



Report title

## **Firefighter Recruitment – Update**

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Meeting

Resources Committee

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Report by

Interim Head of Human Resources

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### **Summary**

At their meeting on 17 September 2017, the Resources Committee approved changes in the requirements for firefighter candidates to support the recruitment of 400 trainees by the end of 2018/19 (FEP 2775). Specifically, the Committee approved (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) suspending the London residency requirement. The report also set out plans for targeted advertising and outreach activity to attract candidates from currently underrepresented groups.

This report updates Members on the impact of these changes on applicant numbers and the plans underway to recruit additional firefighter trainees with a view to achieving a full establishment. The need to attract and recruit diverse, high quality candidates and thereby support operational resilience, will continue to be a priority for the Brigade under the new governance arrangements.

### **Recommendation**

That the report be noted.

### **Introduction**

1. In January 2017 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. FEP 2686 proposed a number of changes to the recruitment and assessment processes to assist in improving the number, quality and diversity of recruits.

2. These changes were implemented for three recruitment rounds in January, April and July 2017. However, the number of eligible applicants for all campaigns was too low to meet operational requirements. Officers therefore returned to Committee in September with a proposal to recruit 400 firefighters by the end of 2018/19 to address operational shortfalls (FEP 2775).
3. In order to achieve this more challenging target, Members firstly agreed to remove the requirement to hold a full UK manual driving licence and to successfully completed a Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) theory test before appointment. These requirements are potential social and economic barriers to younger candidates and those from lower income households.
4. The Committee also agreed to suspend the London Residency requirement which obliged applicants to have had a permanent London address for the previous 12 months. The residency requirement had a significant dampening effect on applicant numbers in the previous two years and officers advised suspension would increase applications significantly and give a much better chance of meeting the recruitment target.
5. Officers also set out in this report the positive action being undertaken to encourage more women to apply to become firefighters, and to support applicants from all backgrounds, but particularly BAME and women candidates, to prepare for the selection process. An update on this attraction and outreach activity is set out later in this report.

### **October recruitment campaign**

6. The Brigade ran a recruitment campaign using the new criteria for four weeks in October and it proved very successful. The previous three campaigns during 2017 had delivered a total of c3,400 applications. The October campaign, without the driving licence and residency requirements, produced 5,232 candidates:

<b>2017 Ff campaign 4</b>		<b>Women</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>BAME</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>LGBT</b>	<b>LGBT male</b>	<b>LGBT female</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Applications</b>	No.	550	4682	775	4457	525	382	143	234	<b>5232</b>
	%	11%	89%	15%	85%	10%	7%	3%	4%	

7. Candidates from this campaign are now progressing through the various stages of the assessment and selection process. Officers estimate this campaign will deliver approximately 200 successful candidates which will provide a strong foundation to achieve our target of 400 new firefighters within a year.

### **Attraction strategy**

8. As agreed by Members in January 2017, the Communications team have developed a new attraction approach to reframe how people think about the London Fire Brigade through new messaging, imagery and a recruitment microsite. This began in the October recruitment campaign and will develop further in the new campaign which launches on 8<sup>th</sup> March. This campaign focusses on encouraging more women to apply –not to the exclusion of other groups – responding specifically to the feedback the Future Thinking research identified (FEP 2686).
9. The phase of the campaign launching 8th March 2018 will put in place a strong digital marketing strategy to target women in London. Working with digital marketing agency Wavemaker, procured through the TFL procurement framework, the campaign will target women on a number of platforms from Facebook to news outlets. Women who have visited the recruitment website will retarget to encourage them to complete their application. This marketing will continue for the full six weeks that the campaign is open. The paid for digital marketing will be supported by media activity and digital content across the all of the Brigade's digital platforms.

### **Outreach overview**

10. 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 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.
11. Research and previous best practice indicates that outreach activity is most effective when it is carried out at grassroots level, particularly with BAME communities. With this in mind the Outreach Team are linking with a number of local events around London to encourage potential applications from under represented groups at career fairs, colleges/universities, sports centres and places of worship. The team have attended over 60 events since July 2017, and have a further 70 booked in targeted areas up to September 2018 . Nearly 400 potential candidates signed up for more information at these local events. They were then invited to 'Attraction Days' at Paddington Fire Station where they had an opportunity to learn more about the varied careers in the fire service and receive personal support with preparing for the various application stages and fitness tests.
12. These Attraction days are divided into Women's events and those for BAME men. To date, 5 attraction days have been delivered and 8 more are planned between now and the end of April when the next campaign closes. Over 60 potential trainees have attended these events and another 90 people on the waiting list to attend future attraction days. Eighty per cent of these are women and experience shows they are motivated and dedicated to both apply and succeed, no matter how many attempts it takes. The team are also supporting the Brigade's Fire Cadets at these events, who have demonstrated an interest in joining the fire service and have the skills and attributes which are an asset to the organisation.

13. There is also a longer term strategy planned to engage with young people ages 14-17 to encourage them to consider a career in the fire service from an early age, through inviting them to 'Fire Brigade Taster days', where they can visit their local stations for organised talks about careers in the Brigade and participate in some drills. This will be targeted in areas with high BAME communities to encourage them to engage with the Brigade as a uniformed organisation, through a positive experience. Meeting role models from the fire service at their local fire station will be a powerful way to send this message. The Brigade is also attending a number of career events such as at the Excel Centre in Newham where nearly 30,000 young people attended. Many were from BAME communities around Newham and this was their first experience speaking to the fire service about careers.
14. The Outreach Team are working closely with Borough Commanders across all areas to devise local strategies to encourage recruitment from within London and each Borough Commander is nominating local Outreach Champions to lead on this. For example, in April, Wembley station are hosting a multi-agency recruitment event, inviting local colleges and members of the community to attend to learn more about the firefighter role and take part in drills in full PPE. Some champions are organising our attendance at religious events to promote the role to BAME communities.

#### Outcomes

15. From the work outlined above there will be a larger volume of women applying for the role and it is envisaged that the additional support at the attraction day will give them the best chance possible to pass the assessments. Attracting and inspiring women to consider the fire service as a career has been effective due to the high profile of women in the service this year, media coverage, the Brigade promotion on social media and having a positive role model in the Commissioner.
16. The Brigade did not undertake firefighter recruitment for several years to 2015 and the previous outreach team was disbanded due to budget pressures. The new team is reinvesting in working with BAME communities, linking with Fire Stations. Rebuilding networks, identifying and addressing the issues within these communities will take time to address and require longer term strategies. These are communities which are varied, and have complex reasons as to why they do not view the role of a fire fighter as attractive or a viable career choice. The Brigade are therefore commissioning research to better understand the barriers preventing predominately Black and Asian communities from joining the Brigade and this analysis will support the development of a strategy to overcome the barriers.

#### **Expanding our training places**

17. Officers are confident that our new approach combining innovative attraction techniques, outreach activity and established selection techniques, will produce a higher number of appointable, quality candidates. Consideration has therefore been given to how the Brigade can maximise the impact of this activity and recruit to full establishment in 2019/20.
18. This would require an expansion in the number of training places which is governed by the Babcock training contract. Officers are therefore in active discussions with Babcock on options that might increase the number of trainee delegates by up to 100

over the next 12- 18 months. This will take into account any cost implications and how they might be funded.

### **Financial implications**

19. 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).
20. The funding for new posts has been as follows:

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

21. Additional funding of £50k for advertising campaign materials has also been funded from general underspends. This is in addition to the original £150k advertising budget bringing the total cost of the new campaigns to £250k.

### **Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments**

22. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services has been consulted and has no comments to add.

### **Director of Finance and Contractual Services comments**

23. This report provides a progress update on plans underway to recruit 400 trainees by the end of 2018/19.
24. The 2018/19 budget report also on today's agenda currently includes an assumption that there will be 85 vacancies on average during 2018/19.
25. It is also noted that the financial implications set out from paragraph 19 to 20 above will be contained within the £600k earmarked reserve.

### **Sustainable Development Implications**

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

### **Staff Side Consultations Undertaken**

27. Staff side have been involved in discussions about how to improve the number and diversity of firefighter recruits.

### **Equalities Implications**

28. 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.

29. 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; a general review of our recruitment process, seeking good practice from similar industries; and ensuring the support groups are involved in recruitment planning. Updates on this work will be provided through reports on the Inclusion Strategy.

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#### **List of Appendices to this report:**

None.

<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985</b>	
<b>List of background documents</b> 1. FEPs 2590, 2686, 2775	
Proper officer	<b>Interim Head of Human Resources</b>
Contact officer	<b>Tracey Dennison</b>
Telephone	<b>020 8555 1200 x30451</b>
Email	<b>tracey.dennison@london-fire.gov.uk</b>