



# Dorset Fire Authority

MEETING	Dorset Fire Authority
DATE OF MEETING	16 June 2015
OFFICER	Chief Fire Officer
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	WDS Firefighter Recruitment
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Workforce planning is the means by which we ensure we have staffing capacity and necessary capabilities to achieve our corporate objectives. It requires an assessment of where we are now, a forecast of where we want to be, and an analysis of what will need to do to get there. We can then develop our action plans accordingly.</p> <p>Reports outlining workforce and succession planning arrangements are regularly presented to the Authority.</p> <p>The last report in February 2015 included a comprehensive overview of WDS establishment and strength levels and outlined the key issues in relation to recruitment, retention and succession planning.</p> <p>This report provides an update on our WDS workforce and succession planning arrangements and outline timelines for wholetime firefighter recruitment.</p>
RISK ASSESSMENT	Failure to put in place robust workforce and succession planning processes will result in the staff not being adequately prepared to carry out their current and future roles in a safe, competent and effective manner.
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None identified.
<p><i>Note: If the matrix indicates negative impacts on the community or staff, an equality impact assessment (EIA) will need to be completed.</i></p>	
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	<p>As both the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services are holding vacancies salary cost savings are being made.</p> <p>There are costs associated with recruitment and selection activities. These costs have not be calculated as they are dependent on the approach taken.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS	That Members support a decision to carry out a joint wholetime duty system recruitment campaign with the Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority as set out in section 5 of this report.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None
APPENDICES	None
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	Darran Gunter, Chief Fire Officer Tel: (01305) 252604

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Dorset Fire Authority receives regular reports regarding workforce and succession planning. The last report in February 2015 included a comprehensive overview of WDS establishment and strength levels and outlined the key issues in relation to recruitment, retention and succession planning.
- 1.2 The report informed Members of the effects that the forthcoming combination with Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority might have on succession planning and future recruitment plans.
- 1.3 It was resolved that Members would receive regular updates from the Chief Fire Officer in respect of establishment levels and any decision to recruit wholetime firefighters.
- 1.4 Following this, in April 2015 the Joint Leadership Team (JLT) received a report outlining joint workforce planning issues so that as we approach combination succession planning issues are considered on a joint basis.
- 1.5 The report advised that the current combined WDS vacancies are 32, 17 at Firefighter, five at Crew Manager, two at Watch Manager, five at Station Manager and three at Group Manager.

## 2. Key Workforce Planning Issues

- 2.1 Like many organisations, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services have an ageing workforce, particularly within the WDS staff category. This has been exacerbated by the fact that neither organisation has carried out any external recruitment activities for a number of years.
- 2.2 Both organisations have a high number of WDS retirements over the next five years which will result in a loss of key skills, knowledge and experience.
- 2.3 Of those retiring, a high number are at roles above firefighter level, which will exacerbate the loss of key skills as officers have additional specialised skillsets.

## 3. Current Position

- 3.1 It is a fine balancing act to ensure that we have adequate resources in place in the future without making workforce commitments that may have to be reduced. To that end, it is imperative that we are fully conversant with our current workforce planning status so that we can develop informed actions for the future.
- 3.2 As indicated in paragraph 1.5 above, our combined vacancies are 32. The retirement profiles for both Dorset and Wiltshire indicate that by March 2017 the number of vacancies could rise to 59.
- 3.3 As a result of the workforce planning report considered by JLT, a number of workforce planning interventions will be set in place. They are:

- 3.3.1 Fire Control Redeployments - Three Fire Control staff have passed WDS selection tests and can be redeployed into Firefighter roles after September 2015. In addition to this, one member of Fire Control will be redeployed into a WDS Crew Manager role. A further two members of Fire Control have expressed an interest and are currently undertaking practical assessment tests.
- 3.3.2 Apprentices - Five Apprentices commenced an apprenticeship programme in October 2014. Should they successfully complete their programme in October 2016, then there is the option to offer them permanent employment.
- 3.3.3 RDS Transferability - The one individual remaining from our transferability selection process is transferring to the WDS establishment.
- 3.4 The interventions would reduce the projected combined vacancies from 59 to 49 by October 2016 and will reduce the current margin of 17 Firefighter vacancies to 13 by December 2015 (paragraph 3.3.1 and 3.3.3) and a further reduction to 8 by October 2016 (paragraph 3.3.2)

## 4. Forward Planning

- 4.1 Retirement and Re-engagement - At the DFA meeting on 16 June 2015 Members will consider a report on retirement and re-engagement. The paper proposes that, as with Wiltshire's flexible retirement and re-employment of uniformed employees policy, decisions to offer retirement and re-engagement opportunities to staff will be based on a case by case basis and will require justification as to how this supports the needs of the organisation. This approach can provide both flexibility and act as a workforce planning tool as re-employment opportunities will only be offered for a fixed term of 12 months.
- 4.2 Potential Changes to Service Delivery - The Combination Business Case committed to undertaking a shift review that will realise significant savings by 2017/18. The Business Case estimated that our WDS establishment could reduce by 30 roles (at Ff and CM level). It is likely that the Combination will also result in a number of reductions in officer posts.
- 4.3 In readiness for this and as a means of avoiding compulsory redundancies of WDS staff, a vacancy margin, achieved through natural wastage, has been maintained and needs to be moving forward.
- 4.4 Suitable Alternative Employment - In the same way that Fire Control staff were offered the opportunity to go through the WDS recruitment process, the same opportunities could be made available to non-uniformed/corporate staff who are at risk of redundancy.
- 4.5 Transfer Register - Currently the vast majority of vacancies are within Dorset. A transfer register for cross border transfers aimed at balancing the vacancies across the two counties is being set in place. This approach could have additional cultural alignment and integration benefits. Clearly this approach will not reduce vacancies, but it could enable a better balancing of the impacts on crewing levels.

## 5. WDS Firefighter Recruitment Requirements

- 5.1 Our current combined vacancies are 32. When balanced against proposed changes to Service Delivery and reduction in numbers of officers, we could be in a position where we have no vacancies. This however is highly dependent upon the outcomes of the shift review and any associated timescales for implementing the shift review changes.
- 5.2 It is also anticipated that following Combination we will have a small number of supernumerary (surplus) officers for a short period.
- 5.3 Notwithstanding this, it is clear however that we will need to increase our WDS strength at some point over the next couple of years in preparation for high levels of eligible retirements in 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- 5.4 Given the number of vacancies and future predicted retirements, the vacancy margin at Firefighter level in Dorset is becoming unsustainable. Whilst we must be mindful of the proposed changes to Service Delivery, this will take some time to implement. In addition, the new organisation needs to prepare for the future 'peak' in retirements as set out in section 5.3.
- 5.5 Neither Authority has carried out external recruitment for a number of years, instead each has used other interventions, such as RDS transferability and external transfers as a means of managing vacancies.
- 5.6 We have often indicated that we would utilise a 'blended' approach to WDS recruitment in that we would interchange the interventions outlined in section 5.5 with external recruitment. In wishing to maintain a 'blended' approach, we now need to carry out external WDS firefighter recruitment campaign. This would provide us with a pool of people who could attend recruit firefighter training in accordance with our succession planning requirements.
- 5.7 A decision to carry out a joint WDS recruitment campaign over the next few months would send a very positive community engagement message.
- 5.8 An indicative WDS recruitment timeline is set out below:

Date	Activity
Sept 2015	Advert
Oct 2015	Marking of Application Forms
Nov 2015	On line written tests
Dec 15/Jan 16	Practical Tests
End Jan /Feb 16	Interviews
April 16	Potential to commence employment

NB: Timelines are indicative and dependent upon developments with our E Recruitment System and resources allocated

## 6. Conclusion and Next Steps

- 6.1 It is now timely to prepare and commence a joint WDS firefighter recruitment campaign.
- 6.2 The interventions set out in section 3 enable the Service to be in an interim holding position whilst we undertake out WDS recruitment.

**DARRAN GUNTER**

Chief Fire Officer

8 June 2015