



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT 2020

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 23 April 2021

Purpose of Report:

To provide members with an update on the Wholetime Recruitment Process which took place during 2020.

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 During 2020 the Service undertook a selection process to recruit wholetime firefighters for entry in to the organisation from April 2021. The last such process took place in 2017/18. Planning for this work began shortly after the national lockdown was instigated, which made the management of the process and positive action campaign even more challenging than in previous years.
- 1.2 A central part of the campaign was the positive action work to attract under-represented applicants to the role of firefighter, this included women and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. Face to face fitness and familiarisation sessions have always been key to the success of positive engagement; much of this activity had to be delivered online via webinars and social media.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Planning for the recruitment process commenced in May 2020, with final interviews taking place in December 2020. The process included application, on-line testing, Job Related Tests, interview and finally, medical assessment.
- 2.2 Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Service worked with an external consultant to deliver on-line testing for mechanical reasoning, literacy and numeracy and Situational Judgement.

POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES

- 2.3 The organisation seconded a Crew Manager to the Organisational Development and Inclusion (ODI) team to help manage the positive action process. A large proportion of the positive action activities were open to all but were targeted to improve the diversity of attendees. Based upon feedback from previous recruitment campaigns, which highlighted the stages at which different groups of applicants were least successful, Activities took place during the summer in the run up to the recruitment process and included -
 - Zoom webinars (x 8 sessions approximately 170 people attended);
 - Familiarisation with the role
 - Overview of the process
 - Online fitness and strength education
 - Interview mentoring sessions (x 3 sessions approximately 120 people attended);
 - Literacy/numeracy practice sessions x 6 sessions (BAME candidates only);

- Face to face fitness sessions (x 10) – COVID-19 risk assessments permitting.
 - Some of these were targeted solely at women to begin with and were then opened up to all.

2.4 It should be noted that the festivals including Nottinghamshire and Worksop Prides, Mela, Carnival, Eid Festival and Nottingham Cultural Festival were all cancelled this year and so it was necessary to use more direct marketing strategies using social media and more traditional methods. This included several Facebook Live interviews, radio interviews/advertising, social media advertising, mail shots and YouTube films.

2.5 The positive action co-ordinator (Crew Manager) also used WhatsApp groups during this campaign to assist candidates and provide a platform for answering questions or concerns.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

2.6 The recruitment process itself opened on 24 August 2020. Within less than a week, over 600 applications were received. At this point, the applications stage was closed. Candidates were immediately directed to a third-party provider to complete the online tests. The next stage included the job-related (physical tests) which took place at the Service Development Centre in Ollerton over three weeks.

2.7 An assessment centre was originally planned to be face-to-face, but this was changed to a Zoom presentation and interview due to limitations resulting from COVID-19. Over 120 interviews took place between 19 November and 16 December.

2.8 95% of the interviews were balanced in terms of gender and 30% were represented by BAME panel members. Whilst the latter number is not as high as the Service would like, it was an improvement on previous years and something the organisation will seek to improve for all interview panels during 2021-2022.

RECRUITMENT FIGURES

2.9 Out of the 646 who successfully applied, 28 were successful at interview stage. This includes 2 transferees and an internal applicant from the NFRS on-call cohort.

	All	White British	BAME	Prefer not to say	Female	Male	LGBT	Disability
Applications	646	481	99	66	78	568	52	27
Online Tests	563	425	86	52	63	500	44	27
Job Related	242	199	32	11	20	222	22	15

Tests								
Interview	132 (incl 6 transferees)	107	16	9	10	122	15	6
Successful	28	21	4	3	5	23	5	2

- 2.10 15% of applicants were from BAME backgrounds with 14% being successful at interview. Although there is a slight drop (from 15 to 14%), the success rate for this group was generally level throughout the process. The last Census 2011 suggests that 12% of Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City's population is from a BAME background.
- 2.11 Women made up 12% of applicants and 17% were successful at interview, demonstrating high performance through the process.
- 2.12 Whilst lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gender (LGBT) candidates represented 8% of all applicants, the success rate of those identifying as LGBT was 17.9%. This is far better than previous campaigns and may indicate that LGBT applicants consider the service to be a supportive employer.
- 2.13 Of those applicants who declared a disability, 7% were successful at interview compared to 4% of all applicants. It should be noted that the physical requirements of the job are not conducive to making reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, as would normally be the case for non-operational roles.
- 2.14 The outcomes will be subject to successful medicals and therefore may change. Successful candidates will start their careers as trainee firefighters on courses starting in April and September of this year.
- 2.15 Whilst the outcomes from the campaign are positive in terms of diversity of appointments, there is still a challenge to make the workforce more reflective of the communities it serves. Attraction rates of women, LGBT applicants and people from BAME backgrounds to firefighting roles need to improve further in order to make a marked difference to the make-up of the workforce in the future.
- 2.16 It is anticipated that the next firefighter appointments will be in 2022 and planning for positive action will commence prior to this to ensure that full engagement with prospective applicants leads to a higher level of interest from applicants who are currently under-represented within our workforce.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Online testing was funded by a budget dedicated to maintaining 'business as usual' during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Crew Manager seconded to the ODI team was funded by existing budgets.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

The human resources and learning and development implications of this recruitment campaign were identified and addressed during the project.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment (EIA) was undertaken for the Wholetime Recruitment and Selection Process. Workforce diversity and positive action measures have been highlighted in the report.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The positive action work and EIA above helps the organisation to meet its requirements under the Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk implications arising from this report.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

The Service liaised with Nottinghamshire Police and Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service whilst planning the campaign and associated positive action. This allowed the Service to learn from partners' approaches to positive action.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

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

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER