

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 NOVEMBER 2017

1. **SCRUTINY OF POSITIVE ACTION AND FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

That Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made in relation to the review of positive action and firefighter recruitment.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide an update to Scrutiny Committee on current activity in developing the Services' approach to positive action and firefighter recruitment.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committee has undertaken to review and evaluate our approach to positive action and firefighter recruitment. Members of the working group met on 9th October and discussed the current activity being undertaken by the Service.
- 3.2 The scope for the review was to consider our practices in relation to both positive action and recruitment and selection, and make recommendations for improvement.
- 3.3 The approach to recruitment has moved away from campaign based, instead focusing on generating a candidate pool that we will nurture through selection. This will provide us with a sustained approach to positive action that will drive our recruitment activity.

4. **Workforce Planning**

Our workforce planning assumptions indicate that we need to recruit 105 new entrant firefighters during the calendar year 2018. The diagram at Appendix 1 shows the impact of this when compared to the establishment figure.

5. **Positive Action Approach**

5.1 **Vision**

Our vision is to be representative of the communities we serve. Our current working population (aged 16 – 64) reflects:

- 49% female
- 19% Asian
- 6% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- 3% mixed

Our current uniformed workforce demographics include:

- 5.4% female
- 3% Asian
- 4% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- 3% mixed

A further, more detailed breakdown of Ethnicity can be found at Appendix 2.

In order to improve the way in which we deliver our services to our communities we must increase the diversity of our workforce. We will work both internally and externally with our communities to consider innovative and modern approaches in the redesign of our services. We will challenge ourselves to think differently, listen to our communities and reduce or remove barriers and limitation that underrepresented groups may face.

5.2 **Opportunity**

Predicted retirements and proposed recruitment over the next four years will mean changing 29% of our operational workforce providing a greater opportunity to change the profile of our workforce than we have had for many years.

Whilst we have increased representation over recent years, there is still much more to do. We have introduced ambitious recruitment targets and will change the way in which we carry out positive action, moving to a candidate nurturing approach.

5.3 **Recruitment Targets**

2017/2018 20% of new starters will be women
35% of new starters will be BME

2018/2019 40% of new starters will be women
35% of new starters will be BME

2019/2020 50% of new starters will be women
35% of new starters will be BME

2020/2021 60% of new starters will be women
35% of new starters will be BME

In July and August, we recruited 27 new entrants including 2 women (7.5%) and 6 BME (22%).

5.4 **Intelligence Gathering**

We have gathered information from our community members with specific regard to understanding the potential barriers faced by our underrepresented groups. The intelligence gathered will ensure that we are able to target our activity and resource effectively as well as shape the way in which we recruit in the future in an intelligence led way. This will influence the recruiting system, marketing and positive action moving forward. Early analysis of this data has shown that many women believe that they are not strong or fit enough to be a firefighter, where people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds comment that they do not see role models within the Service.

5.5 **Candidate Nurturing**

We will have a sustained approach to positive action which will drive our recruitment activity. We will move away from campaign based recruitment, instead focussing on generating a candidate pool that we will nurture through selection.

Our recruitment activity will focus on three phases 1) Attraction, 2) Selection and 3) Onboarding / Induction.

It is our intention to expand our positive action activity across the three phases, offering support and advice to candidates along their recruitment journey.

Phase 1 Attraction – our marketing strategy will reflect the changing role of the firefighter, focusing on those behaviours and skills that may not previously have been measured during selection. Through our marketing and diverse imagery, we will ensure that we attract a different type of candidate. Through our internal channels we will open career paths for existing employees, volunteers, community members and Fire cadets. We will develop our internal communication strategy to engage with our existing employees, who in turn will engage with our local communities. We will work in partnership with external agencies including job centres and other community and education networks to target our advertising and reach out to those who have not necessarily seen the Fire Service as an employer of choice.

Phase 2 Selection – support will be provided to candidates during the selection phase outlining what can be expected of them during the assessment days. Fitness sessions will provide information and advice regarding levels of strength and fitness required.

Phase 3 Onboarding / Induction – once successful during the recruitment process, candidates will be allocated a buddy / mentor to support them during their early career.

Our approach to candidate nurturing is shown at Appendix 3.

6. **Positive Action Activity**

6.1 **Attraction and Marketing**

Working in partnership with the Fire Service College, we have introduced the Attract Module of the 'Attract to Train Programme'. The attract module is made up of two main stages:

Attraction – developing a social media marketing and attraction campaign. This includes campaign planning and developing the media strategy. A West Midlands specific web area has been created on the 'Be a Firefighter' national portal with localised imagery.

Sift – initial stages of selection utilising a number of selection tools. These are detailed in the Online Application section below.

We have identified the need to address the misconceptions about the firefighter role, rethink our communications strategy and overall approach to recruitment. We need to communicate with right audience with the most engaging messages regarding employment. By doing this we would expect to boost the diversity of applicants.

6.2 **Taster Sessions**

These sessions provide an insight into the firefighter role. They are aimed at fostering a sense of confidence in individuals and allow potential candidates the opportunity to make informed decisions about a career in the Fire Service. The sessions are targeted at our underrepresented groups and are held at key locations across the Service.

6.3 **Pre Recruitment Course**

Women only course designed to remove or reduce barriers to recruitment. The course runs over five sessions and involves input on the firefighter role, preparation for recruitment and fitness assessment.

6.4 **Airwaves Media Project**

Bespoke taster sessions targeted at the South Asian communities. Pilot session is due to be held in November 2017 with further sessions to be rolled out over the next 12 months.

6.5 **Fitness Sessions**

A two session programme where delegates are offered advice on fitness and nutrition. They also have the opportunity to have their physical ability measured. The two session programme will be focused on session A, where areas of development will be identified and advice given to delegates. Session B will assess progress and further advice and support. Session B can be attended multiple times.

6.6 **DICE Stations**

Designed to embed equality objectives across the organisation, drive cultural change and capture evidence and good practice. Stations are audited every 3 months against a set of performance criteria in a range of equality areas including commitment to positive action, approach to community engagement, having trained staff in the diversity awareness and unconscious bias.

7. **Assessment and Selection**

7.1 **Eligibility Criteria**

To enter the Firefighter recruitment process, the main eligibility criteria includes the need for applicants to be at least eighteen years of age and be resident within the West Midlands service delivery area.

Previously the entry criteria also included the requirement to hold GCSE qualifications grade A – C in English and Mathematics (or equivalent). However, there is some evidence to suggest that the inclusion of such criteria may be a potential barrier to some members of our communities. It is important that our selection methods include an assessment of appropriate numerical and literacy skills and

our newly developed online psychometric tools provide us with this assurance.

Our recruitment process considers the changing role of a Firefighter. The role incorporates a more diverse set of skills relating to a much wider variety of activity that firefighters are now engaged in. These include those 'softer' skills of caring, compassion, empathy and overall emotional intelligence.

7.2 **Online Application**

Working in partnership with the Fire Service College, WMFS has introduced a new online application process. The process includes an eligibility questionnaire followed by a range of psychometric assessments which measure a candidate's ability to be an effective firefighter.

Behavioural Styles Questionnaire – this explores typical behaviours at work and the preferences that a candidate emphasises. Candidates are presented with a series of statements about their working style and are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement.

Situational Judgement Test – this measures judgement and decision making in relation to typical situations a firefighter could face. Candidates are asked to rate the effectiveness of different actions that could be taken in response to a given situation.

Verbal Assessment – this measures the ability to evaluate, reason and conceptualise with words and sentences. Candidates are presented with passages of information and four statements about each passage. Candidates are asked to determine whether the statements are true, false or they cannot say based on the information in the passage.

Numerical Reasoning – this measures the ability to understand, interpret and logically evaluate numerical information. Candidates are presented with numerical information in the form of graphs, tables or infographics and statements that relate to the data. Again, candidates are asked to determine whether the statements are true, false or they cannot say based on the information provided.

Mechanical Reasoning – this measures the ability to apply cognitive reasoning to mechanical, physical and practical concepts in order to solve related problems. Candidates are shown mechanical situations and are required to select the best answer from the options available.

7.3 **Assessment Day**

Those applicants who successfully complete the online assessment will be invited to attend an assessment day. The assessment day provides an opportunity to assess how candidates behave and deal with a variety of situations. Traditionally interviewers would rely on how well a candidate responds to a question in an interview scenario. The assessment day will allow assessors to observe how a candidate performs in simulated reality. A range of selection methods will be utilised to ensure a rounded assessment of candidates.

Group Discussion – candidates are assessed in groups of four and are given a topic to discuss among themselves. The group discussion is designed to assess how candidates work with others. Assessors are able to observe behaviours that are exhibited by various candidates and determine how well they demonstrate the competencies required of the firefighter role.

Role Play Exercise – role play exercises are among the most popular assessment tools and are particularly useful when assessing candidates who will be required to work with the public. The role play exercise concentrates on an interaction with a vulnerable person. Candidates performance is observed throughout the exercise and assessed against the behavioural framework.

Interview – The interview panel consists of two members of staff and the interview is based upon a discussion with candidates to understand the person and their behaviours.

Practical Selection Test – The practical selection test comprises of a series of job related tests that follow the national framework to ensure that candidates have sufficient practical ability to handle Fire Service equipment. Candidates are assessed to ensure they can work at heights, have good manual dexterity, and the ability to combine upper and lower body strength and coordination.

The emphasis of the selection process is on ensuring candidates have the right behaviours. Whilst it is important that candidates have the right levels of strength and fitness, this is the last of the assessment areas. The majority of selection decisions are based upon the personal qualities and attributes of the candidates.

8. **NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 WMFS commenced firefighter recruitment on 4th October and candidates are in the early stages of selection. Detailed analysis of the selection activity will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee working group.
- 8.2 It is proposed that the next up-date to Scrutiny Committee be provided in six months' time.

9. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The activity outlined in this report will require detailed analysis of a range of equality data including all of the protected characteristics.

10. **RISK IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The objectives identified in this report support the organisation in mitigating its risk with regard to claims of unlawful discrimination.

11. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations outlined in this report assists us to fulfil our duties under the Equality Act 2010 particularly to advance equal opportunities and eliminate behaviours that are unlawful under the Act.

12. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Funds to support this work have been identified through the Scrutiny work programme. Early engagement has been had with Equal Approach and costs associated with this work will be identified through their proposal.

13. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

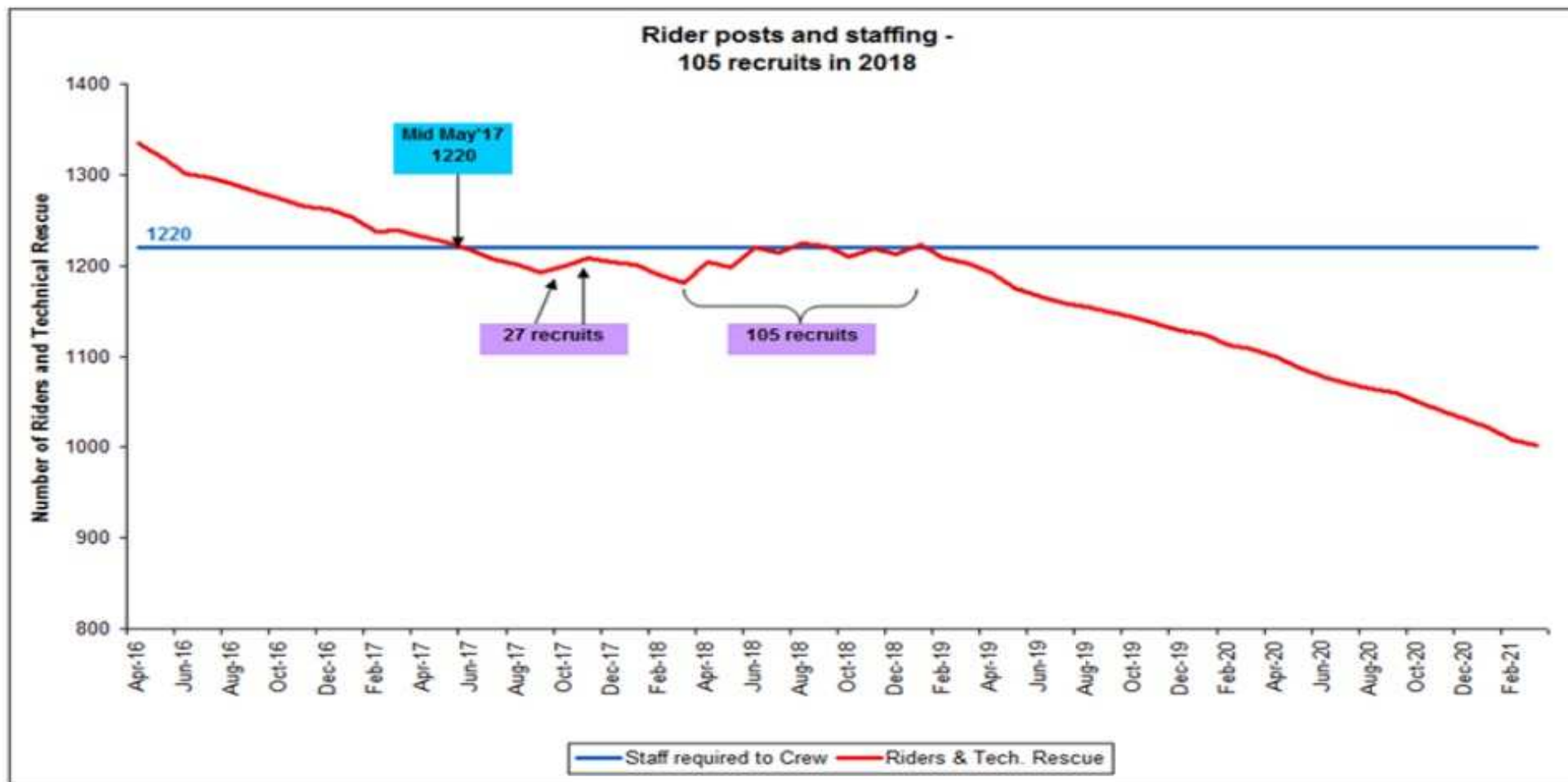
BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Scrutiny Review Scoping Document – Scrutiny of Positive Action and Firefighter Recruitment
- Scrutiny Committee Report of 12 June 2017
- Scrutiny Committee Report of 4 September 2017

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APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

