

# CHESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

**MEETING OF:** STAFFING COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 13<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2024  
**REPORT OF:** HEAD OF SERVICE DELIVERY  
**AUTHOR:** ESTABLISHMENTS TEAM

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**SUBJECT: ANNUAL WORKFORCE PLANNING UPDATE**

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## Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update as of October 2024 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 390 "Grey Book" wholetime employees. This includes staff across a range of departments. There are also an average of 2.75 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. The total funded establishment will rise to 411 "Grey Book" employees upon implementation of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) by the end of the current financial year.
4. During the last year the Service has continued to see a number of retirements which is due to the current workforce age profile. This turnover will continue to present additional challenges to the Service in the coming years.
5. Analysis by the Service Pensions Manager has provided detailed retirement assumptions which are used to inform workforce planning. The recent pay awards have slowed down retirement rates to below the numbers expected, however the number is still significant.
6. The Service is also seeing an increased number of leavers through others leaving for other fire and rescue services, careers and retirements.
7. The total retirements for 2023/24 was 17, whilst other leavers for the same year totalled 6. The total retirements for 2024/25 to date is 12, with other leavers to date totalling 6 so far.

8. The anticipated retirements until March 2027 is 36 and other leavers estimated at 10 per annum.
9. 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

10. In the last 12 months the Service has recruited 6 wholetime recruits, with 8 further firefighters joining through On-Call migration.

### Leavers

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

- Retirements – 21
- Transfer to other FRS – 4

Sadly, there was also a death of a serving member of staff.

Totalling 26 leavers.

### Future Recruitment

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

- 16 x CRMP Re-deployment (Nov-2024)
- 12 x Wholetime Recruits (Apr-2025)
- 12 x Wholetime Recruits (Sept-2025)

### Promotion Board Processes

13. The Service continues to conduct annual promotion boards 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 2024. This resulted in the following permanent appointments:
  - 1 x permanent Group Manager appointments (with a further one successful held in the talent pool awaiting a vacancy).
  - 1 x temporary Group Manager on secondment from Greater Manchester FRS.
  - 3 x permanent Station Manager appointments.
  - 10 x permanent Watch Manager appointments (with a further six successful staff in the talent pool awaiting a vacancy).

- 11 x permanent Crew Manager appointments (with a further three successful staff in the talent pool awaiting a vacancy).
14. By completing the promotion boards on a structured annual basis, the Service can reduce the number of temporary promotions which increases stability within management teams and promotes improved employee engagement and welfare.
  15. The number of temporary promotions is one measure which is considered by HMICFRS as part of their inspection process.
  16. Following the conclusion of the 2024 promotion boards, the Service will (as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025) have just six staff (at Area Manager level and below) in temporary posts. This is a significant reduction compared with previous years and demonstrates the Service's commitment to fully managing career pathways effectively.

### Secondments

17. The Service supports staff who wish to undertake secondment opportunities to other organisations such as the National Fire Chiefs Council and Home Office. This can provide personal development for staff and achieve benefits for the Service when they return to the organisation. One staff member is currently seconded to the Fire Brigades Union. Secondments opportunities are regularly shared with staff with the benefits highlighted.

### Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2028

18. The CRMP 2024-2028 was approved by the Fire Authority in February 2024. This involves the inception of four new Weekday Pumps and the reversion of Knutsford to the day crewing duty system. The establishment on both duty systems have been filled by a mixture of on-call redeployment and the preferencing and reallocation of current staff. The Specials Review undertaken by the Service has also been approved which has reduced establishment numbers at Lymm and Ellesmere Port by 1 per watch. However, through the promotion process and preferencing system, all staff who requested to remain at their respective stations have currently been accommodated.

### **Financial Implications**

19. To facilitate our recruitment plan efficiently, the wholetime recruit training courses ideally 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 full-time equivalents (FTE) required at any given time. As a result, the Service will, on average, across the period, employ approximately +7.33 FTE above the funded establishment during 2024/25. This will represent an additional cost of approximately £414k.
20. This over establishment assists the Service by adding some resilience for higher than planned staff absence and training, and to smooth any unexpected peaks and troughs in staff turnover.

## **Equality & Diversity Implications**

21. 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.
22. 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**

23. None

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE**