



BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Retained Recruitment

FINAL

Internal Audit Report: 8.16/17

28 April 2017

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

An audit on Retained Recruitment has been undertaken at the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority as part of the approved 2016/17 Internal Audit Plan.

Retained firefighters are a vital part of today's fire and rescue service as they provide efficient, cost effective and reliable fire and rescue cover to Fire Authority's around the UK. Retained crews are called upon to attend the full range of incidents including fires, floods, road traffic collisions, chemical spills and more, and work alongside their Whole-time colleagues at many incidents. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority, as with the majority of other Fire and Rescue Authorities, are struggling to recruit and retain these type of Firefighters as unfortunately, the majority of the general public are not aware that Retained Firefighters exist, or that their local fire station is a retained station and needs them to give their time to provide this service to the local community.

The aim of this audit review was to focus solely on the recruitment and retention of Retained Duty System (RDS) Fire-Fighters and not the recruitment process across the Authority for all employment posts. The Retained recruitment process responsibilities are mainly assigned to the Training and Development Department but other responsibilities are assigned also to the Human Resources, Diversity and Occupational Health Departments as well.

The audit testing was over the 2016/17 financial year and was to ensure that recruitment processes and criteria for recruiting Retained Firefighters has been adequately documented and these processes followed appropriately from start to finish by the relevant Departments and Officers involved. This included ensuring that for all Retained Firefighters recruited, all documentation had been fully completed and signed off, all written, practical, physical tests had been undertaken and passed, fitness and medical checks carried out and a Training and Development Plan put in place for them to continually learn and improve. In addition, the audit also reviewed whether the Authority had identified sufficient ways to recruit new Retained Firefighters but also identify any key trends in the reasons for them leaving the Authority from which the Authority can possibly improve the work life it provides to them.

As at the end of February 2017, there were 142 retained fire-fighters working out of the Bedfordshire Stations; of which 101 were Retained Duty System (RDS) retained and 41 Whole-time retained, and a further eight Firefighters were providing retained services to Bedfordshire Stations with Whole-time roles in other Services. During 2016/17 there were 18 Retained Firefighters recruited and 22 who left the Authority.

1.2 Conclusion

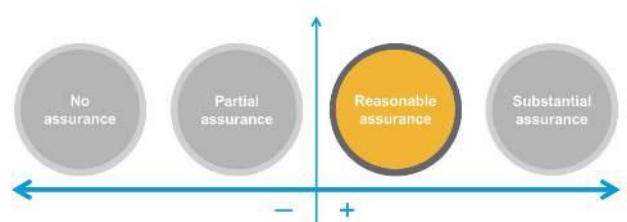
Our review of the Retained Recruitment processes within the Authority has identified that although they are generally robust controls in place there are a number of minor improvements which can be made to further strengthen these which have been recorded in the Action Plan in Section 2 of this report. The key issue identified was in relation the recruitment documents where a number could either not be located or had not been appropriately signed off prior to the Retained Firefighter starting at the Authority.

The Authority is looking to roll out an online recruitment process in the near future which will reduce the amount of paperwork produced and held by the Authority but also ensure that all recruitment documents are completed and signed off and improve the efficiency of the process for the applicant.

Internal Audit Opinion: Collaborative Arrangements

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take reasonable assurance that the controls in place to manage this risk are suitably designed and consistently applied.

However, we have identified issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the control framework is effective in managing the identified risk.



1.3 Key findings

A summary of the key findings from this review are as follows:

- A 'People Strategy' is in place which outlines the Service's Vision, Strategic Objectives, Core Values and Virtues.
- A 'Retained Duty System' (RDS) Recruitment Policy and Procedures document along with various additional recruitment procedural documents are in place which set out the Service's recruitment process arrangements to be followed in respect to new Retained Firefighters.
- The Authority have various documents in place which define the criteria for recruiting Retained Firefighters within the Service and which are adhered to as part of the process.
- The Retained Recruitment processes as recorded in the RDS Policy and Procedures document and other additional recruitment procedural documents are being followed when recruiting Retained Firefighters at the Fire Stations.
- Retained Firefighters recruited are required to pass written, practical and physical tests prior to being offered a contract to ensure they are physically and mentally up to the standard required to undertake the Retained job role.
- Once recruited, Retained Firefighters are all set up with a Training and Development Plan for them to undertake and complete over a three year period and this is monitored on the MIS System and PDR Pro System.
- Retained Firefighters are requested to complete an Exit Interview Questionnaire when they leave but as this is optional not all leavers complete one. These provide the Authority with the reasons why they are leaving from which the Authority can identify ways to improve aspects such as the work life balance of its staff.
- Management of Fire Stations have identified a number of various ways to advertise and make the public aware they are recruiting for Retained Firefighters i.e. Local Newspapers / Radio, visiting Schools / Colleges, Coffee mornings, etc., and are always trying to identify new ways to do this.
- Key Performance Indicators relating to recruitment (including Retained Recruitment) have been identified and are reported on a quarterly to the Authority Board through the HR Policy and Challenge Group.
- The Authority are currently undertaking a project to review the whole of the Retained recruitment process to gain assurance that its processes are as effective and efficient as they can be and to identify any possible improvements to the process which can be made.

We have identified the following weakness for which we have agreed a Medium priority action with management:

- A number of documents through testing of 18 (100% sample) Retained Firefighters recruited during 2016/17 were either unable to be located or appropriately signed off as part of the recruitment process.

In addition, we have agreed five Low priority actions, further details can be found in sections two and three of our report.

1.4 Additional information to support our conclusion

Area	Control Design	Compliance with controls	Agreed management actions		
			High	Medium	Low
The Authority has appropriate processes and controls in place to ensure that an adequate number of retained officers are employed throughout the Authority.	0	0	0	1	5
Total			0	1	5

2 ACTION PLAN

Categorisation of internal audit findings

Priority	Definition
Low	There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency and quality.
Medium	Timely management attention is necessary. This is an internal control risk management issue that could lead to: Financial losses which could affect the effective function of a department, loss of controls or process being audited or possible reputational damage, negative publicity in local or regional media.
High	Immediate management attention is necessary. This is a serious internal control or risk management issue that may lead to: Substantial losses, violation of corporate strategies, policies or values, reputational damage, negative publicity in national or international media or adverse regulatory impact, such as loss of operating licences or material fines.

The table below sets out the actions agreed by management to address the findings:

Ref	Findings summary	Priority	Actions for management	Implementation date	Responsible owner
The Authority has appropriate processes and controls in place to ensure that an adequate number of retained officers are employed throughout the Authority.					
1.1	The Authority's 'People Strategy 2014-2018' was approved in July 2014 but no evidence could be located that the Strategy has been reviewed and the data updates reported to the HR Policy and Challenge Group since its approval. .	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development will ensure that the data recorded within the 'People Strategy' when reported to the HR Policy and Challenge Group is appropriately captured within the minutes to clearly evidence where this has been reported and discussed.</p> <p>In addition, the Authority will ensure that during 2017/18 the details within the recently published 'National People Strategy' will be incorporated in the Authority's current People Strategy.</p>	Mar 2018	Head of Training and Development

Ref	Findings summary	Priority	Actions for management	Implementation date	Responsible owner
1.2	<p>The Retained Duty System (RDS) Policy and Procedures document is still in 'draft' format although being used by the Authority.</p> <p>A number of additional procedural documents, forms and guidance notes were identified that needed to be incorporated into the RDS Policy and Procedures document before it is finalised and formally approved.</p>	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development in conjunction with the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator will ensure that the Retained Duty System (RDS) Policy and Procedures document is updated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate the additional retained recruitment procedures and flowcharts, including the 'Re-Employment as RDS' Procedure; • Record the additional checks on National Insurance, Right to Work in the UK and DVLA details; and • Include links to other Policies, Procedures and Guidance Notes where applicable. <p>Once updated the RDS policy and Procedures document will be formally approved and published on the Intranet to be available to all staff to follow.</p>	Sep 2017	Head of Training and Development
1.3	<p>The Job Description and Personnel Specification documents for a Retained Firefighter applicant currently request the applicant to sign them both to confirm they have received them.</p> <p>However, this is no longer a requirement as the Authority now accepts the applicant signing their contract as evidence they are fully aware of their key accountabilities.</p>	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development will ensure that the requirement for a Retained Firefighter applicant to sign off the Job Description and Personnel Specification documents is removed to stop any confusion to whether they need to be signed or not.</p>	Sep 2017	Head of Training and Development

Ref	Findings summary	Priority	Actions for management	Implementation date	Responsible owner
1.4	Through testing of 18 (100% sample) Retained Firefighters recruited during 2016/17 we noted there were a number of documents either unable to be located or appropriately signed off as part of the recruitment process.	Medium	The Head of Training and Development will ensure that all required recruitment documents and checks are fully completed and performed prior to a Retained Firefighter starting at the Authority.	Jun 2017	Head of Training and Development
1.5	It was identified that there is some confusion to where Retained Firefighters recruitment documents should be held as some were held as hard copies within the Training & Development Centre, some electronically by Human Resources, some by the Diversity Team and some by the Service's Occupational Health. Documents were noted to have been duplicated as well across the areas recorded above.	Low	The Head of Training and Development will ensure that clarification on what recruitment documents are to be held by who and for how long is clearly documented. A review will be undertaken to ensure, where possible, all recruitment documents are held centrally in one location.	Sep 2017	Head of Training and Development

Ref	Findings summary	Priority	Actions for management	Implementation date	Responsible owner
1.6	<p>The percentage of Exit Interview Questionnaires completed by Retained Firefighters was being reported as quite low (averaging 52% since 2013/14). However, inaccuracies were noted in the calculations as currently it does not take into account where Retained Firefighters leave to become Whole-time Firefighters, therefore not actually leaving the Authority, or where a Retained Firefighter requests a one-to-one meeting with the Chief Fire Officer instead of completing an Exit Interview Questionnaire.</p>	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development will review the Exit Interview Questionnaire process to identify ways in which the percentage of completed and returned questionnaires can be increased.</p> <p>This will provide additional information as to why Retained Firefighters are leaving and allow ways in which to improve work life balance to be reviewed and necessary changes implemented.</p> <p>In addition, the way in which the performance indicator for RDS Leavers against the number of Exit Interview Questionnaires returned is calculated and reported will be reviewed and updated.</p> <p>This is to record if an RDS Leaver has become a Whole-time Firefighter or has had a one-to-one meeting with the Chief Fire Officer as these will have an influence on the overall percentage calculated.</p>	Sep 2017	Head of Training and Development

3 DETAILED FINDINGS

This report has been prepared by exception. Therefore, we have included in this section, only those areas of weakness in control or examples of lapses in control identified from our testing and not the outcome of all internal audit testing undertaken.

Ref	Control	Adequate control design (yes/no)	Controls complied with (yes/no)	Audit findings and implications	Priority	Actions for management
The Authority has appropriate processes and controls in place to ensure that an adequate number of retained officers are employed throughout the Authority.						
1.1	<p>The Authority has a 'People Strategy' in place which outlines the Service's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision, • Strategic Objectives; • Core Values; and • Virtues. <p>The Strategy provides staff with information on the Authority's workforce, resourcing the service, developing the organisation and Corporate Planning Framework for them to understand and follow.</p>	Yes	No	<p>We confirmed by the Head of Training and Development and by the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator that the Authority do not have a 'Recruitment Strategy' in place but do have a 'People Strategy 2014-2018' in place along with the following additional documents which are linked to it:</p> <p>We also confirmed by the Head of Training and Development that the People Strategy document was approved in July 2014 by the HR Policy & Challenge Group and is available to all staff on the Intranet.</p> <p>However, it was noted from a review of the HR Policy and Challenge Group meeting minutes since July 2014 that it could not be located where the Strategy had been reviewed and updated since it was approved. The Head of Training and Development stated that data within the Strategy is updated separately and reported accordingly although this has not been captured appropriately.</p> <p>In addition, it was also established that a 'National People Strategy' had been recently published which the Authority will review and incorporate into their current Strategy during 2017/18.</p>	Low	The Head of Training and Development will ensure that the data recorded within the 'People Strategy' when reported to the HR Policy and Challenge Group is appropriately captured within the minutes to clearly evidence where this has been reported and discussed. In addition, the Authority will ensure that during 2017/18 the details within the recently published 'National People Strategy' will be incorporated in the Authority's current People Strategy.
1.2	A 'Retained Duty System' (RDS) Recruitment Policy and Procedures document is in place and sets out the Service's policy	Yes	No	The RDS Recruitment Policy and Procedures document was confirmed by the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator that although it is being used, it is still in draft format and has therefore not been	Low	The Head of Training and Development in conjunction with the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator will ensure that the Retained Duty System (RDS) Policy

Ref	Control	Adequate control design (yes/no)	Controls complied with (yes/no)	Audit findings and implications	Priority	Actions for management
	<p>and selection process arrangements to be followed in respect to new RDS employees.</p> <p>The RDS Recruitment Policy and Procedure is currently not available to staff on the Intranet and although in use, is currently in 'draft' format</p>			<p>published on the staff intranet for staff to view. A review of the Policy confirmed this as there were parts of the Policy which were blank within it. We also confirmed by the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator that the 'Re-Employment as RDS' Procedure was to be incorporated into the Policy along with a recent report agreed by the Service Head of Operations, the Head of Human Resources and the Head of Training and Development, which outlines additional recruitment procedures to follow and flowcharts of these procedures.</p> <p>In addition to the above future additions to be made to the RDS Recruitment Policy and Procedures, it was also noted and confirmed with the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator that the Policy also needs to include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Insurance details will be checked; • Right to Work details will be checked; • Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) details will be checked; • Links to where to locate additional guidance notes and information i.e. Accepted documents to 'Prove Right to Work in the UK' and documents required for a Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check to be carried out. 		<p>and Procedures document is updated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate the additional retained recruitment procedures and flowcharts, including the 'Re-Employment as RDS' Procedure; • Record the additional checks on National Insurance, Right to Work in the UK and DVLA details; and • Include links to other Policies, Procedures and Guidance Notes where applicable. <p>Once updated the RDS policy and Procedures document will be formally approved and published on the Intranet to be available to all staff to follow.</p>
1.3	<p>The Authority have the following documents in place which define the criteria for recruiting retained officers within the Service and which are adhered to as part of the process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retained Duty System (RDS) Firefighter Job Description; 	Yes	No	<p>As part of the testing undertaken in 1.4 we identified that although a copy of the Retained Firefighters Job Description is held on the HR Personal Record File (PDF) system and signed off by Authority Officers, where applicable, the applicant had not signed any of them and the Personnel Specification is not held on the system. It was confirmed by the Assessment & Selection Co-ordinator that although there are boxes on both the Job Description and Personnel</p>	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development will ensure that the requirement for a Retained Firefighter applicant to sign off the Job Description and Personnel Specification documents is removed to stop any confusion to whether they need to be signed or not.</p>

Ref	Control	Adequate control design (yes/no)	Controls complied with (yes/no)	Audit findings and implications	Priority	Actions for management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RDS Personnel Specification; • PERS68 / HR17012 Initial Assessment; and • PERS308 / HR17523 Retained Duty Cover Submission. 			<p>Specification forms for applicants to sign, the Authority no longer requests they do as they accept the sign off of the contract by the applicant instead.</p> <p>Testing of the documents and the findings are recorded in 1.4.</p>		
1.4	The Authority follow the processes recorded in the RDS Policy and Procedures document, the Whole-time RDS Policy and the Re-Employment as RDS Procedure when recruiting retained firefighters at the Authority Fire Stations.	Yes	No	<p>A list of Retained Firefighters for 2016/17 was provided from which it was identified that there had been 18 Retained Firefighters recruited of which it was identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine were new Retained Firefighters; • Six were Ex-Retained Firefighters; and • Three were Whole-time Retained Firefighters. <p>A review of all 18 (100% sample) was undertaken to ensure, where applicable, the processes as per the relevant policy and procedure documents and the correct forms fully completed and appropriately signed off. The following issues were identified from the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For one applicant the FSO50a forms could not be located; • For three applicants only one character reference had been received; • For one applicant no character or employer references were received, no ED05a form was completed and they had not signed their Offer of Employment Letter (it was confirmed that this individual left after only three days working and therefore these documents were not chased); • For an additional four applicants the Offer of Employment Letter had either not been signed by them or not signed by both them and an Authority 	Medium	The Head of Training and Development will ensure that all required recruitment documents and checks are fully completed and performed prior to a Retained Firefighter starting at the Authority.
					Low	The Head of Training and Development will ensure that clarification on what recruitment documents are to be held by who and for how long is clearly documented. A review will be undertaken to ensure, where possible, all recruitment documents are held centrally in one location.

Ref	Control	Adequate control design (yes/no)	Controls complied with (yes/no)	Audit findings and implications	Priority	Actions for management
				<p>representative; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For one individual there was no evidence that a DVLA check had been undertaken. <p>In addition, through the testing it was noted that recruitment documents are held in various locations and some recruitment documents duplicated across the areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As hard copies within the Training Centre; • Electronically on the HR Personal Record File (PRF) system; • As hard copy within the Diversity Department; and • Electronically by Occupational Health. <p>The issue with this is that there is no clear clarification on what documents should be held where and how long they should be retained for which could result in missing information or information held longer than required.</p>		
1.5	When a Retained Firefighter leaves the Authority they are requested to complete an Exit Interview Questionnaire to provide the reasons for leaving from which the Authority can identify ways to improve the work life balance of its staff.	Yes	No	<p>A document summarising data on Retained Firefighters who have left the Authority between 2013/14 and 2015/16 was provided and the current numbers for 2016/17 obtained from the Diversity Department. It was noted that the percentage who had completed and returned an Exit Interview Questionnaire over the last four years so far has been only 52%. This is quite a low percentage and the Authority should look at ways in which this can be increased.</p> <p>We however identified, when queried with the Diversity Department that if any Retained Firefighters leave to become Whole-time Firefighters, these are recorded as an RDS Leaver although you would not expect them to complete an Exit Interview</p>	Low	<p>The Head of Training and Development will review the Exit Interview Questionnaire process to identify ways in which the percentage of completed and returned questionnaires can be increased. This will provide the Authority with additional information as to why Retained Firefighters are leaving and allow ways in which to improve work life balance to be reviewed and necessary changes implemented.</p> <p>In addition, the way in which the performance indicator for RDS Leavers against the number of Exit Interview Questionnaires returned is calculated and reported will be reviewed and</p>

Ref	Control	Adequate control design (yes/no)	Controls complied with (yes/no)	Audit findings and implications	Priority	Actions for management
				<p>Questionnaire as they have not officially left the Authority.</p> <p>In addition, we also confirmed that if a Retained Firefighter requests a one-to-one meeting with the Chief Fire Officer instead of completing an Exit Interview Questionnaire this is also not recorded. Therefore, the percentage of Exit Interview Questionnaires being completed is inaccurately stated on the summarised report.</p> <p>Furthermore, it was also noted that for 2014/15 the percentage on the report was calculated incorrectly and should be 77% instead of 74%.</p>		<p>updated. This is to record if an RDS Leaver has become a Whole-time Firefighter or has had a one-to-one meeting with the Chief Fire Officer as these will have an influence on the overall percentage calculated.</p>

APPENDIX A: SCOPE

Scope of the review

The internal audit assignment has been scoped to provide assurance on how Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority manage the following risk:

Objective of the area under review	Risks relevant to the scope of the review	Risk source
The Authority has appropriate processes and controls in place to ensure that an adequate number of retained officers are employed throughout the Authority.	If we cannot recruit or retain adequate numbers of part time fire fighters, particularly in relation to day cover, then we will not be able to fully crew our fire appliances and thus have a detrimental impact on our service delivery due to the unavailability of our fire appliances.	Risk Register

Areas for consideration:

A review of the processes in place to recruit for Retained Officers including a review of the efficiency of methods used and the recruitment checks undertaken:

The following areas will be considered as part of the review:

- A recruitment strategy is in place detailing the process for identifying and recruiting retained officers, this includes ensuring there is diversity within the retained officers;
- Policies and procedures are in place detailing the recruitment process for retained officers;
- The criteria for recruiting retained officers is clearly defined and adhered with as part of the recruitment process;
- Pre-employment health checks / tests are completed prior to an offer being made;
- A training plan is in place to ensure that new recruits receive all required training to allow them to carry out their role as soon as possible after commencing employment; and
- A process to assess why reasons why retained officers leave the Authority is in place to identify trends.

The following limitations apply to the scope of our work:

- The scope of the review was limited to those areas examined and reported upon in the areas for consideration in the context of the objective set out in this review.
- The scope of the review was to consider recruitment and retention of retained fire fighters and therefore has not provided assurance for this process across the organisation for all employment posts.
- It should not, therefore, be considered as a comprehensive review of all aspects of non-compliance that may exist now or in the future.
- Our work does not provide absolute assurance that material errors, loss or fraud do not exist.
- All testing has been undertaken on a sample basis.
- No assurance has been given as to whether appropriate staff have been recruited, and the emphasis of this review has been based on compliance with approved processes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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