

Report to Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee:

14th January 2022 10:00hrs



Recruitment and Retention in GFRS

Purpose of Report:

At the meeting on 12 November 2021 CFO Mark Preece presented the GFRS whole-time firefighters Recruitment and Selection Review Report to the Committee. This report evaluated the recruitment process that took place in 2021 and identified areas for improvement.

The following actions were noted by the committee and are addressed in this report:

1. Whether progression opportunities for those from the BAME community in the Service need to be looked at?
2. That the retention of firefighters needed to be monitored
3. That an update providing an overview of the expectations for GFRS recruitment and retention over the next five years be provided to the Committee.

1. Under represented Groups and Positive Action

Members were advised at the previous meeting that positive action for the recruitment campaign had been hindered by the pandemic, however in order to improve focus in this area, a Culture and Inclusion Manager has been recruited who started with the Service in October 2021.

The Service already monitor the breakdown of staff based on gender and ethnicity on a monthly and quarterly basis as part of key performance indicators to understand where there is under representation of Gloucestershire communities. The Service still need to look at monitoring LGBT+ staff where 50.1% of staff do not record their sexual orientation making it difficult to monitor.

The Service has recently been recognised by the Home Office as the top ranked service in England for its proportion of female firefighters. 17.1 per cent of firefighters at GFRS are women – 73 of the total. Gloucestershire was among only five fire and rescue services in the country to have achieved higher than 10 per cent when the workforce diversity data was recorded on 31 March 2021.

However, although the Service evidenced in the whole-time recruitment evaluation report that BAME candidates were not disadvantaged by the process, the Service acknowledge that there is more work to do to attract these under represented groups to apply for roles in the fire and rescue service.

Currently the Service only have 12 BAME staff members, 2.62%, whereas 4.6% of the population of Gloucestershire are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The Service recognise we have more work to do in this area to reflect the community. One of the priorities is to ensure that positive action becomes embedded as a core part of what the service delivers and not just when recruitment is taking place.

A draft action plan has been developed that identifies the breakdown of the communities in Gloucestershire and compares it to the breakdown of GFRS staff. This enables the Service to focus engagement with the under represented groups in communities.

The action plan also supports the council's equality action plan and includes:

- Promoting Positive Action to all staff as ambassadors
- Improvements in recruitment information on GFRS webpages with images demonstrating diversity and personal stories by staff
- Advertising recruitment with under represented organisations
- Retention: Supporting under represented staff by providing buddies
- Progression: Offering access to under represented groups to 'Stepping Up' courses and the opportunity to offer Reverse Mentoring to Senior Leaders.

The Service now monitor and evaluate all recruitment and promotion processes to ensure there is no disadvantage to under represented groups, including gender, ethnicity and LGBT+.

As part of the Cultural Improvement Plan the Service has commissioned 'Above Difference' who have a wealth of experience in providing public sector organisations support in this area. As well as providing Cultural Intelligence training to our senior leaders they will also provide independent and external scrutiny of the Improvement plans and EDI policies. This will offer the Service assurance and feedback on how the Service can continue to improve recruitment and promotion processes.

2. Leavers and Retention

We monitor leavers on a monthly and quarterly basis to understand why staff are leaving and what we can do better that may improve retention.

Category	Headcount 1st October 2021	Leavers 12 months (01/12/20- 30/11/21)	Turnover 12 months (01/12/20- 30/11/21)	Completed exit interview/form 12 months (01/12/20- 30/11/21)
Control	21	1	4.76%	0
Retained	201	36	17.91%	3

Support staff	51	5	9.80%	1
Whole time	185	20	10.81%	1
Whole service	458	62	13.54%	5

The majority of leavers from whole-time firefighting roles are due to retirements or leaving to work for another fire and rescue service. For on call staff the majority leave due to making work life balance decisions.

Overall numbers of exit interviews within Community Safety/ GFRS are low compared to other Directorates although these have increased slightly recently. More work is needed over coming months to encourage greater exit interview completion and promotion of the new process introduced earlier this year as part of the Culture section of the Improvement Plan.

The data from these exit interviews is analysed so that we can see where we need to improve.

3. Workforce Planning

The GFRS Workforce Planning (WFP) group was set up in July 2020 to co-ordinate the approach and application of workforce planning activity across GFRS (Whole time, On call, Retained Firefighters and Support and Fire control employees).

The Workforce Planning Group is chaired by ACFO Jean Cole with senior Area Manager representation from every area of the service, as well as HR. The Group has oversight of all workforce planning activity and decision making within the service including regular monitoring of temporary promotions, reviewing our retirement profiles so we know when to recruit, considering how we can increase representation from under represented groups and supporting succession planning, talent and leadership development.

Over the last 12 months the Service have carried out the most intense period of recruitment and promotion that GFRS has ever seen, with processes being conducted for every level within the organisation. At the beginning of this period, the Service launched its new promotion policy and took the decision to recruit into Succession Pools to ensure future resilience and manage demands on our capacity. This means that when a vacancy arises at any given level, we are now able to fill it immediately, which is key for operational resilience.

Every month the Workforce Planning Group receive a report on vacancies and forecast retirements of all staff groups. This includes an update on the number left in the succession pool, to enable identification of timelines for planned future recruitments and promotions processes. As the Service recruit into Succession Pools for every level of the organisation there are estimated to be enough staff in the pools to cover retirements until the end of 2023. The Succession pools are monitored monthly as there will always be leavers who we did not anticipate. This enable the Service to schedule the next planned recruitment at any level in a timely manner.

It is important to note that these estimates are based on static current establishment levels. If the service were to grow or expand over the coming years, it's likely to have a knock on effect on numbers and bring the need to recruit forward.

3.1 Recruitment and Promotions

Below is a summary of the planning information that the Workforce Planning Group receive on a monthly basis.

As at the 1st January we are 3.5 over establishment for whole-time firefighters. This is due to the requirement of training new recruits through the apprenticeship course which works most effectively in blocks of 6 or 12.

According to the pivot data provided by HR /Peninsular the following retirements will accrue across the organisation. There has been no estimate made for retirements due to pension changes in April 2022 or leaving to join other FRSs, but this is kept under constant review.

On call firefighter recruitment follows the same format as for whole-time firefighter recruitment. However, recruitment for this group of firefighters runs continuously based on need. This is due to the limiting requirement of applicants needing to live or work in a specific radius of the fire station, in order to meet response targets. This reduces the possible numbers of applicants considerably.

For further information our recruitment information can be found on the Service website

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/glosfire/recruitment-at-gloucestershire-fire-and-rescue-service/>

All Roles			Pool end date				Retirements 2024 to 2026		
Level	No. in Pool	Vacancies in 3 months (Nov 21 to Jan 22)	Vacancies in 6 months (Feb 22 to April 22)	Vacancies in 9 month (May 22 to July 22)	Vacancies until pool ends (Aug 22 to Dec 2023)	2024	2025	2026	
PO						1			
Area Manager	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	
Group Manager	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Station Manager	2	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	
Watch Manager	3	0	1	0	2	1	0	4	
Crew Manager	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Fire	18	1	4	0	2	2	1	2	

Fighter													
Total		1	6	0	6	8	3	6					

We have 6 trained firefighters in the succession pool (that are already currently On – Call or in other FRSs) that can be used immediately to in fill unexpected whole time vacancies when staff leave (currently 2 forecast this year leaving to work for other FRS.)

This workforce planning data that GFRS holds suggests that the following recruitment and promotions processes should be timetabled, provided there is no growth in establishment numbers which would change this forecast and bring the dates forward significantly. (This is kept under monthly review and is subject to change if the data changes.)

Level	Dates
Area Managers	January 2024
Group Managers	March 2024
Station Managers	September 2024
Watch Managers	September 2023
Crew Managers	November 2023
Whole-time Recruitment	April to July 2023

Whole-time firefighters workforce planning

+ 3.5 WT Firefighter	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22	Jun 22	July 22	Aug 22	Sep 22	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Total
Retirement	1	2	3	1	2 pool			2	2				11
Affect on W/T numbers	+2.5	+0.5	-2.5	-3.5	-1.5	Apprentice ship course booked for 6		+2.5	+0.5				
	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	July 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	
Retirement			1					1					2
Affect on W/T numbers +0.5	+0.5		-0.5	Plan recruitment for firefighters succession pool: estimated numbers required to 2026 is 9.5 plus impact of internal				-1.5		Apprentice ship course for 6		+4.5	

	promotions												
	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	July 24	Aug 24	Sept 24	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	
Retirement	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1				8
Affect on W/T numbers	+3.5		+2.5	+1.5	+0.5	-0.5	-1.5	-2.5	-3.5				
	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Apr 25	May 25	Jun 25	July 25	Aug 25	Sept 25	Oct 25	Nov 25	Dec 25	
Retirement						1		1			1		3
Affect on W/T numbers						-4.5		-5.5			-6.5		
	Jan 26	Feb 26	Mar 26	Apr 26	May 26	Jun 26	July 26	Aug 26	Sept 26	Oct 26	Nov 26	Dec 26	
Retirement					1	1			4				6
Affect on W/T numbers					-7.5	-8.5			-9.5				

3.2 Skills, Development and Progression Plans

In addition to numbers of roles to recruit to, the other key data required for workforce planning is ensuring we have the skills required for the roles. Due to the high level of recruitment and promotion required in the past 12 months there are relatively high numbers of staff in development. The number of staff in development, and resulting competence and experience levels from this workforce profile has been highlighted as a specific risk on the corporate risk register (S.R. 1.4). As whole time leavers tend to be more experienced staff who retire, the Service need to ensure that the levels of skill is managed. When considered against a trend of decreasing emergency incidents, the risk to general operational safety and competence is exacerbated. This gap can only (and must) be plugged by increasing the level of training and development given to staff. Put simply, 'as incidents decrease, training requirements increase' – due to the fact that staff do not gain the experience necessary or have opportunity to practice their skills at operational incidents. Owing to this GFRS's Learning and Development team have sought to expand through the MTFS process.

The following is the latest data on those in development in the Service:

Role	Total number	Number in Development	Percentage %
Firefighter	271	92	34
Crew Manager	71	31	44
Watch Manager	45	6	13
Station Manager	16	6	38
Group Manager	4	0	0
Area Manager	4	0	0

The workforce planning data suggests that in 2023/24 we will lose 3 of our 4 Area Managers in a very short timeframe. To address this we are working on development pathways for all staff in line with the National Fire Chiefs Council project on professional standards. These pathways will look to develop staff that have the potential to be promoted and ensure that we have our future leaders ready for the roles, as these are key posts in the organisation.

As well as improving initial firefighter training through the use of the apprenticeship levy, the Service have also managed to improve large scale exercising this year with the running of 4 x 10 pump large scale exercises, to help ensure that as a service we are fully prepared to provide a professional response to any size incident. More large scale exercising is planned in 2022.

To support this increase in training and development the Service has been successful in requesting a growth bid for learning and development. This will ensure provision of an improved level of training and exercising to support our Safer Firefighter Programme.