

CHESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MEETING OF: STAFFING COMMITTEE
DATE: 20TH NOVEMBER 2023
REPORT OF: HEAD OF SERVICE DELIVERY
AUTHOR: ESTABLISHMENTS TEAM

SUBJECT: ANNUAL WORKFORCE PLANNING UPDATE

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update as of November 2023 of the current operational staffing levels and give Members an overview of the workforce planning process which is used to plan and recruit the required number of operational Firefighters.

Recommended: That Members:

- [1] Note the contents of the update.

Background

2. The Service currently has a total funded establishment of 391 "Grey Book" employees. This includes staff across a range of departments. There are also an average of 4.6 temporary roles within the structure, which are not part of the permanent establishment but are interim roles the service wishes to fill to meet various operational and business needs.
3. During the last year the Service has continued to see a higher number of retirement due to the current workforce profile. This turnover will present additional challenges to the Service in the coming years.
4. Analysis by the Pensions manager has provided detailed retirement assumptions which are used to inform workforce planning; however, some uncertainty exists due to the pensionable status of individuals being influenced by their personal circumstances and the continuing lack of clarity around the impact of the McCloud pension ruling.
5. The Service is also seeing an increased number of leavers to both external employers and other Fire and Rescue Services who are facing similar issues with their retirement profiles. In the four-year period to 31st March 2027, we are anticipating approximately 111 leavers, which represents employee turnover of 28%.
6. In response to this, officers have developed a detailed medium term workforce model which forecasts our recruitment and training requirements up to March 2027. Progress against this is closely monitored in monthly establishment meetings which ensure that recruitment against operational requirements continues to meet business need.

Information

New Starters

7. In the last 12 months the Service has undertaken the following recruitment to wholetime firefighter roles:

13 x Wholetime Recruits (Sep-22)
4 x Community Safety Apprentices (Mar-23) – these staff were already On-Call Firefighters and therefore did not require the full course.
2 x Re-deployments from On Call migration (Mar-23) – as a result of the duty system change at Wilmslow
7 x Community Safety Apprentices + 3 x Wholetime Recruits (Apr-23)
12 x Wholetime Recruits (Sep-23)

Total 38 new recruits.

Leavers

8. In the last 12 months the Service has seen the following staff leave:

Retirements – 18
Transfer to other FRS – 4
Resignation – 3

There was also one ill health retirement and one death in service.

Total 27 leavers.

Future Recruitment

9. Future recruitment and training is planned to fill the following courses within the coming year:

8 x On-Call Migration (Mar-24)
12 x Wholetime Recruits (Apr-24)

Promotion Board Processes

10. The Service continues to conduct annual promotion boards in order to fill the required number of supervisory and managerial roles. The latest round of promotion boards for Crew, Watch, Station and Group Managers were completed in October 2023. This resulted in the following permanent appointments:

4 x permanent Group Manager appointments
10 x permanent Station Manager appointments
2 x permanent Watch Manager appointments (with a further seven successful staff in the hold pool awaiting a vacancy)
14 x permanent Crew Manager appointments (with a further seven successful staff in the hold pool awaiting a vacancy)

By completing the promotion boards on a structured annual basis, the Service is able to reduce the number of temporary promotions which increases stability within management teams and promotes improved employee engagement and welfare.

The number of temporary promotions is one measure which is considered by HMICFRS as part of their inspection process. Following the conclusion of the 2023 promotion boards, the Service will (as of 1st January 2024) have just four staff (at Station Manager level and below) in temporary promotion posts. This is a significant reduction compared with previous years and demonstrates the Service's commitment to fully managing career pathways effectively.

Secondments

11. The Service supports staff who wish to undertake secondment opportunities to other organisations for both personal development and to achieve benefits for the Service when they return to the organisation. Two staff are currently seconded to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to support national sector improvement work.

CRMP 2024-2028 / Fire Cover Review

12. The new workforce planning model which has been developed by officers can be easily adapted as the emerging findings from the Fire Cover Review and future requirements identified for inclusion in the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2028. This will allow officers to ensure the Service is well placed to adapt to any changing workforce requirements, subject to the final version of the CRMP being approved by CFA in February 2024.

Financial Implications

13. To facilitate the recruitment plan effectively, the wholetime recruit training courses must be completed with a minimum of 12 recruits. The volume nature of this type of bulk recruitment means that the plan cannot be fully aligned to having the exact number of FTE required at any given time. As a result, the Service will, on average, across the period, employ approximately 11.8 FTE above the funded establishment during 2023/24. This will represent an additional cost of approximately £567k.

This over establishment assists the Service by adding some resilience for higher than planned staff absence and training, and to deal with any unexpected peaks in turnover.

Equality & Diversity Implications

14. Officers have established a dedicated Attraction and Recruitment group which meets quarterly and considers positive action requirements in detail to ensure inclusion within all recruitment processes. Several ongoing initiatives to promote recruitment within underrepresented groups are in place, including

arrangements to maintain contact with those unsuccessful in previous processes and provide support in preparation for future recruitment processes.

15. Further work to review the eligibility and entry requirements for external applicants when applying for vacancies and transfers is ongoing. This is in direct response to the loss of staff to other Services and to address the need to diversify our workforce further.

Environmental Implications

14. None

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

NONE