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Subject

## Firefighter Recruitment

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Brief for

Members of the LFEPA Resources Committee

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At the Resources Committee meeting on 3 November, Members asked for data on the breakdown by gender and ethnic background at each stage of the firefighter recruitment process. This briefing provides the requested data together with relevant background information.

### ***Assessment Process and the 'conversion rate'***

Firefighter recruitment is a very open process. Candidates for firefighter positions do not require any previous work experience or formal qualifications. Many candidates are school and college leavers. The average age range for a successful candidate is 24-29 years of age but many applicants are younger than this.

Given there is no previous work experience or qualification requirement, the process attracts candidates with a wide range of backgrounds. The recruitment process is therefore rigorous in testing that individuals have the skills and demonstrate the behaviours required for the role. However it also means that significant number of candidates drop out at key stages, either because they are unsuccessful or because they withdraw.

The process currently involves the following stages:

- 1 Register personal details on-line
- 2 Online job preview and confirmation of eligibility to apply
- 3 Two online scenario based tests of behaviours and judgement: these tests are used elsewhere within the national fire service
- 4 Ability tests in maths, English language and mechanical reasoning: these tests are used elsewhere within the national fire service and replaced the requirement for GCSE level passes
- 5 Verification tests. As the ability tests are taken online at home, there is a short verification test to confirm competence for those who pass
- 6 Assessment centre – group exercise, two role plays and a structured interview
- 7 Physical work related tests
- 8 Medical assessment

The ratio of 18 applicants for every successful appointment cited in FEP 2775 is drawn from the experience of the first campaign we ran in January 2017. In this campaign,

- 15% of applicants who registered to apply withdrew at the first stage when asked to confirm they were eligible to apply. Eligibility at this stage included holding a driving licence and being resident in London for at least 12 months.
- A further 19% of applicants who reached the ability test stage dropped out when required to provide documentary proof of residency.

- The biggest drop out is at ability test stage where the pass rate was less than 40%. These are tests of maths, English language and mechanical reasoning which have been specifically designed for the national fire service. They are GCSE level standard and replaced the requirement for formal qualifications. Given the low pass rate, officers have reviewed the testing and scoring processes for in consultation with the company who designed the tests. As a result changes have been implemented which have improved the pass rate for the campaign run in August.
- Around 40% of candidates pass the assessment centre, which is in line with general recruitment practice.
- Most candidates pass the physical fitness tests (c90%) and the medical (c70%)

An alternative to a very open recruitment campaign could be to require previous experience or some form of qualification to narrow the field of applicants. The MPS for example require candidates for police constable to pass a Certificate in Knowledge of Policing before they can be appointed. The CKP course involves around 300 hours of study and costs between £800-£1000 which applicants are expected to fund themselves although means tested interest free loans are available.

### ***Diversity impact***

The appendices detail the number and diversity characteristics of applicants at each of these stages in respect of two further campaigns run this year (May and August) where the majority of candidates have progressed to the end to the process.

The pass rate figures at each stage show a degree of consistency between applicants from different backgrounds. However candidates from a BAME background have lower pass rate at the ability tests in maths, English language and mechanical reasoning. This is therefore an area of focus for our outreach activity to equip candidates to prepare for these tests (see below).

### ***Recruitment Outreach***

Recruitment open days have historically been one of the most successful tools for supporting diverse groups to apply successfully for the firefighter role. Our new Outreach Team has begun to hold open days and these will continue into the new year. These events provide direct engagement with potential BAME and women candidates and ensure that they are provided with accurate information about the role and support with the assessments.

Specialist women only open days have been successful in the past. The benefit of these are that they are offered a comfortable environment in which to seek advice and support with the fitness element of the assessments. They can also be provided with an enhanced, bespoke fitness programme to address any development needs.

Evidence indicates that BAME groups find the ability tests and group exercise challenging. The open days and events offer guidance, hold practice test sessions or sessions which target specific development needs.

### ***Conclusion***

The firefighter selection process is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and delivers successful candidates who have the capability to pass the intensive training programme and to be successful in the role, with the potential to progress further within the Brigade.

We have recently compared the firefighter recruitment process to that for MPS police constables. The process is very similar – both include an online job preview and confirmation of eligibility to apply; online scenario based tests of behaviours and judgement; an assessment centre; and a fitness and medical assessment. The MPS do not use ability tests but do require candidates to achieve the Certificate in Knowledge of Policing (CKP) before they can be appointed.