



Report title

## **Firefighter Recruitment**

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Meeting

Date

Resources Committee

15 September 2017

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Report by

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Interim Head of Human Resources

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### **Summary**

The Brigade estimates a requirement to recruit 400 trainee firefighters in the next 18 months to maintain operational requirements. The conversion rates in recent campaigns of 1:18 indicates a requirement for 7,200 eligible applicants to convert to 400 appointments. The HR Team have reviewed the current recruitment process in its entirety to identify areas for improvement and barriers to attraction, working with representatives from the equality networks.

This report sets out a plan for the project to recruit a further 400 trainees by the end of 2018/19 and recommends (i) removing the requirement for applicants to hold a full UK manual driving licence and passing a LGV theory test before being appointed and (ii) removing the London residency requirement and instead focus on targeted advertising and outreach activity to attract candidates from currently underrepresented groups.

### **Recommendations**

That the Committee:

1. Agrees that the requirement for candidates to hold a full manual driving licence at the time of application be removed and note that officers will develop an alternative approach to meeting the requirements of unit 9 of the firefighters role map (FF9) and revisions to PN 860 – 'Unit 9 of the Firefighter role map (FF9); and achieving and maintaining competency without FF9' in consultation with the FBU;
2. Agrees to remove the London Residency requirement for the new firefighter recruitment campaign, scheduled to begin on 2 October, in order to increase applications significantly and give a much better chance of meeting our recruitment target. The impact of this change will be reported back to a future meeting of this Committee; and
3. Notes the contents of the report.

## **Introduction**

1. In January of this year officers reported to the Resources Committee (FEP 2686) on the outcome of trainee firefighter recruitment rounds in 2015 and 2016. These had not delivered sufficient suitable candidates and as a result a number of vacancies remaining unfilled.
2. FEP 2686 proposed a number of changes to the recruitment and assessment processes to assist in improving the number, quality and diversity of recruits. These changes were implemented for two recruitment rounds in January and April this year. However, whilst the quality of successful candidates appears to be good, the number of individuals eligible to apply is wholly insufficient to meet operational needs. This has further been reflected in the response to the third and most recent campaign which was timed to take full advantage of the ITV documentary on the Brigade, but again the number of eligible applicants (762) is disappointingly inadequate. Appendix A details the number of applications received to campaigns since 2008.

## **Demand: Operational workforce planning**

3. Firefighter numbers at the beginning of 2017/18 were 122 below establishment and there have been 95 firefighter leavers to date. Officers anticipate a further 150 leavers before the end of the financial year, which brings the total potential vacancies to 367. Set against this, the Recruitment Team predict 200 appointable candidates from the three campaigns run so far this year.
4. Officers estimate beginning 2018/19 with c167 vacancies and the workforce planning prediction is for 236 leavers during next year. The recruitment target for 2018/19 would therefore be 400 firefighters in the next 18 months to meet operational requirements.
5. It should be noted that from the time of application to starting training is around six months and from training to being posted to a station takes a further three months. Therefore the current shortages in operational capacity will continue and could worsen over the next year as staff continue to leave faster than the Brigade can recruit replacements.
6. Also this does not include any allowance for promotions including the impact of role to rank which may result in more firefighter vacancies as additional posts higher in the structure (Sub Officers and Leading Firefighters in particular) are filled.
7. The recruitment of trainee firefighters remains the key method to intake new talent to the Brigade, although the LFB have recently invited transfers of competent firefighters from other Brigades and will continue to do so. However the numbers of applicants and successful appointments from this route is small in relation to overall needs (c30 this year).

## **Supply: Available candidates**

8. Officers have reviewed the most recent campaigns to predict the number of candidates required to achieve the target of 400 appointments. This indicates that the conversion rate from applications to appointable candidates using the current assessment process is 18:1, therefore to deliver 400 appointable candidates will require at least 7,200 applications.
9. This compares adversely to the experience in the last 12 months where three separate campaigns have delivered c3400 applications. The Brigade therefore needs to take action to secure a much greater number of applicants, whilst maintaining the quality, if it is to meet

operational requirements. Action falls into two areas: eligibility requirements and candidate attraction.

#### 10. Eligibility criteria

Currently to apply to be a firefighter candidates must:

- Be at least 17.5 years old when applying.
- Be a UK/EU citizen, without work restrictions or be a permanent resident of the UK.
- Have had a permanent London address for the past 12 months.
- Hold a full UK manual driving licence.
- Have successfully completed a Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) theory test before being invited to the medical examination.

#### Driving licence requirement

11. Currently trainee firefighter applicants must hold a full UK manual driving licence. This was agreed by the Authority in March 2004 (FEP 537). If they successfully progress through the assessment centre stage, they must also pass the LGV theory test certificate before moving further.
12. Research shows that in England 33% males and 29% females in the age group 17-20 hold a full driving licence (DoT National Travel Survey 2016) which significantly restricts our candidate pool in this age group. For 21-29 year olds the proportion increases to 66% overall.
13. Cost is another barrier as according to the Driving Standards Agency (2016), the average learner driver needs 47 lessons before they pass their test at an estimated cost of £1400. In London in particular, young adults are thought less likely to learn to drive given the prohibitive costs and availability of other transport methods.
14. This report recommends that the driving licence requirement is removed to aid recruitment. Options will then be developed to ensure that new recruits can meet the on going requirement to carry out driving duties. For example the proposal might be that new trainee firefighters would be expected to pass their driving test at their own cost and comply with unit 9 of the firefighters role map (FF9) within the first three years' service. The Brigade will look to negotiate reduced cost driving lessons for trainees, although it would not enter into any contractual arrangements with driving schools.
15. If the Committee supports this proposal, officers will work with the FBU to to amend PN 860 – 'Unit 9 of the Firefighter role map (FF9); and achieving and maintaining competency without FF9'.

#### London residency

16. In January 2015 (FEP 2379), Resources Committee agreed to endorse the proposal that applicants for the 2015 firefighter recruitment campaign be required to demonstrate three years' residency in London. The rationale for introducing this criterion was to increase diversity and knowledge and understanding of London in the operational workforce. It was considered that having a workforce more reflective of London's population would improve the operational effectiveness of the Brigade. This has particular importance for community fire safety (e.g. HFSV visits, schools talks, public education events, LIFE courses, JFIS work), fire regulatory work, emergency medical response, and firefighting and rescue work itself.
17. In January 2017 (FEP 2686) Members agreed to reduce the London residency requirement from three years to a period of 12 months and asked that the impact be kept under review. It was also agreed that the London residency requirement be relaxed for those who are

currently serving in, or have recently left the Armed Forces; students resident in London prior to commencing their course; and London Fire Brigade FRS/Control staff living outside of London who wish to apply for the firefighter role.

18. There is no way to assess the specific impact that the London residency requirement has had on applicant numbers as officers do not know how many candidates *would* have applied from outside London. However Appendix A shows the comparative application numbers for campaigns in the last ten years. This shows that whilst the diversity of candidates has increased, the overall number of applicants, and therefore appointees, from all groups has been significantly reduced.
19. The level of operational vacancies is becoming critical and the Brigade needs to make significant progress in addressing the shortfall through the new recruitment campaign, scheduled to begin on 2 October. The London Residency requirement had a significant impact on applicant numbers in the last two years and therefore officers propose that the next campaign should be open to everyone, regardless of where they live. This should increase applications significantly and give a much better chance of meeting the recruitment target in terms of overall numbers. Officers would review the impact of this change after the campaign has delivered the first 2500 applications and would report back on progress to this Committee.
20. Officers are also seeking to drive up applicants numbers from specific sections of the community through the use of Outreach and a new targeted attraction campaign (see below).

### **Attraction campaign**

21. As agreed by Members in January, work is underway to launch a new a recruitment campaign that will reframe how people think about the London Fire Brigade. In its initial form this campaign will focus on encouraging more women to apply – this will not be to the exclusion of other groups – but it will target women and messaging will be developed that specifically deals with the barriers to women applying that the Future Thinking research identified (FEP 2686).
22. The Brigade appointed the creative agency BBD Perfect Storm in July to help create the new campaign. They are tasked with delivering it by October and work is well under way to develop new messaging, new imagery and a new perspective on what it takes to be a firefighter and look after your community. The campaign platform will be "Firefighter: Means so much more" , highlighting the variety within the role of firefighter and the opportunities it holds as a professional career. The campaign is being designed so that although in this instance it will target specifically women, it will be possible in later iterations to focus on other underrepresented groups.
23. The campaign deliverables will include a video, imagery, digital assets and a new recruitment campaign microsite, as well as resources which will be able to support to the work of the new outreach team and other officers working across the Brigade to talk about recruitment.
24. Examples of the campaign materials are appended to this report (Appendix B)

## **Outreach activity**

25. Members previously agreed to re-establish an Outreach Team to promote diversity and the firefighter role to a wider audience, Their role will be to encourage applications for employment from under –represented groups and offer pre application training ahead of the recruitment process. Following discussion amongst officers, it was decided that the Outreach Team would be best located with the existing Community Safety function, to take advantage of the expertise and community links that already exist in that area. This has delayed the establishment of the new function but team is now being set up and work has begun. However it should be noted there will be limited outreach activity in place before the October campaign launches but this will gather momentum in coming months. Some of the activities that are being planned include:

### Open Days at Local Fire Stations

26. Evidence from the previous Outreach Team indicates that open days were one of the most successful tools for supporting diverse groups to apply for the firefighter role. It provides direct engagement with potential candidates, challenging any misconceptions about the role and an opportunity to support candidates through fitness tests. This is particularly useful for women who may feel this is a barrier, and can be provided with an enhanced fitness programmes.
27. Evidence also indicates that BAME groups have higher failure rates at the ability tests and perform poorly in the group exercise. The open days and events could offer guidance, hold practice test sessions or sessions which target specific development needs. Support would also be available for applicants with learning needs such as Dyslexia who will be encouraged to access additional help through the open days.
28. We are considering linking this activity to more localised recruitment, to support the 'sell' in the attraction campaign that recruits will be working to support their local community. The Inclusion Strategy identifies Borough Commanders as key to this, supported by the outreach team.

### Support for Cadets

29. There is a working group exploring strategies to support suitable individuals who have progressed through Fire Cadets programme to have a pathway into the firefighter role through an apprenticeship programme, but this is a longer term strategy. It is important to note that it is not planned that this process becomes an automatic fast track route for any person interested in joining the Brigade. Support sessions at open days for potential Cadet candidates will go some way to support this group in the short term.

### Targeted Activities

30. Potential candidates from under-represented groups will also be funnelled to Open Days through the outreach team promoting the role of the firefighter at:
- Job/Career fairs
  - Community events
  - Public sector colleges
  - Fresher's fairs
  - Fitness/sports centres
  - Secondary schools and other youth organisations through the Brigade's youth schemes
  - Existing partnership links Borough Commanders and Station Managers have with their communities

## Financial implications

31. In January 2017 the Committee approved (FEP 2686) the establishment of a reserve of £600k to fund the proposed re-establishment of the firefighter recruitment and outreach team for a period of two years (£550k), and the development of new advertising campaign materials and media placement in 2017/18 (£50k).

32. The funding for new posts will now be:

### Community Safety

1 X Outreach co-ordinator (FRS D £46,442pa)

1 X Outreach Support Officer (FRS C £40,213 pa)

2 X Outreach Watch Manager A specialists (2 x £50,970pa)

### HR

1 x Fitness advisor (FRSD £46,442pa)

3 x administrative staff in firefighter recruitment team (FRSB 3 x £ 33,934)

All posts will be established until 31 March 2019 and costs will be contained within the provision of £550k as agreed.

33. The additional funding of £50k for advertising campaign materials is being used to fund the external attraction campaign materials.

## Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments

34. When reviewing the residency requirement earlier this year, the Committee were advised as to the implications of the Equality Act 2010 and the European Union freedom of movement provisions. It was explained that for a residency requirement to be justified it would have to be demonstrated that it was a reasonable means of securing a legitimate objective (i.e. the improved operational effectiveness of the Brigade). However if the rationale were simply to increase the proportion of BAME firefighters, without reference to operational effectiveness, there would be a risk that the Authority would, if challenged, not be able to demonstrate that such a requirement was reasonable. If the Committee accept the recommendation to remove the residency requirement, this risk is avoided.

## Director of Finance and Contractual Services comments

35. This report sets out the plan to resolve the current recruitment challenges and the envisaged recruitment of 400 trainees by the end of 2018/19.

36. It is currently forecast that the budget for operational staff will underspend in 2017/18 by £4.0m, and this relates to operational vacancies due to the current recruitment challenges. This underspend is in addition to the increase in the vacancy margin in 2017/18, agreed as part of the budget.

37. This report presents an updated structure for the recruitment and outreach team, set out from paragraph 33. It is expected that all costs will be contained within existing budgets.

## Sustainable Development Implications

38. There are no direct sustainable development implications to this report.

### Staff Side Consultations Undertaken

39. Staff side have been involved in discussions about how to improve the number and diversity of firefighter recruits. The FBU are supportive of the proposals to remove the requirement to hold a full manual driving licence subject to further consultation of the implications of this change. The FBU position is that the London Residency requirement should be removed as this is a barrier to achieving a full operational establishment.

### Equalities Implications

40. A key strategic aim of the Authority has been the objective of achieving an operational workforce which reflects the diversity of the community it serves, in particular in respect of women and BAME staff. This objective continues to have a high priority for the Brigade, and informs the recommendations within this report.

41. The Inclusion Strategy and accompanying action plan, which was endorsed by the Authority at its meeting on 30 June 2016 (FEP 2590), includes a number of activities relating to firefighter recruitment, i.e. the development of proposals for enhanced cadet and apprenticeship programmes, including pathways for cadets to become trainee firefighters; the review of social media targeted digital marketing, promoting greater use and investment where it has proven successful; a general review of our recruitment process, seeking good practice from similar industries who are also seeking to attract greater diversity of applicants to identify what we could do differently; and ensuring the support groups are involved in recruitment planning. Updates on this work will be provided through report-backs on the Inclusion Strategy.

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### List of Appendices to this report:

Appendix A: Trainee firefighter applications received 2008 – 2017

Appendix B: Examples of new firefighter recruitment campaign materials

<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985</b>	
<b>List of background documents</b>	
1. FEPs 2590, 2686, 2379	
2. PN 860 – 'Unit 9 of the Firefighter role map (FF9); and achieving and maintaining competency without FF9	
3. Department of Transport National Travel Survey 2016	
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## Firefighter recruitment campaigns: number of applications received since 2008

	London Residency requirement applied						No London Residency requirement		
	2017 (Aug)	2017 (Apr)	2017 (Jan)	2016 (Jul)	2016 (Feb)	2015	2011	2009	2008
<b>Total number of applications</b>	762	923	1708	703	1196	1598	8762	5768	5968
<b>Number of women applicants/ (%)</b>	82 (11%)	94 (10%)	181 (11%)	73 (10%)	159 (13%)	149 (9%)	733 (8%)	586 (10%)	600 (10%)
<b>Number of BAME applicants/ (%)</b>	184 (24%)	265 (29%)	470 (28%)	199 (28%)	308 (26%)	451 (28%)	1808 (21%)	1321 (23%)	1390 (23%)

Examples of visual treatments for the campaign

