

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY



REPORT REFERENCE NO.	HRMDC/08/5
MEETING	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	12 SEPTEMBER 2008
SUBJECT OF REPORT	FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT
LEAD OFFICER	Steven Pope – Human Resources Manager
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the report be noted.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	At the last HRMD committee meeting on the 19 June 2008, Members requested further information in relation to staff transferring from the Retained Duty System to the Wholetime Duty System and in respect of the Government's proposals for a Graduate Recruitment Scheme. This information is included within this report including background information on the transfer of retained to wholetime, our workforce planning and details of the National Firefighter Selection process.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	
APPENDICES	Appendix A: New Recruit Firefighter Selection Flowchart
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 At the last HRMD committee meeting on the 19 June 2008, the Members requested further information in relation to staff transferring from the Retained Duty System to the Wholetime Duty System and in respect of the Government's proposals for a Graduate Recruitment Scheme.
- 1.2 With regard to the Graduate scheme, this is referred to within the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 document and under the heading of Equality & Diversity it states that:
- 'To help and support FRA's in improving diversity in their workforce at all levels the CLG will work with stakeholders to develop initiatives for High Potential and Graduate Entry Management Development Schemes.'*
- 1.3 The document also states under Training & Development that:
- 'High potential development and multi-level entry schemes are designed to identify and bring on talent through the organisation and encourage recruitment of people with diverse skills and backgrounds. A collaborative approach to implementing such initiatives is likely to produce more resources-efficient solutions. Consideration should be given to the role of Regional Management Boards in taking this forward.'*
- 1.4 Despite a government announcement regarding the introduction of such a scheme into the Service, Communities and Local Government has, to date, brought forward no proposals.
- 1.5 The National Framework was published in May 2008 and at this point in time the concept of a multi-entry scheme has not been incorporated into the Corporate Plan or departmental business plans but will be a matter for further consideration in preparing for next year's update to our plans.

2. **BACKGROUND TO RETAINED TO WHOLETIME TRANSFERS**

- 2.1 The concept of transfers from the Retained to Wholetime is based on Firefighters having the same set of competencies whether in one duty system or the other.
- 2.2 Since the introduction of rolemaps and the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), it is possible to assess Retained Firefighters in the same way as Wholetime Firefighters. Whilst the initial acquisition of skills takes longer for the Retained Firefighter, they have the potential to reach the competency level of their wholetime counterpart.
- 2.3 Traditionally within the Fire & Rescue Service, retained staff have not been able to transfer to Wholetime and this same position has been taken throughout the Southwest. Within the former Devon FRS, wholetime staff taking on additional retained duties were not able to carry across their previous rank or role as we now have within the Fire & Rescue Service. They would therefore start as a Firefighter whatever their previous wholetime position. Within the former Somerset FRS wholetime staff were not offered the opportunity to take on additional retained duties. In both the former DFRS and SFRS, Retained Firefighters could apply to be new wholetime recruits and if successful through the selection process could undertake the recruits' course. However, such vacancies were limited and there was always considerable numbers of applicants.

2.4 Following combination, DSFRS has seen an increase in the interest from Retained Firefighters wishing to be considered for wholetime positions and also external applicants who are firefighters within non-FRS organisations eg MOD, airport Firefighters.

3. **PROPOSED SERVICE POLICY ON RETAINED TO WHOLETIME TRANSFERS**

3.1 In order to be able to use these particular pools of potential wholetime staff, the Service has developed a policy for Appointments, Promotions, Acting-up and Transfers which incorporates details of transfers in from the retained. The Service has consulted with the relevant stakeholders including the Representative Bodies and having assessed the feedback will shortly be issuing the new policy to the Service. The policy includes the following extracts from the section on transfers:

3.2 To fill a particular business need, DSFRS may, from time to time, accept transfers in response to advertised or announced Wholetime vacancies from Firefighters in other Services or Duty Systems. These might include:

- firefighters from local authority services; and/or
- firefighters from overseas services; and/or
- members of non-local authority fire services; and/or
- firefighters currently on the DSFRS Retained Duty System.

3.3 In such cases, candidates must have successfully completed phases 1 and 2 of development (or equivalent) for their current roles and successfully completed any separate probation procedures.

3.4 Members of non-Local Authority Fire Services e.g. Ministry Of Defence, Airport Fire Services and Overseas Services will also need to provide an independently verified portfolio of evidence, acceptable to DSFRS, that has been cross mapped to the National Firefighter Role Map and Occupational Standards. Advice will be given to potential applicants on how this may be achieved.

3.5 When applying to transfer, individuals will be required to complete an application form, from which potential candidates for transfer will be short-listed. The application form will require details of skills, experience and other attributes. Appointment will be subject to a selection procedure which may consist of (*inter alia*) written and practical assessments and a formal interview. A medical examination, references and a record of skills maintenance and achievement will also be required.

4. **WORKFORCE PLANNING**

4.1 The Service has recently recruited 7 new Firefighters and continues to review our workforce plans. During the financial year 2007/8 the Service extended the number of open vacancies within the wholetime staff in order to accommodate the move to dual crewing of Aerial Appliances which would reduce the wholetime establishment by 24. In addition the Authority has decided to reduce the number of Area Managers by 3.

- 4.2 Taking account of the dual crewing, Area Managers and the known recruits, the Service is currently 15 under our adjusted establishment and likely to be 22 under by the year end. The Service has therefore already determined that there should be 10 wholetime vacancies made available for the Retained with an option for a further 5 retained to wholetime transfers. In addition, the Service intends to prepare for an external recruitment campaign for new recruits. The precise number will depend on the Service predictions for retirements from existing staff within the Service. There are currently 37 staff with 29 years' service where 30 years is required to reach the normal pensionable age. These staff could opt to retire, continue in employment or seek a flexible retirement which would allow the employee to retire and be re-employed possibly under a job share basis. There are also a further 38 employees who have already worked beyond 30 years' service. The Service is currently updating our information on the retirement intentions for these members of staff.
- 4.3 Any future changes in establishment requirements or duty systems could also impact on our workforce planning requirements. Having not previously advertised for transfers from the Retained to Wholetime the Service is not currently able to predict the likely number of applicants but it is thought to be considerable.

5. **RETAINED TO WHOLETIME SELECTION PROCESS**

- 5.1 Whilst competent retained staff will be eligible to apply for wholetime positions, there will need to be a competitive process to select the successful candidates. This will include a battery of ability tests including numerical and verbal reasoning, spatial awareness and mechanical problem solving. They will also undertake a theory based technical skills assessment and have an interview to assess their Personal Qualities and Attributes.

6. **NEW RECRUIT FIREFIGHTER SELECTION PROCESS**

- 6.1 The Fire & Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 document states that FRS's are expected to use the National Firefighter Selection (NFS) process. The CLG have commissioned further research into these tests and their impact assessment but in the meanwhile they provide a fair, consistent and transparent recruitment process. Prior to their introduction each FRS would have had their own process.
- 6.2 The NFS process includes an initial application form including personal details eg work history and qualifications and a questionnaire to test the suitability of the applicant as a Firefighter. If successful at this stage, the candidate undertakes written assessments of aptitude including verbal and numerical reasoning and a situational awareness test. There is also a questionnaire to assess applicants' attitude and motivation in relation to scales based on the Fire & Rescue Service Personal Qualities and Attributes.
- 6.3 The candidates then do practical tests which include a ladder climb, ladder lift, enclosed space test, equipment assembly, casualty evacuation and equipment carry. If successful at this stage the candidates then have a PQA interview. There is then a medical and the take-up of references prior to any offer of employment.
- 6.4 Since the introduction of the NFS tests the Service has not recruited any wholetime new recruit Firefighters but the Service has continued to recruit for the retained and has utilised these new selection processes. We continue to have some concerns over the suitability of these tests for retained recruitment and this will be considered further over the coming months. The flowchart for the recruitment process is attached.

7. **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 There have been a number of significant changes in the processes for Firefighter selection as a result of the modernisation of the Service and within DSFRS we are progressing with their implementation.

STEVEN POPE
Human Resources Manager

Appendix A

