



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Community Safety Committee

ON CALL RECRUITMENT

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 07 October 2022

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with an update regarding the challenges and recent efforts to increase On Call recruitment.

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Members requested an update regarding On Call recruitment at the Community Safety Committee on 17 June 2022. This report highlights the challenges faced, and progress made, between 01 April 2021 and 31 July 2022.
- 1.2 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) currently has 16 On Call sections. These comprise of 12 stand-alone sections and four that share a station with a wholetime crew.
- 1.3 On Call sections are crewed by firefighters who live and/or work within approximately five minutes of their local fire station. They offer availability to fit in with their home and work commitments and are alerted via a pager to emergency incidents when required. On Call firefighters meet the full breadth of a firefighter's role map in not only attending incidents, but also delivering the Service's prevention and protection priorities within their local communities.
- 1.4 County-wide campaigns to recruit On Call firefighters take place three times a year, with the aim of maintaining or increasing establishment levels at all sections. However, it is becoming increasingly challenging for the Service to recruit to On Call roles due to several factors that are highlighted in Paragraph 2.1 below. These challenges are issues which face the fire and rescue sector nationally and are not particular to NFRS.
- 1.5 The challenges facing the sector are recognised by the NFCC On Call Strategic and Practitioner Groups who prioritise improved recruitment and retention as the key to ensuring the sustainability of the On Call system.
- 1.6 In 2019, the NFRS On Call Support Team (OCST) became the Service lead for On Call recruitment, supported by Human Resources, Learning and Development, Occupational Health, and Corporate Communications. At the outset, a review of On Call recruitment was completed, and improvements were made to make the recruitment process more efficient and engaging for applicants. During the reporting period, approximately 600 hours have been dedicated by the OCST to On Call recruitment.
- 1.7 Appendix A shows the current establishment levels at each On Call section.

2. REPORT

ONGOING ON CALL RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

- 2.1 As highlighted in Paragraph 1.4, the fire sector nationally faces On Call recruitment challenges which impact on the number of applications received. Challenges include the:
 - Requirement to live and/or work within approximately five minutes of the fire station;

- Societal changes, especially in more rural communities, such as ageing populations and less people working within their local community;
- Reluctance of primary employers to release staff during their contracted hours;
- High level of commitment required for initial training, including the need for time away from primary employment;
- Commitment to hours of availability required to maximise appliance availability, especially during the daytime;
- Perception of low rates of pay when compared to the level of commitment required;
- Perceived difficulty to suitably manage a work/life balance;
- Potential impact on primary employment.

2.2 Between 01 April 2021 and 31 July 2022, NFRS received applications for firefighter roles at all On Call sections. Whilst the application numbers are encouraging, the number of applicants rejected through the selection process remains disproportionate to those applicants starting trainee courses.

2.3 In total, the Service received 178 applications during the reporting period, which resulted in 34 (19%) starting one of four courses. A further 52 applications have been received for the trainee course starting in January 2023. Following the initial sift, 41 (79%) have been invited to attend the next stage of recruitment in September 2022.

2.4 The On Call recruitment process delivers a robust means of identifying the most suitable candidates. This process consists of the following elements, which must be passed before progression to the next stage:

- Initial sift based on proximity to station and proposed availability;
- Written tests (maths, English, memory recall and dictation);
- Practical job-related tests (JRTs) and fitness test;
- Formal interview with the section Watch Manager and the OCST Station or Watch Manager;
- Full medical with the Occupational Health team before being offered a position subject to DBS checks and references.

2.5 The rate of failure at each element varies. During the period, the failure rates were as follows:

Initial Sift	29%
Written Tests	12%
JRTs & Fitness Test	69%
Interview	18%
Medical	50%
DBS check & references	0%

2.6 The highest failure rate was during the fitness test. Of the 95 applicants invited to complete the fitness test, 32 retracted their application or failed to attend, and 36 failed to reach the minimum pass level.

PROMOTION OF ON CALL ROLES

- 2.7 The OCST, with the assistance of sections, Corporate Communications and the EDI Team, have planned and facilitated several 'try it' initiatives during the reporting period, to increase the understanding of the role of an On Call firefighter and encourage applications.
- 2.8 Such initiatives have afforded the opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions about the role, gain an understanding of the recruitment process, engage in fitness sessions, and observe demonstrations delivered by current On Call firefighters.
- 2.9 Throughout the reporting period On Call Sections were encouraged to promote their role to potential applicants by conducting leaflet drops, attending community events and job fairs, holding coffee mornings, and generally being visible in their community. Areas where these interventions worked particularly well were in Hucknall, Ashfield and Stapleford which attracted 23 applications between them (with 14 being successful).
- 2.10 The OCST and Corporate Communications hold at least two live webinars prior to each application closing date. These webinars are bookable events aimed at presenting a realistic view of the role of an On Call firefighter from both an organisational, and from a serving On Call personnel's perspective. These webinars also give many opportunities to engage and ask questions relevant to the role and the recruitment process.
- 2.11 Within the reporting period, the Service's website has been upgraded and now includes a specific On Call portal as part of the careers page. This has updated information, including case studies and videos about the role. A significant improvement has been the inclusion of an 'expressions of interest' link. This allows the potential applicant to register their interest via a simple form. This information is passed to relevant sections via the OCST to allow a direct contact to be made. This function enables early engagement with potential applicants prior to a recruitment window being opened.
- 2.12 Throughout the reporting period, the OCST has liaised with the primary employers of potential applicants to explain the On Call role, the potential implications of it on their primary employment, and the benefits it can bring in terms of individual development. Going forward the OCST is planning a series of roadshows to proactively target business owners who employ potential applicants. The first of these is due to take place in Tuxford in November 2022.
- 2.13 As highlighted in Paragraph 2.1 above, the demands of initial On Call training has been identified as a challenge for some applicants. During the reporting period the OCST has developed and introduced a new Safe-to-Ride (STR) Policy. Trainees now have the option to complete a modular programme over a 12-month period as opposed to a traditional 13-week course.

- 2.14 Since the introduction of STR, 50% of new trainees have opted for the modular programme and have reported that access to this was a factor that enabled them to apply for the On Call role.
- 2.15 Paragraph 2.1 also highlights that the commitment to hours of availability, especially during the daytime, presents a challenge for potential applicants. During the reporting period a Flexible Contract trial has taken place at two sections. The trial ended on 31 August 2022 and an evaluation report with recommendations will be presented to the CRMP Assurance Board in October 2022.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because the information contained in this report does not relate to a change in policy or procedure.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 places a duty on NFRS in respect of the delivery of its services to communities.
- 7.2 The Local Government Act 1999 places a statutory duty on NFRS to '*secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised*'. The reporting of Service Delivery's performance ensures that the Service is focusing on key objectives as set by the Fire and Rescue Authority and continuous improvement. This ensures that Members can apply effective scrutiny to be satisfied that statutory obligations are being met.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There is an increased risk to service and the communities of Nottinghamshire, if On Call recruitment challenges are not sufficiently identified and resolved.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Service continually seeks opportunities to work closely with partner organisations to maximise efficiency and to provide the highest level of service to the public. Collaboration opportunities to deliver efficiency have been identified with Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service to explore the feasibility of shared initial On Call training.
- 9.2 Nottinghamshire Police has been approached to collaborate in identifying and resolving common challenges linked to the recruitment of Special Constables and On Call firefighters. This has also enabled the potential to engage with Nottinghamshire Police as part of Employer Engagement activities.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

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

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX A

ON CALL SECTION ESTABLISHMENT AS OF 01 SEPTEMBER 2022

Section:	Establishment:
Ashfield	15
Bingham	13
Blidworth	11
Collingham	11
East Leake	15
Eastwood	16
Harworth	12
Hucknall	19
Misterton	13
Newark	18
Retford	15
Southwell	13
Stapleford	19
Tuxford	13
Warsop	16
Worksop	17