

## National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Direct Entry Scheme

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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### 1 Executive Summary

This report provides the Authority with information on the intention and rationale for the Service to take part in the 'proof of concept' pilot of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Direct Entry (DE) programme.

### 2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note the report.

### 3 Background

The purpose of the DE programme is to provide an attractive opportunity for high calibre leaders to directly enter the organisation at Station or Area Manager level. This will enable services to broaden the base from which they draw their operational commanders, thereby increasing diversity of thought, perspective and experience. The programme relies on a robust selection process and an immersive, comprehensive training and development package over two or three years, depending on role, that will produce managers who are competent against all elements of their relevant Grey Book role map.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) has always ensured open and transparent recruitment. However, Grey Book posts that are required to have incident command capability (above Firefighter level) have previously only been open to those who have been able to demonstrate competence and experience at the level below that advertised.

Individual services around the UK have experimented with different recruitment pathways, including Direct Entry, and there is considerable experience to be drawn from those that have done this previously. The NFCC has used this learning, and experience from other sectors such as the Police, the Military and the Civil Service, to develop a Direct Entry Scheme that fits better with the needs and ambitions of the Fire sector.

The recognised benefits of managing the programme as an NFCC endorsed and co-ordinated programme are that services will receive a nationally recognised, supported and quality-controlled product that, most importantly, works on a cohort basis. The importance of new entrants being part of a cohort is that experience shows it increases their learning opportunities and resilience in what is a novel, and often challenging, situation.

The programme has received significant endorsement and enthusiasm during its development from the Fire Minister, Home Office officials and HMICFRS with the anticipation that it will be referenced in the long-awaited White Paper.

There was an initial anticipation that the programme would receive equivalent funding to that which was received by the police DE Scheme, but this has not been the case.

It was agreed at full NFCC Council on 24 November 2021, that the NFCC would support the initial onboarding costs and then provide central co-ordination and quality assurance for a proof of concept. This would be achieved through a group of services who are willing to become early adopters and support a cohort of six to 12 direct entrants.

There are still, however, productive conversations being held between the NFCC and the Home Office (HO) on where additional financial support could be provided to help DE, amongst a number of other leadership initiatives

For the purposes of the programme the posts are described as supernumerary, and the salary costs would be in addition to existing establishments while the individual is under development. In reality, the Direct Entrants will become fully involved in Service life from the onset and in Shropshire will be part of the additional capacity required to deliver the six transformational reviews planned for the next three years.

The current project timescale for the DE programme is for recruitment to commence in September 2022, with a view to the first new entrants arriving in-service in April 2023.

Prior to that, a procurement process will be undertaken to find a delivery partner for the attraction, selection and recruitment phases. To this end, early adopters are being asked to identify which level and number of entrants they would be interested in and to put forward a single point of contact (SPOC) to liaise with the project team and ensure host services are fully engaged with the onboarding phase and in completing the design of the finished programme.

Changing the approach to recruitment of operational managers will likely attract a great deal of interest from the sector, the Fire Authority, and the representative bodies, so a clear communication plan and development programme is part of the project to listen to concerns, provide rationale and give assurance that the process will be robust.

Following consideration by the Service Management Team (SMT) and in recognition of the succession plan, it has been agreed the most valuable and practical way for the Service to engage with the programme is with one post at the Station Manager (SM) level.

SMT recognised within their considerations that the Service has the ambition, cultural strength, and financial capacity to take advantage of the NFCC DE Scheme; and how it fits with the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objective of being deliberately developmental, purposefully diverse and inclusive, and intentionally innovative.

The benefits of this are:

- It is compatible with the Services ambition to be deliberately developmental, purposefully diverse and inclusive and intentionally innovative.
- It retains adequate promotion opportunities to motivate existing staff if delivered as SM level.
- The Direct Entry (DE) SM post can be used to create other development opportunities for staff, as the DE post works through its development progression. (NB: it should, however, be remembered that the DE post should not be used to affect the overall establishment numbers, until the point that the officer is deemed competent at SM and able to take on an establishment position).
- The Service can immediately benefit from a high calibre staff member, already able operate at middle manager level and coming from a different background with some pre-existing skills.
- There is at least a two-year window to absorb the supernumerary post into establishment retaining flexibility in workforce planning.
- Reserves or planned underspend can be used for the initial funding for the post.

## **4 Next Steps**

10 Services have now identified themselves as early adopters and have engaged with the DE programme.

A minimum cohort size of six has been set for practical purposes, which has already been met.

A procurement process for a professional partner to undertake the attraction, recruitment and selection activities is now underway. Once the “onboarding” partner has been contracted, the final details of the selection process will be developed in collaboration with the early adopters. This is to ensure all home service needs are met and the final sign-on appointment is made at Chief Fire Officer level.

Alongside this, the early adopters are working with the project team to fully specify the development programme and identify the most effective and efficient delivery model. For example, a decision needs to be made whether the initial Operational Foundation Course will be delivered by a third-party training provider, by a lead fire and rescue authority (FRA) or by a collaboration from within the consortium. Much of this will depend on scale and availability.

High levels of engagement with stakeholders, including Representative Bodies, continue with a recognition that “receiving” Services will rely on good local industrial relations.

Recruitment is planned to commence in September 2022. It will be a national process with candidates required to specify which service(s) they wish to be considered for. It will be made explicit throughout that these are posts that require the individual to provide an operational response base that fits with the home service’s existing operational model.

Following this it is currently anticipated that the cohort will commence in employment in April 2023, when they will commence their two or three year development programme depending on the role they enter at.

The Service will provide the Authority with updates on the progress of the initiative through the Strategy and Resources Committee.

## **5 Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Fire Authority note the intention of the Service to engage as part of the Direct Entry “Proof of Concept” with a view to contract one direct entrant at SM level. This is, however, dependant on a suitable individual successfully completing the selection process.

## **6 Capacity**

There is an impact with regards to engaging with the programme, but no additional resource requirement is anticipated.

## **7 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working**

The Direct Entrants development programme will benefit from exposure to and being part of project work within the alliance programme.

## **8 Financial Implications**

The initiative will require up to three years of funding at SM(Dev) and training costs (training costs still under discussion with HO)

Salary: £57K per annum (including on costs) for 3 years

Training: £53K over 3 years (these would be the same costs regardless of entry route)

These costs can be met initially through exiting transformation funding with underspends allocated to the post as they arise. It is anticipated the post will be absorbed into establishment by April 2026.

## **9 Legal Comment**

The NFCC DE Project has incorporated contractual legal considerations.

## **10 Community Safety**

The post will be able to provide additional Community Safety Resources.

## **11 Environmental**

There are no negative environmental impacts arising from this report.

## **12 Equality Impact Assessment**

NFCC DE Project has already undertaken an overall EQIA that sees the project as having positive impact but a local one should be done in addition as part of the engagement phase.

## **13 Health and Safety**

There are no health and safety impacts arising from this report.

## **14 Fire Standard Core Code of Ethics and Human Rights (including Data Protection)**

There are no impacts on compliance with the Fire Standards Core Code of Ethics or human rights arising from this report.

## **15 ICT**

There are no significant ICT impacts arising from this report.

## **16 Insurance**

There are no insurance impacts arising from this report.

## **17 The On Call Service**

There are no impacts on the On Call service arising from this report however, it is recognised that there may be applicants for the DE Scheme from the On Call Service and this will support inclusivity.

## **18 Public Value / Service Delivery**

There are no public value or service delivery impacts arising from this report.

## **19 Reputation**

The DE programme is likely to raise some public interest and potentially some concerns from representative bodies as this is a novel way of developing our leaders. However, like positive action, it should be recognised that this is a legitimate method of enriching the culture and practice of the Service.

The NFCC DE project team has been engaging regularly with all stakeholders but there will be a need for increased industrial relations activity locally and for a local communications plan.

## **20 Security**

There are no security impacts arising from this report.

## **21 Training**

There will be training impacts from engaging with the programme and these will need to be managed through the SPOC; identifying where any additional resources need to be provided.

## **22 Appendices**

There are no appendices attached to this report.

## **23 Background Papers**

### **Academic Literature Review of Direct Entry into the UK Fire and Rescue Service**

[https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/NFCC%20meetings/2021/February/Item\\_09 -  
Academic Literature Review of Direct Entry into the UK FRS.pdf](https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/NFCC%20meetings/2021/February/Item_09_-_Academic_Literature_Review_of_Direct_Entry_into_the_UK_FRS.pdf)

National Fire Chiefs Council paper, 24 November 2021

[https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/NFCC%20meetings/2021/November/Item\\_04 - NFCC Direct Entry Scheme.pdf](https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/NFCC%20meetings/2021/November/Item_04_-_NFCC_Direct_Entry_Scheme.pdf)