

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	23 OCTOBER 2025	REPORT NO:	CFO/24/2526
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE	REPORT AUTHOR:	APPRENTICESHIP MANAGER, ASHLEY ROBERTS
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	HEAD OF PROCUREMENT HYWYN PRITCHARD, HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES MIKE PILKINGTON, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)		
TITLE OF REPORT:	APPRENTICESHIP END POINT ASSESSMENTS		

APPENDICES:	NONE
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Purpose of Report

1. To seek Members approval for the award of a contract to Skills for Justice Awards (SFJA) for the delivery of the End Point Assessment (EPA) for Operational Firefighter Apprenticeships.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;
 - a) note the contents of the report; and
 - b) approve the award of a contract for the End Point Assessment of Apprenticeships to Skills for Justice Awards for a period of 5 years based on a total maximum value of the contract of up to £396k, all of which is fully paid from the Apprenticeship Levy.

Introduction and Background

3. In 2019, the Authority moved from the previous National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) approach for the development of new firefighters and implemented the Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship.
4. The Level 3 Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship is a two-year programme for individuals to train and gain the skills, knowledge, and behaviours to become a fully competent firefighter. It includes practical training on topics like fire behaviour, search and rescue, using specialist equipment, and dealing with various emergencies such as fires, road traffic collisions, and floods.

5. Under the apprentice programme, the Authority is able to reclaim significant costs associated with the training and development programme from the apprenticeship levy.
6. The End-Point Assessment (EPA) is the final stage of an apprenticeship. It is an impartial assessment of whether an apprentice has developed the skills, knowledge and behaviours outlined in the relevant apprenticeship standard.
7. An independent End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) is required as part of the apprenticeship to complete EPA's and MFRA have previously utilised Skills for Justice Awards as EPAO in delivering our Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship programme.
8. There are currently two authorised EPAO's in place nationally for the Operational Firefighter Apprenticeships
9. One of the organisations is Skills for Justice Awards (SFJA) which have significant experience in providing EPAs for the Fire & Rescue Sector with long standing relationships with Fire protective services with the organisation having a clear strategy in place and an effective framework for the delivery of the EPA. SFJA also work closely with the NFCC in the revision of many protective services related apprenticeship standards.
10. SFJA have delivered a significant majority of the End-Point Assessments across the sector and have a large team of eighty assessors consisting mostly of recently retired Fire & Rescue Service professionals. Having commenced training and delivery in September 2019, SFJA can evidence robust processes to ensure quality of delivery and continuity of service.
11. The scale, experience and evidence of effective service delivery supports the recommendation to award the contract to SFJA to continue the high quality and award-winning service delivery of Apprenticeships within Merseyside Fire and Rescue.
12. The route to market is through YPO's Apprenticeships and Associated Framework – 1086 that allows direct award to providers and permits call-off contracts.
13. The direct contract award to SFJA would enable a continuation of the ongoing successful partnership supporting forward planning which will be particularly important with the introduction of the apprenticeship assessment reforms and the potential changes with the skills and growth levy as both an Awarding Body and an End-Point Assessment Organisation, and linked with stakeholders, such as Skills England, Ofqual and the NFCC, SFJA is well placed to support MFRA as we navigate future changes.
14. It will ultimately support continued apprenticeship delivery by guaranteeing ongoing access to a proven, experienced, assessment partner who is investing in the industry it serves.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. During the existing arrangements with SFJA, significant work has been undertaken to support equitable delivery and all ensure all learning needs and requirements including reasonable adjustments are built into the process.
16. An EIA has been undertaken for our Apprenticeship Delivery which includes the EPA process.

Staff Implications

17. The End-Point Assessment consists of a knowledge test, practical assessment, a professional discussion/structured interview based on the content of their portfolio. SFJA offers a model that will require some coordination from the Apprenticeship Team. This work is planned into the calendar to limit impact on the team.
18. Once apprentices have passed their EPA, they will become competent Firefighters and complete their probation.
19. A further report will be brought to Members demonstrating the exceptional positive results the Authority has seen as part of our Firefighter Apprenticeship Delivery Programme.

Legal Implications

20. The route to market is compliant with the Authority's Contract Standing Orders and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and has been endorsed by the Head of Procurement. The call off contract also includes appropriate termination clauses should National apprenticeship provisions and/or levy funding arrangements change.
21. All staff will be fully inducted to ensure compliance with all legislation including health and safety, data protection and equality legislation.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

22. The costs of the End-Point Assessment are paid through the Apprenticeship Levy and operate on a call off basis, with costs only incurred where an EPA is requested and no minimum requirements for the number of EPAs as part of the contract.
23. SFJA has a legal agreement in place to ensure that the costs cannot exceed the parameters set out by Skills England. The current SFJA cost per EPA is £1,980.
24. EPAs also incur administration/facilitation time which is claimed through a different funding apprenticeship stream but still within the eligible costs of delivery.

25. The contract value has been estimated based on a maximum of 40 End-Point Assessments per year, which is based on a maximum of two recruit courses of 20 staff per year. This would equate to a total cost of £396k for a period of 5 years.
26. Current workforce planning predictions (Table 1) suggest the number of assessments reducing to around 10 per year from 2029 lowering the predicted cost of £265k. However, should additional firefighting staff leave above predictions necessitating additional recruitment, then further EPA would be required up to the maximum of 40 per year.

Table 1 – Predicted EPA's & Costs

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Predicted numbers	36	38	40	10	10
Cost	£71,280	£75,240	£79,200	£19,800	£19,800

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

27. Skills for Justice have established they will use the Service facilities for assessment of our apprentices and full risk assessments are in place.

Environmental Implications

28. There are no direct environment implications associated with this report.

Contribution to Our Vision: *To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.*

Our Purpose: *Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

29. The Authority has seen fantastic results from our EPA assessments illustrating how our approach to Firefighters apprenticeship delivery is supporting our aim to be the best FRS in the UK, keeping our community safe.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

EPA	End-Point Assessment
EPAO	End-Point Assessment Organisation
SFJA	Skills for Justice Awards