



# DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	<b>HRMD/10/2</b>
<b>MEETING</b>	<b>HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>14 JANUARY 2010</b>
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	<b>WHOLETIME RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN 2009</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Head of Human Resources Management & Development
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<p>(a) <i>That consideration is given to removing the CDI weightings in the process i.e. all PQA questions are marked (no sift on Q1) and a separate pass mark at interview is not used.</i></p> <p>(b) <i>That all practical tests are reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose, job related and do not have an adverse impact on under-represented groups.</i></p> <p>(c) <i>That a rolling programme be introduced for WT recruitment to run concurrently with the RDS one. This will become feasible with the introduction of the e-recruitment system.</i></p> <p>(d) <i>That targeted action interventions are considered to aid the recruitment of under-represented groups. The organisations has signed up to the governments 'stretch targets' for recruitment and a small working party has been formed to look at suitable strategies.</i></p> <p>(e) <i>That, subject to (a) to (d) above, the report be noted.</i></p>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	This report sets out the work that has been undertaken to date on recruitment leading to the appointment of a total of 31 firefighters in 2009/10.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	Practical equipment purchased at a cost of £16,543 and staff time involved in resourcing this process
<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	

<b>APPENDICES</b>	A. Statistical analysis of the recruitment campaign.
<b>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	None

## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The 2009 recruitment campaign for DSFRS is the first since combination in 2007. Previously, recruitment campaigns for the previous Devon and Somerset Services were carried out in 2003 and 2002 respectively.
- 1.2 Workforce planning projections in February 2009 showed that the wholetime establishment of 750 would be minus 23 by the end of Quarter 4 in 2009. Senior Management Board (SMB) had previously agreed to recruit 10 new recruits in 2009 but economies of scale suggested that it would be more efficient to recruit 20.

## 2. **PRE-CAMPAIGN**

- 2.1 A working group consisting of representatives from Human Resources (HR), Equality & Diversity, Procurement and Information and Communications was formed with the aim to procure an advertising agency to assist with the campaign. A procurement process was implemented and 13 agencies tendered for the contract. The decision to use a company, TMP, was made by the working group on 18 March 2009 with an initial meeting taking place on 27 March 2009. At this stage, time restrictions were paramount and the decision to make no overt positive action interventions was made, bearing in mind the negative media reaction to Avon's campaign in the previous year.
- 2.2 TMP in a very short turnaround came up with several ideas for an advertising campaign, the working party chose the poster of the child wearing a Fire Helmet with the slogan 'He want's to be a Firefighter, just like his Mum'. Before combination, the selection assessments had been undertaken at Service Training Centre (STC - Devon) and at Severn Park (Somerset). Since combination, practical assessments for Retained Duty System (RDS) recruitment had been undertaken at Severn Park, but this resulted in logistical problems of transporting candidates and assessors to the centre and fitting in with the timetable of Severn Park. The decision was made by SMB to buy the practical equipment needed at a cost of £16,453 and to place it at SHQ for the wholetime (WT) recruitment campaign and for the future use of RDS recruitment. SMB had previously supported bringing in an additional Watch Manager (WM) into the HR department on a temporary basis and this post was advertised in March 2009, the successful candidate being appointed from the RDS. The main tasks for the WM were the risk assessments and siting of the practical equipment and the sourcing of Preventative Protective Equipment (PPE) and the assessors needed for the practical assessments.
- 2.3 During the pre-campaign phase, the working group also made the decision to drop the questionnaire from the written assessments. As part of the written assessments, there is a questionnaire with unlimited time for completion. It was anticipated that this would be dropped from the National Firefighter Selection (NFS) tools as the Personal Qualities and Attributes (PQA's) for a Firefighter were being tested 3 times with the Application Form sift, questionnaire and interview. It had been reported at a national level that the questionnaire gave 'no additional value' to the NFS process. Avon and Cornwall were running concurrent campaigns and Avon also dropped the questionnaire.

- 2.4 Previously the working party had discussed ways of limiting the number of applications received, traditionally the Fire Service receives 1000's of applications for wholetime positions and since the Service had not advertised for several years it was unclear how many applications would be received. The intention was not to have a waiting list as in previous campaigns, within the former DFRS the Service had been using candidates from a waiting list since 2002 with no opportunity for new applicants to be considered or the ability to undertake targeted advertising to encourage under represented groups to apply, the waiting list consisted of all white males. It was also thought that due to the economic downturn the number of potential applicants was likely to be increased.
- 2.5 Avon and Cornwall were also running simultaneous campaigns, Cornwall had kept an 'Expressions of Interest' list and only supplied applications to these people (approx 750), and they did not undertake an advertising campaign. Avon also did not advertise in the normal way, application forms were only available from their website over a 48 hour period (964 applications received). Due to the short timescales faced by the Service, it was impossible to achieve any positive action within the DSFRS campaign and therefore, the decision was made to advertise in the local press and specialist sites using TMP and not to limit the number of applications in any way. A subgroup of the working group also updated the website with information for the campaign including downloadable application forms and practice leaflets for the written and interview stages. TMP were also asked to provide details of their service for shortlisting in the event that DSFRS was inundated with applications, although this did not prove to be necessary as all shortlisting was carried out in-house.

### 3. **THE CAMPAIGN**

- 3.1 The campaign was launched on 17 April 2009 with a closing date of 1 May 2009. Adverts were placed in the local newspapers throughout Devon & Somerset and health clubs and gymnasiums were targeted with the poster with the aim of appealing to women members. Specialist sites such as PinkPaper.com and youreable.com were also targeted.
- 3.2 An administrative team with support from HR and Corporate Support Departments was formed to deal with the applications as they arrived. 2198 applications were received, each of which was given a personal identification number and was separated from the 6 PQA based questions which formed the basis of the sift. 13 applications were received without the Equal Opportunities monitoring form and consequently, all statistics are based on 2185 applications. All application details were logged onto a spreadsheet and an agency worker was brought in for a few days to assist with this.
- 3.3 The PQA's assessed for a Firefighter are:-
- Working with others
  - Commitment to development
  - Commitment to excellence
  - Commitment to diversity and integrity
  - Openness to change
  - Confidence and resilience
  - Problem solving
  - Situational awareness
  - Effective communication

3.4 A maximum score of 4 for each of the questions is awarded following the NFS sifting guidelines. Question 1 is related to commitment to diversity and integrity and is weighted, unless the candidate scores a minimum of 2 for this question the application is not progressed further. The sifting team consisted of HR professionals and uniformed staff (WT, RDS and Control) who had been specifically trained to do the sift. 1981 people were sifted out at this stage. Pass marks were then moderated in line with workforce planning requirements to ensure that adequate numbers were passed through to the written assessment stage.

#### 4. **WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS**

4.1 There are 3 written assessments

- Understanding information
- Working with numbers
- Problem solving and situational awareness

4.2 All 3 assessments are job related and designed around Fire Service scenarios

4.3 The assessments take approximately 3 hours and 6 sessions were held at Service Headquarters over a number of weekends. Several candidates declared they were dyslexic and special arrangements were made for them (extra time and readers were supplied). Pass marks were then moderated in line with workforce planning requirements to ensure that adequate numbers were passed through to the next stage. The Lead Assessor at this stage was the HR Officer (Firefighter Recruitment) who is BPS Level A qualified, feedback was offered to all candidates.

#### 5. **PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS**

5.1 There are six practical assessments, all are job related.

##### Ladder Climb

This test is designed to assess confidence at heights. Applicants in full PPE must wear a safety harness and practice a leg lock at ground level. The applicant then has to ascend two thirds of the way up the ladder (indicated by a mark on the ladder) and then take a leg lock. They will then be asked to lean backwards and outstretch their arms to the sides and whilst looking over their shoulder say out loud what symbol is being shown by an assessor at ground level.

##### Casualty Evacuation

This is a test designed to assess upper and lower body strength and co-ordination. Applicants wearing full PPE are asked to drag a 55kg dummy backwards around a 30M course by a carrying handle fixed to the dummy.

##### Confined Space

This test is designed to assess confidence, agility and stamina. Applicants in full PPE are to put on a facemask and with un-obscured vision make their way through a crawl and walkway. Once inside the crawl/walkway they have their vision obscured and have to make their way back to the start.

### Ladder Lift Simulator

This test is designed to assess upper body strength and co-ordination. Applicants wearing full PPE are to raise the bar of a ladder lift simulator to the required height with a 15 kg weight placed on the simulator cradle, which gives a total lift of 24 kg.

### Equipment Assembly

This is a test designed to assess manual dexterity. Applicants will be given a demonstration of the test before having to assemble and disassemble a number of components to make an item of equipment.

### Equipment Carry

This is a test to assess upper and lower body strength and co-ordination. Applicants are to carry items of equipment up and down a course between two cones placed 25 M apart. They will be given brief demonstrations of correct lifting techniques and permitted to practice picking up the various items.

- 5.2 The Lead Assessors for this stage were the HR Officer (Firefighter Recruitment) and a WT Station Manager. All assessors were operational staff (both WT and retained) and were experienced/trained in administering the assessments.
- 5.3 In addition to the NFS tests the Multistage Fitness Test (Bleep Test) was also included. Other Services who had previously used the NFS tests had reported that when commencing the training course, many recruits exhibited poor fitness levels and this had also been observed by STC staff when training recruits from other Services. The test was not used as a pass/fail assessment but was used as an indicator to assess current fitness levels. It was explained to candidates that if they could not reach level 8.4 they would struggle with the course content and may also fail the fitness test included in the medical examination. At this stage, if the candidate was not at the required level of fitness they still had time to improve.
- 5.4 It can be seen from the statistical results that the female candidates had problems with two of the tests, namely the equipment carry and in particular the Ladder Lift Simulator, this is a national trend and a draft report issued by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) recommends that the ladder 'extension test' previously used be revisited.
- 5.5 These tests are also used to recruit RDS staff and sessions are run monthly at SHQ. The trend for women to fail these two assessments does continue. However, those who do not reach the standard are given advice on how to improve their upper body strength and invited to attend a future assessment day. Those who choose to put in some work to improve their upper body strength invariably pass the assessments at a second attempt. It may mean that some targeted action is required for future wholetime campaigns if these particular tests remain in the NFS toolkit.
- 5.6 All candidates who failed the assessments were given full feedback on their performance by the lead assessors on the day, 93 people went forward to the interview stage.

## 6. **INTERVIEW STAGE**

- 6.1 Each interview panel consisted of an HR Officer (who were all female) and a uniformed Officer (who were all male and had been trained in PQA based interviewing). Each interview lasts for up to one hour and can take up to an hour to mark. The HR Officer (Firefighter Recruitment) was the lead assessor and all interview report forms were scrutinised and some scores were moderated.
- 6.2 Again, the Commitment to Diversity and Integrity PQA is weighted, there are three questions for this PQA and if candidates score less than 3 on two questions they will have failed the interview even if they score highly for the other PQA's. All candidates' received a practice leaflet to help them prepare for the interview.
- 6.3 In line with workforce planning requirements, the top scoring candidates progressed to the interview stage.

## 7. **FINAL DECISIONS**

- 7.1 10 Successful candidates were taken on for the September course and graduate from the Joint Training Centre at Severn Park in December 2009.
- 7.2 10 successful candidates (including 2 women) will commence their training in January 2010 at STC.
- 7.3 267 applications were received from RDS staff (178 from DSFRS) and 9 were successful and started their WT duties in September 2009 after completing an integration course. This included one candidate from an under-represented group.
- 7.4 39 applications were received from WT Firefighters in other Services, 2 were successful and were also taken on in September 2009. This also included one candidate from an under-represented group.

## 8. **SUMMARY**

- 8.1 This is the first time that DSFRS has used the NFS process to recruit WT Firefighters and although not used to the exact standard (questionnaire dropped and pass marks amended slightly), it has been a resounding success. Considering the short time frame available and the logistic and resourcing problems faced, it was a successful exercise due to the dedication of all the staff involved.
- 8.2 The process is expensive and it may be possible to run a WT recruitment rolling programme in conjunction with the RDS one (the assessments other than the application sift are the same).
- 8.3 It is disappointing not to see more under-represented groups in the final stages and more work needs to be done regarding positive action.
- 8.4 Nationally, there seems to be little lead from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) regarding the NFS process. The team, based at Fire Service College Moreton-in-Marsh, has been disbanded and the National Forum has not met since May 2009.

8.5 Regionally, a Working group (both lead assessors represent DSFRS) is looking to introduce an e-recruitment system for future campaigns with the ability to use initial PQA testing on line to replace the huge initial sift. Invitations to tender will be requested in the New Year. This group is also looking at alternative written and practical tests but this work is still in its infancy.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 It is important not to be complacent and to constantly review the recruitment processes utilised by the Service. As a result of this campaign, the following recommendations are made.
- (a) That consideration is given to removing the CDI weightings in the process i.e. all PQA questions are marked (no sift on Q1) and a separate pass mark at interview is not used;
  - (b) That all practical tests are reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose, job related and do not have an adverse impact on under-represented groups.
  - (c) That a rolling programme be introduced for WT recruitment to run concurrently with the RDS one. This will become feasible with the introduction of the e-recruitment system;
  - (d) That targeted action interventions are considered to aid the recruitment of under-represented groups. The organisations has signed up to the governments 'stretch targets' for recruitment and a small working party has been formed to look at suitable strategies.

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