

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION		
DATE:	23 OCTOBER 2014	REPORT NO:	CFO/110/14
PRESENTING OFFICER	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	REPORT AUTHOR:	DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	AM SEARLE, LYNN HUGHES SUZANNE LEA, , GM LONGSHAW		
TITLE OF REPORT:	OPERATIONAL RECRUITMENT STRATEGY 2014/15		

APPENDICES:	A	EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
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Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the operational recruitment strategy for 2014/15, and seek their endorsement of the proposed contractual terms to be applied.

Recommendation

2. That Members note and endorse:
 - a. the recruitment process contained within this report.
 - b. the recruitment of trainee firefighters under the flexible contractual arrangements specified within the report specifically a combined 32 hour Wholetime / 42 hour Wholetime Retained Contract (averaged over a 7 day period).
 - c. that the feasibility of recruiting firefighters onto a 120 hour Retained Contract is explored in order to future proof recruitment and maximise flexibility.
 - d. the development of an apprenticeship model for future recruitment.

Introduction and Background

3. At the Budget Meeting 27th February 2014 the Authority resolved, subject to public consultation and final Authority approval, to implement a number of structural changes to the operational response model in order to deliver savings required as a result of Government cuts to grant funding (CFO/011/14).

4. The structural changes approved by the Authority included the merger of up to 8 single pump stations to create 4 new two pump stations. These decisions were made on the basis that the new stations would be provided with one wholetime appliance and one wholetime retained appliance.
5. This position was also reinforced during the public consultation process conducted by Opinion Research Services and reflects the desire of the Authority to seek to maintain a wholetime crewing model rather than introducing a community retained alternative.
6. It is important to note that officers have on two occasions sought expressions of interest for wholetime retained working from within the current workforce, and whilst this was endorsed by the representative bodies, on neither occasion were sufficient expressions of interest received to crew even one appliance.
7. The necessity to staff appliances more flexibly combined with the need to ensure organisational core competence up to and beyond 2020 means that it is vital that the Authority considers its recruitment strategy now.
8. In order for the Authority to maintain a predominantly wholetime crewing model augmented by wholetime retained staffing it must recruit in such a way as to complement the existing '224' duty system which was recognised by Ken Knight in his Efficiencies Review (Facing the Future) as being very inflexible in its prescribed format within the Grey Book.
9. In recognition of this the Authority approved a £1 million recruitment reserve so as to respond to the future challenges and to build resilience into the current staffing model.
10. Notwithstanding the short term requirement to reduce staff numbers members recognised the need to recruit in the medium term because of the age profile of the workforce and the importance of maintaining a competent and effective workforce over an extended period.

Contractual Options

11. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed members at the most recent Budget Strategy Day that continued recruitment of purely wholetime contracts was no longer viable and further work would be required to establish alternative solutions which provide additional resilience.
12. As a consequence the Authority now needs to consider recruitment which extends beyond traditional 42 hour wholetime contracts, and the need to consider more flexible contracts with particular emphasis on the retained element. This will ensure that the Authority continues to be an employer of choice within the communities of Merseyside, whilst offering different contracts that make the Service more accessible to all.
13. As a result a number of options have been explored, specifically;

- The recruitment of community retained firefighters – based on Grey Book retained conditions; individuals would be employed to provide cover when they are available via a pager. Whilst this is the system advocated within the 'Facing the Future' report by Sir Ken Knight it has a number of limitations around the acquisition and maintenance of competence, regular availability and retention. Additionally retained firefighters undertake no preventative work therefore it is not deemed preferable to pursue this staffing model at this time.
 - The recruitment of firefighters on a 21 hour contract – although this would provide more flexibility this alone would not deliver the additional resilience required. It is also recognised that this might not be considered a suitable wage for staff and might present challenges with regards to recruitment and retention. As such it has been discounted at this time.
 - Members could however consider an alternative approach through recruiting firefighters on a fully retained 120 hour contract – with a commitment to allocate wholetime shifts based on the operational requirements of the Service. Under these circumstances the Authority would use staff more flexibly to cover wholetime shifts using Voluntary Additional Hours, an approach similar to that which is adopted in a number of other public services. This would ensure higher levels of training are undertaken as those staff employed on this basis would be exposed to more core training as a result of being in the workplace more frequently. This approach may present some challenges to the Authority related to initial training and long term retention which would need to be fully explored by the Authority prior to any recruitment process.
 - The recruitment of firefighters on a combined 32 hour wholetime 42 hour wholetime retained contract. This provides a guaranteed number of hours for staff as well as a payment for the undertaking of 42 hours retained duty. It is envisaged the contract holders would also provide a level of operational cover under the retained contract which would be paid at the appropriate hourly rate.
14. Having considered all the options the recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer at this time is that the Authority approves the recruitment of firefighters on a combined 32 hour wholetime 42 hour wholetime retained contract.
 15. This provides for a guaranteed number of hours for those recruited as well as a payment for the undertaking of 42 hours retained duty. It is envisaged the contract holders would also provide a level of operational cover under that retained contract which would be paid at the appropriate hourly rate. The contract would be offered as a package and so would require each individual accepting the contract to opt out of the Working Time Regulations.
 16. The combined contract means that a firefighter joining the Authority would receive circa 85% of a firefighter's wage – with the ability to work additional shifts subject to the exigencies of the Service.

17. It is also the recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer that the feasibility of recruiting firefighters on a 120 hour retained contract is explored in order to future proof recruitment and maximise flexibility.
18. The contracts recommended for Authority approval would be utilised appropriately based on the level of recruitment required to deliver optimal staffing within the ongoing budgetary constraints.
19. The wholetime/ retained contracts would be offered to those candidates deemed successful through the recruitment process.

Positive action

20. The People and Organisational Development team, in conjunction with the Diversity Manager have over the past five months been carrying out work in conjunction with the positive action strategy by attending careers fairs, graduate open days, working with community groups at open days and attending targeted sports events inviting potential applicants to complete a registration card to attend an awareness day.
21. A total of six awareness days were held at the Training and Development Academy which offered potential applicants the opportunity to learn about the application process and the role of firefighter as well as attempt the physical tests, ladder climb and rat run. They were also given an insight into the written tests that they will have to complete.
22. Following the awareness days each individual was provided with a link into the application process, and given a short window of opportunity to complete the application form.
23. This focused action has now closed and 82 applications were received which includes 17 female applications (21%) and 27 from underrepresented groups (33%).

Recruitment Process

24. The next stage is to open up the application process to the wider public.
25. As with the process above applicants will be required to complete a short questionnaire, asking experiential questions which will be assessed based on the organisational values of the Service.
26. Successful candidates will then be asked to complete a numerical awareness and situational judgement assessment, which will then be followed by physical assessment.
27. Successful candidates will then be asked to complete a full application form prior to being invited to an organisational values assessment centre.

28. The final stages of the process are the interview, medical and appropriate clearances.

Firefighters Apprenticeships

29. The People and Organisational Development Department have also considered the use of apprenticeships for long term recruitment given that the Authority remains a significant employer within Merseyside, and as such provides opportunities for employment within our communities
30. Some detailed work has been completed in relation to the development of a firefighter apprenticeship model that provides high quality development, and the opportunity to move into a firefighting role when a wholetime / wholetime retained vacancy becomes available.
31. Further work is required, however apprenticeships come with additional funding, which may offer value for money in the short term but perhaps more importantly, it will be attractive as a development opportunity for young people across Merseyside.
32. Work is being completed to fully understand the potential of this approach and will be subject to a further specific report to members.

Equality and Diversity Implications

33. The utilisation of a positive action strategy ensures that the recruitment process is open to as many applicants as possible, and does not discriminate against any group. The recruitment process is transparent and ensures appointment purely on ability and adherence to advertised job specification and organisational values.
34. The Authority recently approved a revision to its equality objectives – in that any future recruitment would be conducted in a manner to better represent the make-up of the communities of Merseyside and that future recruitment would seek to encourage applications from under- represented groups.

Staff Implications

35. Personnel undertaking the combined wholetime / wholetime retained contract will be required to commit to a minimum 32 hours per week (although there will be opportunities to work additional shifts subject to signing a opt out from the working time directive and an agreement to work voluntary additional hours being in place). An additional period of 42 hours will be available for operational resilience for which they will receive a retaining fee of 10% of a wholetime firefighter's salary.

36. The combined contract means that a firefighter joining the Authority would receive circa 85% of a firefighter's wage – with the ability to work more shifts subject to the exigencies of the Service.
37. This approach maximises the operational effectiveness of the Authority and provides flexibility for staff – offering shifts when they are available subject to their contractual requirements and the exigencies of the Service.

Legal Implications

38. The recruitment and appointment processes accord with all the legal requirements placed on the Authority when operating an open and transparent process.
39. The contract would be offered as a package and so would require each individual accepting that contract to opt out of the Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended).

Financial Implications & Value for Money

40. The change in crewing from wholetime to wholetime retained on four appliances is part of the plan to deliver the savings target of £3.4m required for the financial plan and 2015/16 budget whilst still providing operational resilience.
41. The specific saving from converting a whole time appliance to wholetime retained is approximately £0.8m (22 WTE posts)
42. All firefighters recruited through this process will be in receipt of circa 85% of a wholetime firefighters pay with the opportunity to undertake additional shifts.
43. It is expected that both the wholetime and the retained contract would be separately pensionable in line with DCLG guidance.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

44. The work patterns and hours worked will be monitored and risk assessed to ensure that risk and fatigue is minimised.
45. Firefighters working on the basis of the contractual working arrangements stipulated will undertake more risk critical training than those working a community retained contract. As a result risk will be reduced and higher levels of competence achieved.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

- 46. The Chief Fire Officer will seek to maximise appliance availability through the introduction of more flexible contracts.
- 47. A combination of wholetime and wholetime retained contracts will maximise training exposure in order to ensure the firefighters working these contracts are safe and effective.
- 48. The recruitment of staff on a more flexible contract should reduce the number of occasions when appliances become unavailable due to short term sickness.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- CFO/011/14 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Budget and Financial Plan 2014/2015 - 2018/2019
 - CFO/038/14 Budget Resolution Transitional Response Arrangements - Order Of Appliance Unavailability
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS
