CUMBRIA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE: WHOLETIME AND ON-CALL FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT AND ON-CALL FIRE STATION APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides an update for Communities and Place Scrutiny, to enable information sharing and challenge, in relation to Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) wholetime and on-call Firefighter recruitment campaign and on-call fire station appliance availability.

1.2 Nationally there are approximately 18,000 on-call firefighters who provide efficient, cost effective and reliable fire and rescue cover to around 60% of the United Kingdom (UK). Within CFRS, there are currently; 402 on-call firefighters and 199 regular firefighters (including Managers) which equates to 67% of the workforce being on-call, providing emergency cover at 35 of the 38 fire stations (appendix A).

1.3 Recruitment and retention of staff is fundamental to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service can respond effectively to operational incidents. This report provides Scrutiny Members with details of CFRS current wholetime and on-call recruitment campaigns and an overview of on-call fire station appliance availability.

2.0 ISSUES FOR SCRUTINY

2.1 It is important at the outset to state that recruitment and development of wholetime and on-call firefighters is for individual Fire and Rescue Authorities to determine. Prior to 2010, the Government set out explicit expectations for Fire Services to follow a national recruitment process. However, In July 2010, an announcement was made by the Fire Minister at that time, Bob Neill MP, stating that the Government would not be directing Fire Authorities how to recruit or develop their staff. Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service continue to review its recruitment process to ensure it is fit for purpose.
2.2 This report provides a narrative of the ongoing wholetime and on-call recruitment campaigns outlining the selection process undertaken for individuals who apply. The report also gives a three year (2014 to 2016) overview of on call fire appliance availability and an overview of the ongoing current challenges around on-call availability and recruitment of on call firefighters.

3.0 **WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN 2016**

3.1 In order to support and contribute to the broader Council efficiency savings, CFRS had intended to introduce a new duty system on three of the wholetime fire stations across the County. (Carlisle East, Ulverston and Workington). The new duty system known as Day Crewing Plus (DCP) would have realised savings in the region of £600k and enabled the wholetime fire stations to be operated with less firefighters.

3.2 As part of the strategic planning process in preparation for the introduction of the DCP duty system, the numbers of wholetime FF positions has been reduced. This reduction in FF posts has been done through not replacing FF posts when they have retired or left the Service, with the vacancies being managed in such a way whereby when DCP would have been introduced there would be no need to carry out any redundancy process for FF’s as the vacancies had already been managed (Not filled).

3.3 However, following months of negotiation with the Fire Brigades Union and further consideration of the working time regulations a decision was made to move away from the DCP proposal and to continue with the normal crewing model on wholetime fire stations. Due to the planned management of the vacant FF positions as explained above, this has led CFRS to be in a position whereby the vacant FF positions need to be recruited to.

3.4 The wholetime recruitment campaign which commenced in October 2016 is the first one carried out in Cumbria since 2008. Currently there are 12 vacant FF positions on the Watches on fire stations. However due to the known retirement profile and the need for succession planning across the service. It is envisaged that more than 12 FF’s will be needed over the next two or three years.

   **Wholetime Firefighter recruitment campaign 2016 process and timeline**

3.5 There are a number of stages involved with recruiting new firefighters. Each stage of the recruitment process will assess different qualities, strengths and attributes from the candidates who apply. The different stages and associated dates are outlined below:

3.6 Prior to opening up the application window - Positive action events and ‘taster sessions’ were organised at a number of fire stations around the County. These days were predominantly targeted at females to allow them to attend the sessions to gain a better understanding of the role of a modern day FF and also to be given the opportunity to practice the physical tests which are part of the selection process.

3.7 **Stage one of the selection process – Application form and educational tests - 17th to 31st October 2016**

An application was completed on-line; following the completion of the application form a number of educational tests were completed.
The educational tests consisted of the following areas:

- Risk Assessment – questions where applicants are required to rate the risk against a given scenario. The test is untimed.
- Situational Judgement – questions where applicants are required to rate what their response would be to given situations. The test is untimed.
- Numerical tests – questions which applicants are required to answer in a given time.
- Verbal reasoning tests – questions which applicants are required to answer in a given time.

(There have been 1152 applications for the 12 FF posts)

3.8 *Stage two of the selection process - Practical and fitness tests – 21st to 25th November 2016.*

3.9 For those candidates who successfully pass the online application process they will be invited to attend practical and fitness tests under stage 2 of the recruitment process. These practical tests will be held at Barrow fire station and Workington fire station.

3.10 At this stage of the selection process a series of physical and practical tests are carried out, these will include:

- Multi Stage Fitness test (Bleep Test)

Candidates are asked to run at increasing speeds of 0.5 km/hr over a 20 meter shuttle distance to the pace of a cd player. They will start off jogging at 8.5 km/hr at level 1. The test will bleep to start and they must meet the bleep at each 20m shuttle.

To pass this test candidates must achieve level 8 shuttle 6 (8.6).

<table>
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<th>Time (sec)</th>
<th>Distance (m)</th>
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<td>9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level 8.6**

Total Distance (meters) – 1560m  
Total 20m Shuttles – 77  
Total Time (min:sec) – 9:06

- Ladder Climb - This aims to test the candidate’s confidence with heights.
- Casualty Evacuation - This aims to test the candidate’s upper and lower body strength as well as their co-ordination.
• Ladder Lift - This aims to test the candidate’s upper and lower body strength as well as their co-ordination.
• Enclosed Space - Working in enclosed spaces is sometimes required when working as a firefighter. This test is designed to test the candidate’s confidence, agility and stamina working in these conditions.
• Equipment Assembly - This test is designed to assess the candidate’s manual dexterity and coordination.
• Equipment Carry - This aims to test the candidate’s upper and lower body strength as well as their co-ordination.

3.11 **Stage three of the selection process – Interviews - 5th to 9th December 2016**
Upon successfully passing the practical tests the candidates will be invited to attend an interview. This will take place at Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Penrith, and lasts for about an hour.
This will be our chance to get to know more about the candidate and ask them about the information they provided within their online application form.

3.12 **Stage four of the selection process – Medicals 20th to 23rd December 2016**
Carried out at Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Penrith, these medicals are carried out by a medical practitioner and supported by the occupational health department.

3.13 **Stage five of the selection process – Basic Training course – Starts 20th February 2017 for 14 weeks**

4.0 **O N-C A L L  F I R E F I G H T E R  R E C R U I T M E N T**

4.1 Prior to March 2014, CFRS supported two annual on-call recruitment processes, however it was recognised that this was unsustainable in meeting the current level of vacancies. Therefore an on-going recruitment process that maintains a window for applications throughout the year was established and has been successful in filling vacancies.

4.2 Since January 2016 the Service has aimed to recruit between 50 - 60 on-call firefighters at 25 different stations. At the time of this report the Service has recruited over 20 new on-call firefighters up to October 2016.

4.3 The current On-Call Recruitment process started in September 2016 and has a closing date for applications of 9th December 2016.

The Selection stages and dates are outlined below:
• **Physical Testing:** Week commencing 16th January 2017
• **Interviews:** Week commencing 13th February 2017
• **Course Date:** Starts 15th May 2017

The On-Call stations which require additional FF’s are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
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<th>Station</th>
<th>Number of Vacancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Alston</td>
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<td>Broughton</td>
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<td>Brampton</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coniston</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kirkby Stephen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milnthorpe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Longtown</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table: On-Call vacancies as at November 2016

| Location          | Vacancies 
|-------------------|-----------
| Arnside           | 3         
| Penrith           | 2         
| Patterdale        | 3         
| Windermere        | 1         
| Cockermouth       | 1         
| Staveley          | 3         
| Shap              | 2         
| Kirkby Lonsdale   | 2         
| Bootle            | 3         
| Kendal            | 4         
| Maryport          | 1         
| Egremont          | 1         
| Millom            | 2         
| Seascale          | 2         
| Silloth           | 4         
| Wigton            | 1         
| Workington        | 2         

4.4 Written Tests

4.5 One of the main areas where potential new On-call FF recruits were failing was the written test stage. CFRS maintains three national psychometric tests.

The three tests are:

- Working with numbers
- Understanding information
- Situational awareness/ problem solving.

4.6 CFRS carried out an analysis over a 6 month period to ascertain whether there was any correlation of successful pass rates against other qualifications detailed on an applicant’s application form, for example GCSE English or Mathematics. The analysis determined that there was no such correlation and therefore the current position is that new applicants must pass all 3 papers with a score of at least 60%. The Service does allow a candidate to re-sit papers and for candidates to carry forward papers which they pass as ‘live’ for 3 consecutive campaigns but no longer than 12 months.

4.7 This change has increased the pass rate for candidates from 50% in 2010 when resits were not allowed, to over 90% for current candidates who have recently undertaken the written tests.

5.0 Recruitments Officer

5.1 CFRS supports the recruitment process and currently has one fulltime firefighter recruitment post. The duties of this post are broad and include close liaison with local business, groups and media to encourage applications. The post also offers a mentoring and support role to ensure new recruits are supported through the demanding development phase, as they work towards becoming competent firefighters.

6.0 Background

6.1 In December 2011 a report was presented to Scrutiny around Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service on-call recruitment, retention and availability and subsequently a number if recommendations were made:

- Recommendation 1:

  Further publicity be undertaken on the role of retained (on-call) firefighters, particularly those from under-represented groups e.g. women, in relevant county council publications and school publications.
Recommendation 2:
Those secondment opportunities for existing firefighters to work with under-represented groups to encourage more participation continue to be supported.

Recommendation 3:
Local employers are advised of the benefits which will accrue to their businesses by allowing staff to become retained firefighters and consideration be given to the introduction of the award of certificates for all participating employers

Recommendation 4:
Local members be assisted and encouraged to become more closely involved with their local fire station as part of their role as community leaders

6.2 The Service is able to demonstrate progress towards all of the recommendations made at that time and continues to place recruitment of on-call firefighters as a priority area of service delivery. The fulltime ‘recruitment’ firefighter role continues to work with diverse and under-represented groups, particularly woman, to encourage them to apply to join the Service.

6.3 On-going support on fitness is provided and further information and direction on the whole recruitment process is given. On-going work with the Corporate Communications Team, including use of social media, has been successful in generating significant number of applications across the Service. The FF recruitment role continue to work with local employers, highlighting the key benefits and skills offered to their employees who are released and subsequently become on-call firefighters, notwithstanding the fact that as work opportunities decline in small rural villages this becomes more and more challenging.

6.4 Cumbria is a predominately on-call Fire Authority and as a consequence offers good value for money when compared to urban and metropolitan Authorities. There are 8 strategically located Regular Stations that are crewed partially or wholly by Regular firefighters. Appendix D provides a breakdown of the average number of incidents in each station area and. In addition, Appendix E highlights additional emergency resources available across the county, many of which are crewed by on-call firefighters.

6.5 The challenges associated with on-call recruitment and retention is not new. In a report commissioned by the Government in 2002, its primary aim was to review and make recommendations for how the UK Fire Service should change to meet the demands of the 21st Century, Sir George Bain identified that recruitment and retention challenges dated as far back as 1923. Indeed within the report Bain stated a national shortfall of around 20% of on-call firefighters across the UK.

6.6 Increasing demands on the on-call duty system is not confined to ‘fire’ specific areas. There are many external influences that affect both recruitment and retention as rural communities change. There is a slide in the demography and socio-economics as rural areas adapt to changes in transportation, economics, education, housing, finance, health and individual expectations all exacerbated by austerity. It is a fact that recruiting firefighters at some of our remote rural stations is a significant challenge as work opportunities in the villages become limited.
6.7 Best Value: The cost effectiveness of on-call stations compared with a regular station is significant. With the staffing costs associated with a small on-call station being approximately £50,000 - £70,000 and the staffing cost of crewing a traditional 2/2/4 duty system 'Full Time' fire station in the region of £800,000 - £900,000. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in their document 'Off the Run' acknowledge that on-call firefighters provide "cost-effective fire cover". Their 2003/4 figures suggest that while 60% (UK national figures) of Firefighting crews are on-call, payments to the on-call only equate to 13.74%. Their calculations suggest that the on-call system is probably about eight times cheaper than regular duty system. Similar figures and benefits of the on-call duty system are supported by the 2007 Audit Commission report 'Rising to the Challenge' and more recently Sir Ken Knight's report 'Facing the Future', that provides a number of recommendations around efficiencies for consideration by Fire and Rescue Authorities.

6.8 In 2002 The FBU made a claim for equal treatment for on-call firefighters in respect of their conditions of Service, including pension and sickness benefits. The case was heard in an Employment Tribunal and although similarities were found, the tribunal concluded that Regular and on-call could not be compared, and this decision was initially upheld at appeal in July 2004. However, the case was subsequently taken to the House of Lords and in 2006 the decision was repealed; they found in favour of the claimants redirecting the Employment Tribunal, stating that "the claimants were engaged in broadly similar work as their whole time comparators and had established unfavourable treatment in their terms and conditions of service". Therefore, on-call firefighters enjoy the same benefits and terms and conditions of employment comparable to their full time colleagues which dispels the myth that such firefighters are 'volunteers' – they are not, they are part-time firefighters that have part time jobs and employment rights and therefore are managed to the same standards as full time staff.

6.9 Another challenge to the on-call duty system came around in 2006 with the implementation of the Working Time Regulations (WTR). These Regulations regulate working time in various ways including placing a general limit of 48 hours on the working week, which can be averaged over 17 weeks (note that being available 'on-call' does not classify as working hours).

6.10 Since October 2005, and the introduction of the WTR, it was identified that, Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) carry no exemption to the Regulations, although Individual workers can agree in writing with their employers voluntarily to “opt out” of the 48 hour limit. During this period the FBU negotiated as part of the 2003 Pay and Conditions agreement, that full cover for an on-call firefighter would be 120 hours per week. Their argument being that this gave the on-call firefighters 48 hours off per week which was more family friendly. These limits are applied across CFRS to ensure that on-call firefighters comply with the regulations and are able to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

7.0 **ON CALL APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY**

7.1 The following table provides detail of Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service on-call appliance availability from 2013 to the current date.
To further analyse the data and determine where the pressures are across the Service, appendix B provides a more detailed breakdown of availability by station.

It can be seen within Appendix B there has been over 85% availability of the on-call appliances across the County over the last three years. Although stations strive to maintain 100% availability the fact that the on-call stations availability is so high is a credit to the commitment of the Managers and the FF’s.

In order to monitor the availability of Cumbria's on-call stations, the Service uses bespoke software from Gartan Technologies Limited. The technology allows on-call firefighters to book on and off duty using either a computer or mobile phone and the system refreshes every 15 seconds to provide Fire Control with the latest fire engine availability. An example of the on-call availability map is provided as Appendix C.

On-call firefighters are contracted to provide up to a maximum of 120 hours of availability each week and must live or work within 5 minutes of the fire station to respond promptly to emergency calls. Each firefighter provides the Service with a template of their availability and this forms part of their contract of employment. Within the Gartan system, various reports are available to allow Managers to monitor individual firefighter and station performance.

In order to continue to ensure CFRS is able to deploy cost effective and efficient emergency cover from our 38 fire stations, recruitment of on-call firefighters remains a high priority for the Service. There are a number of other agencies competing to recruit similar minded personnel, including the Armed Forces. Many of these can offer more attractive remuneration schemes and therefore continue to present challenges in attracting suitable firefighter candidates.
8.0 SUMMARY

8.1 CFRS will continue to do all it can to ensure it has sufficient numbers of firefighters who are highly trained to enable fire appliances to respond to emergency calls across Cumbria and to ensure this is carried out in a cost effective and efficient way.

John McVay
Head of Operational Response

9 November 2016

Appendices

A: On-Call Station Map
B: On-Call Station Availability 2014-16
C: On-Call Station Availability Gartan Map
D: On-Call Station incident performance
E: Specialist Appliances across Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions

No previous relevant decisions. The paper has been shared with the Portfolio holder, Councillor Barry Doughty.

Background Papers

None

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