Table 1 below shows the workforce makeup by employee group. The overall number of men and women in the Support Staff roles are very similar. Overall there is a significant density of males in Operational (Wholetime and On-call) whilst Control has a higher density of females.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **TABLE 1: Workforce Makeup** | | | | |
| **Employee Group** | **2016** | | **2017** | |
| **Male** | **Female** | **Male** | **Female** |
| Wholetime | 604 | 32 | 566 | 34 |
| On Call | 467 | 6 | 506 | 3 |
| Control | 6 | 29 | 7 | 28 |
| Support | 129 | 131 | 150 | 152 |
| **OVERALL** | **1206** | **198** | **1229** | **217** |

Employee turnover refers to the proportion of employees who leave an organisation over a set period, expressed as a percentage of total workforce numbers (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development). The overall total staff turnover figure for 2016 was 13.5% compared to 8.5% for 2017. Table 2 below shows the female and male turnover for each group of staff e.g. support/operational.

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| **TABLE 2: Turnover by Financial Year** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Year** | **Control** | | | **Engineers** | | **Wholetime** | | **On Call** | | **Support** | |
|  | **Female** | **Male** | **Female** | | **Male** | **Female** | **Male** | **Female** | **Male** | **Female** | **Male** |
| 2012-13 | 7.8% | 16.7% | 0% | | 0% | 0% | 4.3% | 0% | 8.9% | 7.7% | 11.1% |
| 2013-14 | 2.5% | 0% | 0% | | 5.1% | 3.1% | 4.5% | 40.0% | 9.8% | 11.3% | 11.6% |
| 2014-15 | 19.4% | 0% | 0% | | 9.3% | 0% | 3.7% | 25.0% | 10.5% | 21.9% | 13.2% |
| 2015-16 | 6.6% | 0% | 0% | | 0% | 8.6% | 5.7% | 28.6% | 12.4% | 16.7% | 16.5% |
| 2016-17 | 3.4% | 0% | 0% | | 21.7% | 9.1% | 15.1% | 0% | 11.1% | 23.8% | 16.5% |
| 2017-18 | 3.5% | 0% | 0% | | 0% | 0% | 6.3% | 66.7% | 14.6% | 8.1% | 9.5% |

There is a significant discrepancy with a higher female than male turnover for On-call during 2017-18. This could be explained by the makeup of the workforce as there are so few females within On call roles that when a female firefighter leaves this has an impact on the overall turnover of females in this group. How we retain on call firefighters will form part of our on call programme of work.

NB - This is the last time that we will report engineers separately, they are being amalgamated as a group into the support figures.

1. **Wholetime Recruitment and Positive Action – Changing Perceptions:**
   1. Taster Sessions

Before the Wholetime recruitment campaign went live in Essex we held two female firefighter taster days which looked to bust the myth that women weren’t strong enough to be a firefighter and that it was only a role for males.

The taster days explained the diversity of a modern firefighter’s role, with increased focus on prevention and protection. The women took part in the bleep test, ladder lift, equipment carry, casualty evacuation and tried on PPE and BA. The first Female Taster Session held on the 20th January 2018 was attended by 44 women and the second Female Taster Session held on the 27th January 2018 was attended by 47 women.

On the 8th February 2018 a further event was held for those who attended one of the taster sessions. The evening session was an opportunity for the attendees to find out more about the role of a firefighter and get further information from our HR and Fitness Teams. There were 28 attendees, this was organised using Eventbrite which showed that the page was viewed 93 times. This perhaps suggests that a selection of evening dates would have enabled more women to be able to attend.

Of the 119 female applicants, 42 (35.3%) had attended a female taster day or evening event.

90 individuals attended a female taster day or evening event in the two months before the application window opened. 42 (46.7%) subsequently submitted an initial application and verified their email address.

Of the 42 females that attended a “taster” event, 5 (11.9%) reached interview stage.

Of those 5, two have received conditional offers and one is on the “reserves” list for 2019.

* 1. ECFRS – join.essex-fire.gov.uk & Perception Change Online Campaign

Our Communication team created an excellent perception change campaign. Overall the website received 10,633 visits from 9,241 visitors. Males made up the majority of visitors and applicants, however 36% of the visitors were females and 31% of those that started applications were females, meaning 86% of females that visited the site were interested in applying.

A hashtag was created that encouraged candidates to #joinessexfire and a sense of anticipation and excitement was created ahead of the applications going live.

The perception change campaign used AdWords via a search and display campaign. This drove 986 clicks to the site and delivered over 105k impressions. The top performing keyword search was “essex fire service”.

Female only targeted campaigns were used across Facebook and Instagram ahead of the recruitment process going live. “Attitude” creative outperformed the “Fitness” message, driving 509 clicks.

On Twitter videos were the most effective media and Twitter was most effective at reaching an interested audience of any channel. LinkedIn targeted specific job roles making certain that we reached a highly relevant audience.

1. **Wholetime Recruitment & Candidate Performance**

Of the 1128 potential candidates that engaged with the process at some point, 66 (5.9%) did not verify their email address in the Applicant Tracking System and progressed no further in the process.

Following successful verification of email addresses, 1062 candidates were invited to complete SHL online testing. The number of candidates starting each stage of the process was as follows.

The campaign emphasised candidates personal strengths and values, rather than focussing narrowly on physical strength.

Table 3 below shows the candidate makeup by gender split by each stage of the recruitment process.

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| **TABLE 3: Candidate Makeup** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Application Stage | Number | FEMALE | | MALE | |
| Number | % | Number | % |
| Online Testing | 1062 | 119 | 11.2% | 943 | 88.8% |
| Written PQA application | 532 | 52 | 9.8% | 480 | 90.2% |
| Physical Assessment | 359 | 42 | 11.7% | 317 | 88.3% |
| Interview | 252 | 10 | 4.0% | 242 | 96.0% |

* 1. Unsuccessful Overall Breakdown

Table 4 below show the number and percentage of females and males who were unsuccessful at each stage of the process.

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| **TABLE 4: Unsuccessful breakdown** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stage at which candidate unsuccessful | FEMALE | | MALE | | ALL | |
| No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Online Testing | 67 | 59.3% | 463 | 52.0% | 530 | 52.8% |
| Written PQA application | 10 | 8.8% | 163 | 18.3% | 173 | 17.2% |
| Physical Assessment | 32 | 28.3% | 75 | 8.4% | 107 | 10.7% |
| Interview | 4 | 3.5% | 189 | 21.2% | 193 | 19.2% |
| **Total Unsuccessful** | **113** |  | **890** |  | **1003** |  |

*Note: % figures represent proportion of all unsuccessful candidates, whether by gender or overall.*

Overall females performed better than their male counterparts at both the PQA application stage and Interview stage whilst males performed better during the Physical assessments. Both genders performed almost equally across the Online tests.

* 1. Unsuccessful Physical Assessment Breakdown

A total of 34 candidates withdrew from the process before Physical Assessment, or were “no shows” on the day.

Of those candidates that failed to successfully complete the Physical Assessment, the reason for failure was as follows. No candidates failed the Ladder Climb, Casualty Evacuation or BA Crawl.

Table 5 shows the number and percentage of females and males who were unsuccessful at each stage of the Physical Assessment process.

This shows that females didn’t perform as well on the Bleep Test and Ladder Lift whereas males didn’t perform well with Manual Dexterity assessment.

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| **TABLE 5: Unsuccessful physical breakdown** |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stage at which candidate unsuccessful | FEMALE | | MALE | | ALL | |
| No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Bleep Test | 17 | 68.0% | 20 | 41.7% | 37 | 50.7% |
| Equipment Carry | 1 | 4.0% | 2 | 4.2% | 3 | 4.1% |
| Ladder Lift | 6 | 24.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 6 | 8.2% |
| Manual Dexterity | 1 | 4.0% | 25 | 52.1% | 26 | 35.6% |
| Withdrew During Day | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 2.1% | 1 | 1.4% |

*Note: % figures represent proportion of all unsuccessful candidates, whether by gender or overall.*

* 1. Successful Breakdown

Table 6 below shows the successful candidate offers broken down by males and females. Of the 59 conditional offers made 10.2% were females.

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| **TABLE 6: Successful breakdown** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Application Stage | Total | Female | | Male | |
| Number | % | Number | % |
| Conditional Offers | 59 | 6 | 10.2% | 53 | 89.8% |
| of which withdrawn | 1 | 0 | - | 1 | - |
| of which reserve offers | 3 | 1 | - | 2 | - |

*Note: % figures represent proportion of all candidates receiving an offer.*

Table 7 below shows the overall success by males and females.

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| **TABLE 7: Overall successful breakdown** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | FEMALE | | MALE | | ALL | |
| No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Proportion of initial 1062 candidates receiving an offer | 6 | 5.0% | 53 | 5.6% | 59 | 5.6% |

*Note: % figures represent proportion of all candidates receiving an offer, whether by gender or overall.*

1. **Future Activity**
   1. **Retaining the interest of the females that applied in this round of f/f recruitment:**

* Make initial contact

All female candidates who were unsuccessful in securing an offer for one of the four squads over the next 12 months have been contacted to ask if they would be happy to hear from the Service and receive regular updates and invitations to events.

* Closed Facebook Group

Set up a closed Facebook page and distribute details for applicants to join if they wish. This could be used to provide updates but also facilitate networking.

* Email newsletters

Emails to be sent every 6 weeks (content to be agreed). Working with the Fitness Team this should include advice and information for areas females didn’t perform as well (e.g. cardio, strength test).

* Continuing Female Engagement Events

3 – 4 events between now and April 2019.

All of the proposed activity fits within positive action as defined by s.158 in the Equality Act 2010. We are also organising to meet with West Midlands FRS who have recently run successful positive action activity.

* 1. **Recommendations for Spring 2019**
* December 2018

Review actual retirements versus planned retirements to update workforce planning and whether/when further recruitment is needed.

* + We currently have 477 actual riders (as at June 2018) at the moment but this includes 35 day crewed staff.
  + We ideally need 480 riders in order to crew appliances with 13/7 riders.
  + The 35 day crewed staff are not currently counted against the 480 required to maintain 13/7 at non-DC stations therefore we have 477 riders minus 35 day crewed riders which gives us 442 actual riders.
  + We need a minimum of 432 riders in order support our agreement with the FBU and keep additional shift working running and so we are not in danger of breaching this. In addition we have a further 5 wholetime firefighters joining in July.
  + We have 49 wholetime firefighters moving into the Service between now and March 2019.
  + Our recruitment needs to take into account the day crewed duty firefighters who are released back in to wholetime firefighting in March 2020.
  + Our anticipated retirements in the next year are between 22-42 and so we anticipate that we will have a need to recruit again in 2019.  However, we will need to monitor anticipated retirements against actual retirements as each cohort of firefighters starts.
* Review ‘Key Lessons Learned and Best Practice Recommendations’

Hold a meeting with key internal stakeholders to gather feedback from other departments to include within the Key Lessons Learned and Best Practice Recommendations document and action recommendations made.

* Stakeholder Planning Meetings

Hold regular meetings with key internal stakeholders between now and Spring 2019 to ensure all parties have input into the planning process.

* Targeted Advertising

Build upon the success of the 2018 online campaign.

* Review assessment methods

Using the statistics provided within this report review the assessment methods and order of assessments.