



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

APPRENTICESHIP UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 02 July 2021

Purpose of Report:

To outline the delivery of the operational firefighter apprenticeship programme within the Service.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the progress made in the employment of operational firefighter apprenticeships roles; and
- Agree to receive further update papers in the future.

CONTACT OFFICER

Name : Craig Parkin
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Tel : 0115 967 0880

Email : craig.parkin@notts-fire.gov.uk

Media Enquiries Contact : Corporate Communications Team
(0115) 967 0880 corporatecomms@notts-fire.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) is one of a handful of Services nationally to offer an apprenticeship for wholetime firefighters in their development and route to operational competence. As a public body, NFRS is subject to the apprenticeship levy and already uses apprenticeships in various support functions across the Service.
- 1.2 The Service commenced delivery of the operational firefighter apprenticeship programme in January 2019. This was initially delivered in conjunction with Sheffield College.
- 1.3 A decision was taken in September 2019 that the Service become a registered employer provider for operational firefighter apprenticeships. This meant that the Service was able to run and administrate in house courses; allowing the Service to fully utilise the apprenticeship levy rather than incurring a cost of using a third-party provider.
- 1.4 Therefore, the Service is now subject to OFSTED inspection as an apprenticeship provider. This report serves as an addendum report to the annual update provided to Human Resources Committee on 22 January 2021, to provide an update following an OFSTED new provider monitoring visit which took place in March 2021.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Since the start of the apprenticeship programme, the Service has 11 competent firefighters that have successfully passed through the operational firefighter apprenticeship programme. A further cohort of eight apprentices are due to undertake their end point assessment in July 2021 with the expectation that all will be successful.
- 2.2 A further 24 operational firefighter apprentices will commence the programme in 2021-22 and the intention is that the apprenticeship route will continue to be the mainstream development programme for all new wholetime duty system firefighters.
- 2.3 In March 2021, OFSTED undertook a formal short notice new provider monitoring visit to the Service to review the quality of our in-house programme against three standard themes:
 - **Theme One. How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?** The Service was considered to have made **significant** progress. The inspectors commented positively on the overall strategic vision for the provision and how it fitted in with the widening participation strategy for underrepresented groups.

In addition, the inspectors commented positively on the comprehensive and well planned theoretical and practical elements of the work and the significant experience of manager, supervisors and trainers involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme.

- **Theme Two. What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices?** The Service was judged as having made **reasonable** progress. The inspectors commented favourably on the overall programme sequence and competence development across the 2-year development programme with well-planned on and off the job training supported by high quality eLearning.
- **Theme Three. How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place?** NFRS was judged as having made **reasonable** progress. The report highlighted the Service had a strong safeguarding and welfare culture with apprentices feeling safe and with access to a comprehensive level of support.

- 2.4 As part of the monitoring visit, the Service presented its self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. The plan sufficiently covers the areas identified for development during the monitoring visit which included embedding of the 'prevent' duty as part of safeguarding training and an increased focus on English and mathematics skills to support learning.
- 2.5 Had the Service received a progress judgment of **insufficient** on any of the three themes, then it would have been required to undertake a further re-inspection visit, with the possibility of losing employer-provider status. Due to the positive outcome of the monitoring visit the Service will now receive a routine full inspection within two years.
- 2.6 The successful OFSTED report means that the apprenticeship levy can continue to be drawn down by the Service for in-house firefighter apprenticeship provision.
- 2.7 A copy of the OFSTED monitoring report is included at Appendix A to this report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 NFRS currently pay an apprenticeship levy of approx. £120K to central Government per annum. This is then drawn back down by the Service to fund the apprenticeship programmes.
- 3.2 Each operational firefighter apprenticeship is now funded at £14K per individual for the programme delivery and end point assessment. The next two operational firefighter apprenticeship cohorts will generate a return to NFRS over the two-year programmes (at 12 apprentices per cohort) of approx. £250K as the employer provider.

- 3.3 An additional incentive payment of £3K per apprentice will be received for all apprentices who commence their training in 2021, meaning an additional £72K can be drawn down for the two firefighter apprenticeship programmes running this financial year. This money will be re-invested to support the apprenticeship development through enhanced digital learning training materials.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

All firefighter apprentices are in wholetime duty system establishment posts and are permanent NFRS employees with full employment rights. They are on national FRS operational staff pay scale as firefighters and they are not on an apprenticeship pay scale.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An initial equality impact assessment has not been undertaken as there has been no change in policy or service delivery.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An effective firefighter apprenticeship programme helps to mitigate a range of risks for the Service by ensuring effective training provision is in place and it is subject to external quality assurance, scrutiny and review.
- 8.2 A number of elements of the apprenticeship programme mitigate risks associated through the promotion of learning associated with health and safety, safeguarding and equality, diversity and inclusion;
- 8.3 The OFSTED monitoring visit positive result will be visible to HMICFRS, employees, communities and other interested stakeholders as it is published into the public domain.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications, as currently no other regional partner has taken forward an operational firefighter apprenticeship programme.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Note the progress made in the employment of operational firefighter apprenticeships roles; and
- 10.2 Agree to receive further update papers in the future.

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

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Nottinghamshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 2625253

Name of lead inspector: Helen Whelan, Her Majesty's Inspector

Inspection date(s): 30–31 March 2021

Type of provider: Employer

Address: Fire Service Headquarters
Bestwood Lodge Drive
Nottingham
NG5 8PD

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by ESFA and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Nottinghamshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority began to offer the level 3 standards-based operational firefighter apprenticeship from September 2019. There are currently nine apprentices in learning. Before this, the authority was a subcontracted provider for a local college. Managers have considerable experience in operational firefighter development.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Significant progress

Senior leaders have a strong rationale for training new employees to reach a nationally accredited standard through the apprenticeship. The apprenticeship forms a key part of the authority's widening participation strategy, to successfully attract under-represented groups into the fire service. Managers recruit apprentices to meet the needs of the local and regional context. They follow fully the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.

Managers ensure apprentices gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours by planning and implementing an effective curriculum. Initial training comprehensively covers the main competencies of the firefighter role. This includes intensive, well-planned theoretical and practical work. Learning is carefully scaffolded and extended. Apprentices have time to practise their skills until they reach a high level of competence before their next phase of training. Staff set exacting standards and are ambitious about what apprentices can achieve.

Managers ensure apprentices thoroughly review their learning after a year in training. This allows them to monitor their retention of knowledge and skills over

time, and, if needed, to fill any gaps through further training. Additional off-the-job training prepares apprentices well for their final assessment.

Trainers have significant fire fighter experience and work as supervisory managers. They undertake extensive sector-specific updates and have teaching qualifications that allow them to perform their roles very effectively. Apprentices use excellent resources to develop their skills. They deal with different types of fire, work at height and use breathing apparatus in different training scenarios. These realistically replicate incidents apprentices will face on the job.

Managers have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. Self-assessment is self-critical and includes decisive actions to bring about improvements. External governance is provided at a strategic level through the Fire Authority. Although oversight is provided by senior leaders, robust internal scrutiny is not yet fully integrated into quality assurance systems.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Reasonable progress

Apprentices' prior learning, physical and practical skills are thoroughly assessed before they start the apprenticeship. They quickly learn the core competencies and knowledge they need to be able to join a Watch as a trainee firefighter. Once in role, they gain experience to deal with more challenging situations.

The sequence of the apprenticeship is clear and logical. In the initial stage, trainers break down competencies into manageable topics to help apprentices make swift progress. They teach core skills, including the use of ladders and how to be a first responder. Once at the station, apprentices follow a detailed framework to develop their knowledge and skills further. This takes place through a combination of well planned on- and off-the-job training.

Apprentices are assessed frequently. They receive extensive verbal feedback from their managers. This helps them master the wide-ranging aspects of the role. Areas for development are not routinely captured in observations. This limits the opportunity to identify areas an apprentice may need support with. Apprentices are well prepared for their final assessment through revision sessions and mock tests. They have access to high-quality online materials, which support their learning.

Trainers do not focus enough on the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills. Apprentices do not recognise that they need to continue to develop these skills as part of their studies.

Apprentices have weekly meetings with their manager to review their progress. This helps them to stay on track. Apprentices who fall behind are very well supported to catch up quickly. Apprentices benefit from progress reviews with their assessor and manager every six weeks. However, these focus more on the percentage of the qualification that has been completed rather than the underpinning learning.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Staff maintain a strong safeguarding and welfare culture. Appropriate procedures are in place to assess risks and manage safeguarding referrals. Managers ensure staff are recruited safely.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) receives suitable training for the role. Staff have a good awareness of local risks and their potential impact on apprentices' experiences. Apprentices are well informed. For example, the DSL shares case studies to raise awareness about mental health and the fire risks associated with hoarding.

Managers complete a 'Prevent' duty action plan that captures key local and regional issues. This needs to be further embedded into apprentices' training. A few apprentices would like to understand more about how to identify signs of radicalisation.

Apprentices feel safe and have access to a comprehensive range of support. Trained mentors offer ongoing personal and professional guidance. Apprentices can seek the support of a counsellor, occupational health professional and service chaplain. Those who have experienced traumatic events are swiftly signposted for specialist support.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021