

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

19TH MAY 2008

1. RECRUITMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Committee note the actions taken as a result of the findings of the Recruitment Task and Finish Group.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to inform Members of the actions taken by the Recruitment Team following proposals made by the Recruitment Task and Finish Group.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Recruitment Task and Finish Group was set up in April 2007 following a presentation to the Policy Planning Forum on recent recruitment activity, and the extent to which this was achieving the organisation's targets for building a more diverse workforce.

3.2 The group was set up to consider the actions taken by the organisation to encourage those from under represented groups to consider a career in the Fire Service. The group also discussed the extent to which the organisation is perceived as one which welcomes and celebrates diversity and what more could be done to create an organisation that would attract and retain people from under represented groups.

3.3 A number of proposals were made by the Task and Finish Group.

3.3.1 To review whether current arrangements for managing recruitment and selection within Human Resources are the most effective.

Action Taken

The Recruitment Team manage the selection processes for both Firefighter and Fire Control recruitment. This ranges from positive action initiatives through to the appointment of employees. The Recruitment Team is also responsible for the monitoring of all applicants. Non-uniformed support staff recruitment has previously been managed differently, with much of the process being completed by members of the Personnel Team.

Following a review of the business process for the management and administration of our recruitment, with effect from 1st December 2007, the Recruitment Team has taken responsibility for all recruitment, at point of entry to the organisation, for all categories of staff.

3.3.2 Review what positive action might be taken in relation to recruitment of all staff to recruit a more diverse workforce at all levels.

Action Taken

The Recruitment Team carries out a variety of positive action initiatives in order to improve diversity in the workplace and to inspire those from under represented groups to consider a career in the Fire Service. The Recruitment Team has a Positive Action Plan which is a 'live' document, reviewed and amended regularly. Information regarding our current positive action initiatives can be found in Appendix 1 attached.

3.3.3 To ensure that, where appropriate, selection processes for non-uniformed support staff include a range of selection techniques rather than just an interview to ensure a well rounded assessment of candidates and to directly test skills that cannot be assessed by interview.

Action Taken

It is recognised that whilst some selection processes include other assessment methods there needs to be a systematic approach to how we assess a candidate's suitability for a particular role. The Recruitment Team will discuss with Line Managers and identify an appropriate method of assessment

in order to test those skills that cannot be measured at interview.

3.3.4 To review the information that is sent out to those who express an interest in vacancies to ensure that the organisation's commitment to equality and diversity is clear and that positive messages about diversity are included where possible.

Action Taken

It is important that the profile of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority as an employer of choice is raised and the availability of our information is improved.

This forms part of the Recruitment Team's marketing strategy. All recruitment literature, i.e., application forms or general information, includes a positive and clear statement regarding equality and diversity. The Recruitment Team's display materials are due to be reviewed in the financial year 2008/2009.

3.3.5 To review whether there would be benefits to using an advertising agency for some recruitment processes.

Action Taken

It is recognised that there may be benefits in using an advertising agency for some or all of our recruitment needs. We are currently exploring our options with regard to using an external agency or setting a service level agreement internally.

3.3.6 To finalise and introduce bias-free application forms.

Action Taken

A review of the Non-Uniformed Support Staff application form has been conducted and final amendments have been made. The layout of the form is currently being designed by our Marketing Team and will be ready for use in May 2008.

The application form used for firefighter recruitment is the National Firefighter Selection application form.

3.3.7 To explore different ways of recruiting to uniformed posts above firefighter level, with a view to broadening our approach and increasing the diversity of people we attract.

Action Taken

Consideration is currently being given to identifying high potential at entry stage. This will support diversity in terms of the staff profile entering and advancing in the organisation – taking account of academic qualification level, range of background and experience, and possibly additional representation of women and people from other under represented groups, as due consideration would be given to targeting women and black and minority ethnic groups.

4. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is required and has been carried out. The Initial Equality Impact Assessment raised issues which required a full Equality Impact Assessment and this will be completed individually for policies, procedures and activities that are reviewed and revised.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

F. J. E. SHEEHAN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX 1

RECRUITMENT TEAM
POSITIVE ACTION

Strategy

To provide an efficient and effective recruitment service that meets organisational needs, reflects our corporate values and is cost effective.

Objective 1 of the Recruitment Team Action Plan is:

To improve diversity in the workplace and to inspire those from under represented groups to consider a career in the Fire Service.

Our positive action initiatives will sustain and increase progress towards achieving targets for the recruitment of firefighters from Black and ethnic minority communities and the recruitment of women firefighters.

Initiative	Target Group	Aim	Outcome
Monthly Awareness Evenings	Women and BME groups in the employment market.	To promote firefighting and encourage applications from under represented groups. Awareness Evenings are designed to break down barriers to those groups and enable them to compete equally in the recruitment and selection process.	Awareness Evenings have been in place since 2005. Monthly awareness evenings commenced in January 2007. Since then we have had a total of 94 women attend with a further 25 awaiting a date. 107 BME groups have attended with a further 19 awaiting a date.
Rolling Recruitment Process for Firefighter Recruitment	All groups.	To move away from campaign based recruitment. This allows application forms to be handed out at all of our positive action events. Application forms are available to download from our website, thus allowing our information to be accessible to all.	Rolling Recruitment commenced in April 2007. Since that date we have received over 3000 application forms. 9% of those applications have been made by women. 12% of applicants are from BME groups. Of those that have applied since rolling recruitment began, 41 people have commenced employment. 32% are women and 11% are from BME groups.

Initiative	Target Group	Aim	Outcome
Partnership with Women's FA	Active women in the employment market.	To continue to maintain links with the Birmingham Women's FA and raise awareness of a career with the Fire Service amongst players.	The partnership with the Women's FA commenced in September 2004. We have seen an increase in women applicants and to date, 14 women have been employed as a direct result of this initiative.
Women Only Fitness Sessions	<p>Women in the employment market who are preparing to apply.</p> <p>Women who have been successful in the selection process and are preparing for Phase 1 Training.</p>	<p>To increase the number of women who are successful at the Practical Selection Tests.</p> <p>To assist women to maintain and increase fitness levels in preparation for Phase 1 Training.</p>	Fitness sessions commenced in December 2006. To date, 8 women have been employed as a direct result of this work.
Access Courses	Women and BME groups in the employment market	To build on the long standing provision of Access Courses run by Wolverhampton College and offer similar courses elsewhere with the West Midlands area.	<p>Wolverhampton College now provide both Level 1 courses and Level 2 courses.</p> <p>Level 1 courses are provided at Lozells Birmingham, New Hampton Wolverhampton, Northfield Birmingham, Ward End Birmingham and Handsworth Birmingham.</p> <p>Level 2 courses are held at Wolverhampton College and Handsworth.</p>

Initiative	Target Group	Aim	Outcome
			Access courses are monitored and reviewed by the Recruitment Team. Two recent recruitment campaigns for the courses resulted in a good response from our target groups:- Level 1 Handsworth – 10% women and 62% BME groups. Level 2 Handsworth – 14% women and 65% BME.
Forces Resettlement	Women leaving the armed forces.	To establish links with the re-settlement projects of the armed forces and obtain their support to promote firefighting as a career to women leaving the Armed Forces.	Initial contact has been made, however this is proving to be a very difficult area to break into and to date, we have not received any applicants as a direct result of this work. Currently we are exploring the possibility of using role models from within our service who had a career with the armed forces previously.
Internal initiative via Station Manager	BME groups within the employment market.	Working alongside station based personnel to target recruitment activity in areas of high minority ethnic population.	Initial contact has been made with a Station Manager and leaflets have been produced. Applicants will be monitored. This is a pilot study and will be rolled out to other stations in the future as appropriate.
Radio Advertising	Women in the employment market.	Working alongside local radio stations to raise awareness of the role of a firefighter to women.	The last campaign ran during December 2007. This produced 42 referrals to awareness evenings. 25 people have made an application.

Initiative	Target Group	Aim	Outcome
Partnership with Camp Hill Women's Rugby Football Club	Active Women in the employment market.	Using the Women's FA model, to establish links with WRFC and raise awareness of a career with the Fire Service amongst players.	We will be sponsoring Camp Hill Women's Rugby Football Club for the 2008/09 season. Publicity materials have been produced. Camp Hill WRFC will reflect the WMFS ethos with a commitment towards enabling women development and representation. This initiative is in its infancy and will be monitored.
Attendance at high profile careers events	Women and BME groups in the employment market.	To attend key communities events / careers fairs to raise awareness of a career in the Fire Service.	Increased referrals to Awareness Evenings. The most recent high profile event was the BRMB Job Show held in Birmingham earlier this year. This one day event generated 58 referrals – 23 women and 35 BME groups.
Maintain contact with applicants	Women and BME groups who have applied to the Fire Service	To ensure that we maintain contact, provide support and encouragement to those who have been unsuccessful in our selection processes. To contact women and BME candidates who do not attend selection tests to establish the reasons why.	This initiative is in its very early stages and will be monitored.
Profiles of existing employees	Women and BME groups in the employment market	Through the use of targeted advertising to inspire women and BME groups to consider a career with the Fire Service.	Currently working alongside our Marketing Team to produce profiles of existing staff. This initiative will be monitored.