



17 JULY 2018

## FIREFIGHTER APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME UPDATE

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### REPORT OF HEAD OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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#### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide members with an update on the Firefighter (FF) Apprenticeship Scheme, the outcomes of the review undertaken and the progress of the current selection process.

#### BACKGROUND

2. In order to effectively utilise the apprenticeship levy and meet government targets, the Service developed a FF apprenticeship scheme with the intention of providing excellent opportunities to young people from our local communities to join the fire and rescue service (FRS) via an alternative recruitment pathway. The scheme would enable people to learn and develop at a slower pace and have meaningful employment opportunities once complete.
3. The scheme was the first of its kind in the country and is now viewed as good practice by other UK FRS. The National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services hosted a hugely successful event in London in 2017 at which the Service was invited to showcase the scheme to other FRS.
4. The apprenticeship programme was recognised by the government at the National Apprenticeship Awards and was also a regional finalist in the newcomer category. The awards recognise excellent businesses that grow their own talent with apprenticeships and apprentices, who have made a significant contribution to their workplaces. The Service is listed in the top 100 apprenticeship employers for 2017 and is the only blue light service to feature on this list.
5. The ten apprentices who commenced their career with the Service in May 2017 have successfully completed the academic and operational requirements of their first year, this was celebrated at the passing out event at the Service Training Centre on Friday 27 April 2018. Poor retention rates can be an issue for apprenticeship schemes therefore to have a 100% retention rate for our scheme is testament to the success of the scheme. The apprentices are now working towards the Business Fire Safety (BFS) Trailblazer apprenticeship standard whilst working with operational crews across the service providing front line services.
6. Due to the success of the programme and our identified workforce planning requirements, a second cohort of apprentices are currently being recruited with a view to start in September 2018.

7. The Workforce Development Team have undertaken a full review of year one of the programme with amendments made to the scheme to ensure we continue to develop the best firefighters for the communities of County Durham and Darlington. The methodology and the changes are outlined below.

## **METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW**

8. Anecdotal and formal evidence was collated throughout year one from the apprentices, key groups of employees and external providers to capture a broad range of views to enable improvements to be made to the scheme for future cohorts which will add value to both the development of the apprentices and to the Service.

## **KEY CHANGES TO THE SCHEME**

9. Cohort 2 of the FF apprentices will receive a one-week induction to the Service followed by four weeks at the Service Training Centre (STC) where they will start to learn core firefighting skills. This change has been made due to feedback received from both the apprentices and the STC to ensure the values, behaviours and operational discipline required of a professional FF is instilled at the beginning of their career. Once complete, they will attend STC one day per week until they reach the block of eight-week risk critical training at the end of year one. The improved frequency of the operational training will lessen the skills fade that was seen with the current apprentices as they attended the STC fortnightly.
10. To positively impact the number of females passing the role related test phase of the recruitment process and progressing to the interview phase, some changes were made to lessen the strength requirements which could then be developed during year one of the scheme. The STC identified that initially some of the apprentices did not have sufficient strength to lift the 13.5 metre ladder during drills so to ensure this did not hamper the progression of core skill development, for cohort 2, STC will utilise the lighter 10.5 metre while the apprentices enhance their strength. Prior to commencing risk critical training each apprentice must achieve the standard required for strength in normal FF recruitment.
11. Whilst based in Community Safety (CS) and following the receipt of initial training, the apprentices will be assigned a workload to support the Vulnerable Persons Advocates (VPAs) and District Teams, conduct Safe and Wellbeing Visits and assist with ongoing campaigns in the community. This will enable their work and progress to be monitored more closely whilst providing tangible evidence to assess their productivity and competence against the CS Trailblazer Standard in addition to providing extra resource for the CS Team.
12. At the beginning of the scheme, the Health and Fitness Advisor will increase the input on fitness given to cohort 2 whilst they undertake their core firefighting skills. This will include regular group activities in addition to the fitness plan in place for daily personal training sessions aligned to their individual needs. Fitness assessments will be undertaken every 6 to 8 weeks to monitor progress of their cardiovascular fitness and strength.
13. The allocation of a mentor was positively received by the apprentices which will be maintained for cohort 2. The Workforce Development Team is currently progressing the development of a mentor scheme for the Service. In addition, the current apprentices will be allocated one of the cohort 2 apprentices to offer support, advice and guidance where required.

14. Cohort 2 will use the new CS Trailblazer Standard and the BFS Trailblazer Standard providing the apprentices with a clear development pathway as delays in their release initially provided cohort 1 with an element of doubt as to their pathway. The redesigned scheme will facilitate opportunities for the apprentices to gather the required evidence to demonstrate their competence against the standards. Relationships continue to be forged between New College Durham and the Service to ensure the college can fulfil their obligations required by the standards.

## CURRENT RECRUITMENT PROCESS UPDATE

15. The recruitment process for the second cohort of apprentices reflects the Service's recruitment process for Wholetime and On Call FF. Applicants undertook a two-stage online assessment which assessed both abilities and behaviours. The role related stage of the process was amended with modifications made to the weight of the ladder lift and the removal of the time limit on the equipment carry assessment.
16. In the final stages of the process, all applicants were asked to complete an i3 personality profile which was used to assist the interview panel to maximise the contribution of the candidate during the interview. The profile will also assist the design of onboarding programmes and ensure training is delivered in the best way for the candidates to reach their full potential.
17. It was identified from the outcome of the first apprenticeship recruitment process that further work with the Service's Young Firefighters (YFA) and Cadets was required to prepare them for applying for the scheme this year. To this end, the Workforce Development Team designed and facilitated employability sessions specifically targeted to the YFA and Cadets who would be eligible to apply for this year's programme. The sessions were well attended with positive feedback received and the impact can be seen in the latest recruitment figures with 14 of the YFA/Cadets applying for the scheme with 4 reaching the interview stage of the process.
18. 509 initial applications were received for the scheme which was an 80% increase in comparison with the first process. The Service also saw success in terms of increased numbers of applications from underrepresented groups and from the YFA/Cadets.
19. 108 candidates progressed to the role related tests with 39 candidates progressing to the final interview and presentation stage which concluded on Thursday 28 June, a breakdown of the specific groups is shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**

Final Interview and Presentation	
Group	Number of Candidates
Male	27
Female	12
BAME	1
On Call	8
YFA/Cadets	4

20. The outcome of the recruitment process following final interview and presentation is shown in Table 2 below. Initial offers have been made to these candidates however pre-employment checks are still to be completed before a contract of employment is given.

**Table 2**

Recruitment Process Outcome	
Group	Number of Candidates
Male	6
Female	5
BAME	1
On Call	3
YFA/Cadets	2

21. The successful candidates will start their apprenticeship on Monday 10 September 2018.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

22. Members are requested to:
- (a) **note** the contents of the report.

Katherine Metcalfe, Head of Workforce Development Tel Ext. 5665