



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Human Resources Committee

WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT POSITIVE ACTION AND NEXT STEPS

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 09 November 2018

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with the outcomes from the whole-time firefighter recruitment campaign and associated positive action measures.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 For the first time in six years, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has undertaken a whole-time firefighter selection process, with appointments to trainee firefighter roles made from September 2018. The selection process was preceded by a comprehensive positive action and awareness campaign which started in June 2017.
- 1.2 NFRS, like other Fire and Rescue Services, is aware that the number of female firefighters and employees from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds has remained relatively low over a long period of time and has been working to improve the diversity of its workforce through engagement and awareness raising within the community.
- 1.3 The equalities monitoring report provides further information about the profile of the workforce and recent recruitment.

2. REPORT

WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER POSITIVE ACTION AND RECRUITMENT

- 2.1 In the summer of 2017, NFRS began its awareness campaign for firefighter recruitment. This included a range of activity design to attract under-represented groups to the role of firefighter. The work included:
 - Targeted radio advertising on community radio stations;
 - Social media presence;
 - Traditional print media – targeted drops;
 - Firefighter role models providing advice and support;
 - A partnership with Nottingham Jobs – Nottingham City Council;
 - Attendance at festivals and the Corporate Games;
 - ‘Firefit’ gym sessions aimed at women;
 - Firefighter awareness days;
 - Mentoring sessions;
 - A WhatsApp group to promote a network of support between candidates.
- 2.2 Much of this activity was organised by a firefighter on secondment to the Organisational Development and Inclusion Team. The recruitment process began in March 2018 and 599 people applied within a 48-hour period. The recruitment process lasted five months and included the following stages: application, literacy/numeracy test, physical job-related tests, assessment centre (presentation, group exercise and interview), medical, swimming test. At the completion of the selection process, 44 people have been offered jobs as wholetime firefighters. This is broken down in the following way:

	%	Number
Male	70.5%	31
Female	29.5%	13
White British	81.8%	36
BAME	18.2%	8

- 2.3 In terms of diversity, this is the most successful campaign the Service has ever undertaken. 37 of these individuals will be required to complete a firefighter training course at NFRS's Service Development Centre with the first course of 14 having started in September, the second in January with the third expected to take place during Autumn/Winter 2019.
- 2.4 In order to share the Service's approach to positive action and recruitment with other fire and rescue services, a case study has been developed and is attached as Appendix A.

INDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FIREFIGHTERS

- 2.5 To ensure that the new trainees experience a positive introduction to NFRS, and to enhance retention, a range of measures are being implemented to maintain support and development for the individuals in their first year of service.
- 2.6 Off-station support is being trialled as a result of 'Little Acorns' (staff suggestion scheme) and provides the new firefighters with a point of contact or "buddy" outside of their normal workplace. Over 25 staff (coaches and those role models who were part of the WDS firefighter awareness campaign) have volunteered to be points of contact and will receive training to assist them in their role. This is an informal relationship which is intended to offer support and advice if it is needed.
- 2.7 Rotation of watch and work location will be put in place to widen the exposure and experience of firefighters in development, whilst ensuring that responsibility for managing performance and welfare is retained by the Watch Manager at their base station.
- 2.8 Development activities including a 'ride-along' with EMAS colleagues, attendance at the 'Women in the Fire Service' development weekend and other activities will also be offered. There is also an intention to bring each firefighter trainee course back together during the year to ensure that their induction in to the organisation is going well.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The value of engaging with potential candidates, through positive action events, prior to the selection process has been instrumental in improving both the diversity of applications and quality of the candidate experience. This ensures that applicants understand the demands and nature of the role and are able to prepare for the selection process. Engaging with communities needs to be an ongoing process, not just at the point of selection, but through continuous contact. The Organisational Development and Inclusion Team will be seeking ways to further develop such opportunities as part of a programme of positive engagement.
- 4.2 The Human Resources, Inclusion and Learning and Development Teams work closely with applicants through positive action events, throughout the recruitment process, and following appointment to ensure a positive experience and introduction to the service. Time invested in this way is more likely to ensure the retention of new entrants, embed our values and build trust at an early stage.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken as this is not a function, policy or service change. However, the positive action work undertaken has had a positive impact on the diversity of the successful applicants and it is recommended that a similar approach is adopted for future campaigns.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this work.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The importance of recruiting, developing and retaining new firefighters is a critical part of succession planning, which ensures that the Service is able to meet its current and future service demands. The investment in attracting and recruiting new firefighters with the skills and behaviours to be effective in an operational role, and with the potential to progress to higher roles is therefore a significant investment in the future, particularly considering the time between recruitment processes. It is important that the service can retain and develop the potential of each recruit to realise this investment.
- 8.2 The work undertaken to recruit, train and provide a positive induction into the Service as set out within the report, whilst resource intensive, means that

trainees fully understand and have the resilience to meet the varied demands of an operational role, and feel supported by the Service. A positive experience at this early stage of employment should therefore lead to higher levels of engagement, and increase the likelihood of retention and future progression.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

Whilst it was not possible to undertake a joint recruitment process with neighbouring fire and rescue services due to timing and systems issues, it is the intention to seek to collaborate on future recruitment and recruit training. However, NFRS contacted and met with a range of fire and rescue services to learn lessons for the 2018 campaign and have provided feedback at a national level to inform best practice. Conversations have also taken place with Nottinghamshire Police regarding their equalities priorities and there may be opportunities to work more closely with them on positive action and careers workstreams.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of the report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

**Wholetime Firefighter
Recruitment and positive action
case study – 2017-18**



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Introduction

During early 2017 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) started planning a wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign and associated positive action activities. The Service last recruited to wholetime Firefighter positions in 2012. From a diversity perspective this had been successful and it was agreed that this approach should be maintained and built upon in 2017-18.

As a result of this work, 44 new firefighters (including 4 transfers from other Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs)) will be entering the workforce over the next 18 months; 18.2% of these new starters will be from BAME backgrounds and 29.5% will be women.

Resourcing

One of the biggest differences this time around was resourcing. NFRS has started providing development secondments for FFs and support staff in to the OD and Inclusion team. The secondment of a FF on to the team in July 2017 working full-time on positive action and the recruitment campaign made a huge difference to the impact made during this campaign. We also recruited a range of Firefighter 'Role Models' - men and women from different backgrounds - to attend and support festivals and cultural events, FF Awareness Days, mentoring sessions etc.

Another significant part of this positive action work was the work undertaken in helping female candidates to maintain and improve their strength and fitness from September 2017 onwards. A female FF has been running fitness sessions on a weekly basis from a boxing gym using fire service equipment. The participants forged a real team work ethic which helped develop fitness, strength and confidence. Although we didn't have large numbers of women applying, the quality of those that did was very high, and it was this that led to the high success rates of women in the process.

Planning

The planning and execution of the Service's positive action campaign, took place from summer 2017, in conjunction with the planning of the recruitment process. The Service advertised a placement opportunity for a wholetime firefighter to undertake positive action activities supported by the Organisational Development and Inclusion team to utilise operational experiences, capabilities and knowledge of participating in a wholetime recruitment process.

The branding used in advertising wholetime firefighter positions was an important factor to consider. The Service's communications team were involved in the

planning and established a branding campaign with the slogan 'Yes You Can' used within marketing materials including careers leaflets, radio advertising and merchandise used at events – this was a strapline used by another fire and rescue service who agreed to let us use it. Role models from a diverse range of backgrounds were recruited to feature within the campaign from interested firefighters, crew and watch managers across the Service.

Equality Act – Section 159 – 'Tipping Point' Provisions

Another important consideration within the planning of the positive action campaign was use of the tipping point criteria within the Equality Act. The provision to appoint an applicant from an under represented group over one from a represented group where they are equally qualified, however after much consideration it was decided there wasn't a desire to use it.

Learning from Others - WhatsApp Groups

During the planning stages of the positive action, other services who had recently undertaken recruitment were contacted to share any learning outcomes and ideas. For example, Leicestershire FRS had used WhatsApp groups during their most recent recruitment process. Through this group, the candidates had been able to share ideas, motivate one another and answer each other's questions. This was something we set up with people through positive action and it was an invaluable way of communicating. Cornwall, Derbyshire, Manchester, Gloucestershire and South Yorkshire FRS's were also contacted to share best practice.

Much consideration was given to the stages of the recruitment process and how this impacted on different groups of people, to ensure it recruited the most suitable applicants for the role. For example, the fitness standards were reviewed to address previous issues raised in terms of strength and fitness of previous trainees. This led to NFRS introducing hose-running as a job-related test.

Working with Nottingham City Council and 'Futures'

NFRS had worked successfully with the City Council in 2012 and we were keen to do this again for this Wholetime firefighter campaign. We met with the Nottingham Jobs/Futures team before the beginning of the positive action and they agreed to help us to book people on to firefighter awareness days. They understood the organisation's objective to get the best people for the job but they were also aware of the very low percentages of women and people from BAME backgrounds in-role and they were keen to help us address this under-representation through advertising and encouragement.

Nottingham Jobs helped book people on to the 13 Awareness Days we ran (2 open to just women, the rest open to all) and also attended one of our sessions at the Service Development Centre to support mock interviews with those who were rated Green (from the RAG rating) on the physical elements of the role. The team also helped us to advertise the awareness days through job centres and their own networks.

Prior to the recruitment process, 'Futures' (a local advice, skills and employment agency) ran an interview skills session much like the ones they had delivered for Crew and Watch Manager promotion processes earlier in the year.

Advertising and Awareness Raising

Interviews were carried out on Notts TV (local TV network), Radio Kemet and Radio Dawn and Radio Faza (all aimed at ethnic minority audiences) about the Service's positive action and recruitment campaign and the reasons for undertaking positive action, dispelling myths and also promoting the Service's careers. We moved away from the typical corporate-sounding script for the radio adverts and changed it to a passage delivered in the first person by FFs about themselves and why they joined back in 2012. This felt much more authentic and was something we'd do again.

Social media channels were also utilised in raising awareness of the Service's recruitment campaign and awareness days.

The Service started to advertise its recruitment campaign at the summer festivals it attends, through the 'Yes You Can' leaflet featuring several of the Service's firefighters who acted as role models within the 'Yes You Can' campaign. The 'Yes You Can' team then moved into visiting job centres, interacted with attendees, raised awareness of the careers within the fire and rescue service and marketed the Service's awareness days to attendees.

Short films were also produced of our role models discussing their careers, advice and experiences, these were uploaded to YouTube and shared through the Service's social media channels. An information event was also held at the Pakistan centre in St Ann's, where a presentation was delivered, by the role models and was introduced by the Chief Fire Officer.

In addition to attracting BME communities the Service also wanted to attract more women and people identifying as being lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, we therefore advertised in QB (a local LGBT+ newsletter) and in female changing rooms at leisure centres across the county.

Awareness Days

The Service's positive action activity was designed around the stages of recruitment to provide participants with awareness of the firefighter career and skills needed to be successful in-role. To ensure the Service's positive action activity was as effective as possible, the Service monitored the progress of its applicants and RAG-rated them according to their strength in each area of the physical elements to allow for gaps in skills to be identified.

The Service delivered awareness days to increase understanding of the role of a firefighter, the job-related test standards and the recruitment process, both providing the opportunity for participants to find out more and to deselect if aspects of the role did not suit them. The awareness days were open to all, except for two which were women-only days giving women the opportunity to experience the physical fitness tests in a more relaxed environment.

Preparation for the recruitment process

To help prepare awareness day participants for the recruitment process, the Service delivered mentoring sessions. The sessions were predominantly about ensuring that attendees understood the huge commitment they were making in applying for the role, making sure they knew what the job could be like (positives and negatives), making sure they were prepared for the selection process. Further JRT sessions were undertaken covering hose-running and confined spaces.

The Recruitment Process

The Service made the decision to limit the number of applications able to apply to 500. In previous years, the organisation has had higher numbers of people applying, but has then had to engineer and resource a process of deselection in order to get numbers down to a manageable number. Due to system constraints, 599 people ended up applying and a brief sift was undertaken in order to check eligibility and thoroughness of the application.

The process took the form of an application form (no PQA questions – just two Qs about motivation for applying and skills they could bring), literacy and numeracy tests, job related tests, assessment centre and references, criminal records checks and a swimming test. It was decided to test that applicants can swim 25 metres (untimed) to ensure water confidence.

Job-Related Tests

305 candidates went through the Service Development Centre job-related tests. 44 of these were women and, as expected, a lower proportion of women passed these tests than men. The overall pass rate was 55.4%. Men passed at a rate of 58.2% and women passed at a lower rate of 38.6%.

169 people got through to the assessment centre. 10.1% of these were women and 17.8% from BME backgrounds.

The Assessment Centre

For the first time NFRS introduced a group exercise (building a wigwam using canes, newspaper and sellotape) and a presentation alongside the traditional interview we've always relied upon in the past. The Wigwam Exercise was the idea of Nottingham City Council and they led on this on the day.

This was a great way of seeing candidates in different environments and allowed us to introduce a behavioural assessment element to the process. The presentation was community safety-related and was chosen by the candidate from four possible topics covering a range of areas and audiences. They had 30 mins to prepare and 10 minutes to deliver the presentation.

Although only 10% of candidates were female, their success rate at the assessment centre was high (29.5% of successful candidates). A high proportion of the female candidates demonstrated excellent levels of commitment and enthusiasm

throughout the process and it was obvious that they had worked hard on their preparation.

17.8% of Assessment Centre attendees were from BME backgrounds and 18.2% were successful.

NFRS shortlisted 169 people to the assessment centre. Between 10 and 12 per day candidates were assessed over a 5-week period. Most of the days were hosted by the City Council in their offices at Loxley House. Watch Managers, Station Managers and support staff all helped with the different elements of the assessments. The Diversity of the panels was sometimes difficult and we were not always able to ensure ethnic and gender diversity on each panel. We tried to work with the City Council's diverse panels network (PARC Scheme) but unfortunately this didn't work out in the end.

Conclusion

In summary, this recruitment process and the associated positive action work in advance have been very successful. A significant proportion of people (24) who attended awareness days, mentoring and gym sessions have been successful (54.5%). We got to know the candidates more through this process and started to see how committed they might be to the process. The RAG-rating turned out to be very useful and we know that a significant number of those rated 'green' were successful. However, we also know that one or two of those who didn't perform from day one at Awareness Days put in huge amounts of effort to meet the required standard and were successful.

This was a hugely resource-intensive process but very rewarding in terms of the successful candidates. In terms of retention, we are now working on an induction process for the new people including 'Off-Station Support' in the form of a buddy or mentor who will help the individual with any 'cultural'/welfare issues which they may come across as they settle in to the organisation.

Lessons Learnt

Review the way in which literacy and numeracy levels were assessed. The online literacy and numeracy assessments could have run more smoothly. They were not as self-explanatory as we would have liked and this did affect candidate experience.

The positive action and awareness could have been explained internally earlier and this may have helped with the communications process later on in the process.

Adoption of project management principles as well as the appointment of a project manager would have really helped bring the various strands of this work together.