

The Authority's Apprenticeship Programme:

As announced in the summer 2015 budget, the Government introduced a UK wide apprenticeship levy from April 2017. This levy was to help fund the increase in the quantity and quality of apprenticeship training and give employers greater control of apprenticeships.

The levy rate is set at 0.5% of an employer's pay bill and is collected via PAYE and applies to both the public and private sectors. The levy is only paid on any pay bill in excess of £3 million. A growth bid of £60,000 was approved by Members on the 24 October 2016 to prepare for the introduction of the levy and details of how it will be utilised and re-invested back into the Authority are below.

Delivering three million apprenticeships by 2020 is a key priority for the Government. In order to meet the three million starts commitment, it was announced that the public sector needed to improve from its current position of delivering comparatively fewer apprenticeships than the private sector. A target was set that organisations must meet a minimum 2.3% new apprenticeship starts each year based on the headcount of employees working for a body in England.

The Authority's apprenticeship programme will deliver enough new apprenticeship starts to meet this target, this equates to 12 new apprenticeship starts per year (based on headcount at April 2016). Our current recruitment campaign for Support Services staff plus the planned uptake of management apprenticeships for existing staff will more than meet the target for 2017.

The Governments reform agenda has significant impacts on the fire and rescue sector, these are set out in Appendix 2.

The Authority's apprenticeship programme supports its strategic aims regarding resourcing, this includes:

- Effective profiling and forecasting
- Refreshing the workforce
- Flexible working
- Collaboration
- Supporting equality and diversity through engagement

Trailblazer Standards Update:

Apprenticeships in England are in the process of undergoing a dramatic transformation. As a result of Government reforms, a new style of apprenticeships has been designed to meet the changing needs of employers, learners and providers.

Trailblazer Developments underway:

- Firefighter – led by Staffordshire FRS
- Business Fire Safety led by Greater Manchester
- Community Safety Advisor led by Greater Manchester
- Discussions are underway regarding Fire Safety/Fire Engineering Career Pathways led by London/NFCC Protection Lead

The Authority has been, and continues to be, involved with other fire and rescue authorities in developing these standards. Representation is given on the trailblazer development groups for Firefighter and Community Safety.

Apprenticeship Training Agency:

As part of the approval of the Authority's apprenticeship programme at the Executive Committee meeting held on the 29 July in 2015, Members opted to use the apprenticeship training agency (ATA) model for the recruitment of our apprentices.

The ATA is an employment agency for apprentices, it directly employs and manages individuals who undertake their apprenticeship whilst being placed into our workplace.

The flexibility of the ATA model, means the Authority has a continuous talent pipeline being developed and can decide at the end of the apprenticeship programme, if the establishment can offer full time, substantive positions to the apprentices.

Our ATA is Encompass Select and the contract commenced in April 2016 and lasts for four years plus an optional one year extension.

There was a steep learning curve for both ourselves and Encompass at the beginning of the contract, being the first fire and rescue service (FRS) to introduce the Firefighter programme using this model meant there was some learning to do along the way, however we are now in a position where the contract is working well for both parties.

As part of the development of the relationship with Encompass, it was identified some dedicated resource was required to undertake learner progress reviews, apprentice and line management support visits, the necessary checks to meet funding requirements and provide welfare to the apprentices on station and in their various departments. A member of staff from the Authority's learning and development team has been seconded to Encompass to undertake this role on an initial one year contract. This support function has proven invaluable in the progress being made by the apprentices.

Current Establishment:

The original apprenticeship paper which went to Executive Committee meeting on the 29 July 2015, set out a three year firefighter (FF) apprenticeship recruitment programme, recruiting 10 FFs per year. Based on workforce planning data, during the initial recruitment campaign it was identified that front loading in the first year would help meet resource requirements, therefore 22 firefighters were recruited during that first campaign.

In addition, a subsequent Growth Bid was approved for the recruitment of 3 Business Fire Safety and 3 Community Safety apprentices in 2016/17 and this is now deferred to 2018/19 due to the availability of apprenticeship frameworks to recruit against and the pending review of the relevant departments.

2016/17 Recruitment:

Support Services staff:

- 1 x Information Communication Technology
- 1 x Health & Safety (Business & Administration)
- 1 x People & Organisational Development (Business & Administration)
- 1 x Fleet Services

Operational:

- 22 x Firefighters

Leavers:

Of the 22 apprentice firefighters that started their apprenticeships in August 2016, three have left before completing the full apprenticeship. As part of the first year evaluation, these reasons were looked at and some improvements were made to future recruitment intakes to reduce the risk of this happening again – further details are contained later in this report.

Current apprenticeship recruitment for 2017/18 includes:

Support Services staff:

- 1 x Operations Assurance (Business & Administration)
- 1 x Procurement (Business & Administration)
- 1 x Data Intelligence (Business & Administration)
- 1 x Central Admin (Business & Administration)

Operational:

- 12 x Firefighters

The positivity surrounding the firefighter and support services staff apprenticeships implemented in 2016 was evident across the organisation and presented an opportunity to use this momentum to carry us into 2017/18

The 12 Firefighter apprentices commence their training on the 25 September 2017 and their graduation date from the Fire Service College is confirmed as Thursday 7 December 2017.

Leadership & Management Apprenticeships:

From June – September 2017, the organisation piloted an Aspiring Leaders Pathway (ALP), a new personal development process which all staff were invited to apply for. This process assisted the organisation in identifying future leaders, replenished development pool for promotional purposes and produced personal development plans which will aid the individual's development, signposting opportunities including lateral moves and secondments.

In addition, one of the proposed outcomes from the ALP was that a number of staff members would be identified and offered the opportunity to pilot a Management Apprenticeship Programme, with the aim of having apprenticeships embedded across all levels within the organisation.

Management Apprenticeships blend leadership and management theory with on the job training to develop staff that have a real and immediate impact.

There are four levels of Management Apprenticeships standards:

Level	Standard
3	Team Leader/Supervisor
4	Associate Project Manager
5	Operations/Departmental Manager
6	Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship
7	Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship

The organisation is able to draw down funding from its levy (up to a cap which will depend upon the standard that is being trained against) to cover the costs of training, including English and Maths (if the individual doesn't already possess these), assessment and certification.

The current costs for the varying levels of Management Apprenticeships are:

Sector	Apprenticeship Standard	Level	Funding band maximum	Programme Length	Classroom sessions
Leadership & Management	Senior Leader	7	TBC	TBC	TBC
Leadership & Management	Chartered Manager	6	£27,000	48 months	TBC
Leadership & Management	Operations/Departmental Manager	5	£9,000	24 months	12
Leadership & Management	Team Leader/Supervisor	3	£4,500	12-18 months	10

The government has committed to top up an organisation's "levy pot" by funding any apprenticeships procured over and above their levy by 90%, meaning the Authority will only need to fund the other 10% if we spend more than the required levy. This government initiative is helpful to support the Authority's attraction and retention aspects of our people strategy.

The indicative costings to run a pilot Management Apprenticeship Programme, require a tender process to be commissioned. This is due to the value of the contract that would be awarded to the Training Provider delivering the apprenticeship programme. The tender document will be published in September, with a planned start from the programme in January 2018.

Notable ongoing improvements to the Authority's apprenticeship programmes:

Since the 2016/17 recruitment, evaluations have taken place and a number of changes made to the recruitment process and terms and conditions for Support Services staff apprentices. These changes have been implemented in an attempt to reduce the number of leavers, increase the number of applications and ensure fairness and consistency across the programmes we deliver.

Driving Licence & Postcode Restriction:

To encourage applications from the local community, during the recent firefighter recruitment, we applied a postcode restriction that applicants must live within 20 miles of the border of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Training Agreements:

We are reviewing the option of introducing a training agreement for future apprenticeship recruitment, which will allow the organisation to re-coup some of the funds invested in an individual, should they leave to join another fire and rescue service within a certain timescale. The training agreement is common practice across the Authority when investing in staff for other training costs, therefore it is proposed it is introduced for apprenticeship training as the Authority fund the full cost of initial firefighter training at the Fire Service College – circa £5k per person.

Support Services Staff Pay scales:

Support Services staff apprentice pay scales were brought in line with the firefighter pay scales, with regards to performance related elements of pay. Both staff groups attract the national living wage, however the firefighters were programmed to receive pay increments every 6 months, based on satisfactory performance. This pay structure ended at the 2 year point where if appointed into employment with the Authority, the firefighters would move on to national pay scales/local terms and conditions. Support Services staff were not originally receiving the same timely increments, however a revised structure has been introduced which meant at the end of the apprenticeship they could move on to the Authority's administrator pay scales.

The Authority's On-Call Apprenticeship:

As part of the paper approved by Members in July 2015, an initiative to pilot an apprenticeship programme for on-call firefighters, engaging with local employers, was agreed. After some initial contact with local employers, the initiative has been temporarily deferred whilst other resourcing areas (detailed above) have taken priority. This will be revisited in 2018/19 as part of the On-Call review.

Collaboration Opportunities:

A current priority relevant to this update is to determine a collaborative approach to firefighter and apprenticeships recruitment across the three Thames Valley Fire Services.