



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Overview & Audit Committee – 21 July 2021

Report title: Apprenticeship Programme – Annual Statutory Reporting 2020-2021

Lead Member: Councillor Steven Lambert - People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance

Report sponsor: Calum Bell – Head of Protection, Assurance and Development

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Action: Decision

Recommendations: It is recommended that:

The Authority's annual return – attached as Appendix 2 – be endorsed for submission to the Department for Education, and for publication on the Authority's website.

Executive summary:

This report sets out the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (the Authority) annual statutory report on the public sector apprenticeship target for the year ending 31 March 2021, for member endorsement.

As part of the Government's Apprenticeships Reform agenda, a public sector target was introduced in 2017 whereby organisations in England must meet a minimum of 2.3 per cent apprenticeship new starts each year, based on employee headcount. For the Authority this equates to approximately 11 per year.

The Authority is a qualifying organisation within the scope of the public sector target and is therefore required to provide an annual report to the Department for Education (DfE), detailing its progress towards achieving the target. The 2020 / 21 report is set out in Appendix 1. It is also a requirement for the Authority to publish the information.

The current target period for annual reporting is from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2021 and the deadline for returns is the 30 September each year.

For the period of 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021 the Authority have exceeded their target with 21 new apprentice starts.

- 20 Operational Fire Fighters
- 1 Coaching Professional, Level 5

Appendix 1 states that qualifying organisations will be measured on average over the annual reporting period of 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2021. With our previous employment statistics and our current workforce planning the Authority will exceed its required target for this reporting period with an average of 4.5% per year.

Financial implications:

There are no direct costs implications attached to the production and submission of this information.

The Apprenticeship levy was introduced in April 2017 for all employers that have an annual PAYE bill of £3 million per annum or more and employ over 250 staff. The employer's payment is set at 0.5% of their annual payroll and will include a £15,000 annual allowance. The Authority current pays approximately £68,000 per year into the levy which the government tops up by 10% making a total of £74,800.

The Authority is able to draw down on this levy for those employees who are currently undertaking apprenticeships to assist with their own development and to also enhance the skills within the organisation.

If the levy fund becomes depleted the Authority will enter into a co-investment with the government. The co-investment rate changed for new apprenticeships starting on or after 1 April 2019. The Authority pay 5% towards the cost of apprenticeship training. The government pay the rest (95%) up to the funding band maximum.

Risk management:

There is an ongoing risk that the Authority might not meet the annual 2.3 per cent target for new apprentice starts set by the Government

This risk is mitigated through effective workforce planning, and the Authority's continued commitment to using apprenticeships as part of its blended approach to refreshing and retaining its workforce.

The Apprenticeship Programme is continually monitored through regular updates to the Authority and internal governance boards.

The awarding body accredits the programme and yearly audits are undertaken by their representatives to ensure the required standards are being met.

The apprenticeship training provider is audited by Ofsted to ensure compliance with funding regulations.

Legal implications:

The recommendations meet and exceed the requirements of the statutory guidance.

Privacy and security implications:

Consideration has been given to any potential privacy issues or security implications from the data contained within this report and none have been identified.

Duty to collaborate:

The Authority continues to work with its Thames Valley fire service partners to determine options for a collaborative approach to operational apprenticeship recruitment. This includes looking at improving diversity and working together to resolve common issues.

In the past, career's fairs have been targeted with a collaborative approach being taken between ourselves and Thames Valley Police. These have included the WorldSkillsUK event at the NEC and also the National Apprenticeship show at the Milton Keynes arena. We have also utilised the assistance of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) with the organising and their attendance at the WorldSkillsUK. Due to Covid restrictions these have not taken place within this last year, however moving forward these opportunities will be revisited.

Health and safety implications:

There are no Health and Safety implications.

Environmental implications:

There are no Environmental implications.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

The Authority continues to explore ways in which to improve the diversity of its workforce and to reduce the average age of the operational workforce.

Workforce diversity is an ongoing priority. Building on the successes to date with our apprenticeship programme, and utilising the national On Call awareness campaign material, our aims are:

- To increase awareness through TV collaboration work and joined up resourcing;
- Existing workforce who already interact with the local community being utilised to promote the service we deliver and being supported by our ED&I ambassadors;
- The continuation of identifying role models within the organisation who can promote the values, commitment to diversity and our employment propositions e.g. we have a national diversity ambassador.

The Authority endorsed the submission of a pledge and were the first Fire and Rescue Service to be accepted by the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) in February 2018. The Authority were given the opportunity to be quoted within the 2019 ADCN report, and asked to showcase us as exemplars within this group and we continue to be active members thereof. This group's activities have been limited this year due to Covid restrictions. However, moving forward this will again become part of our business as usual and attraction and engagement strategy.

The Authority's innovative apprenticeship programme provides an excellent opportunity to improve the diversity make-up of the Authority and supports and endorses delivery of BFRS' Equality and Diversity Objectives 2020-2025.

Consultation and communication:

A range of methods are used to communicate on workforce reform across the Authority. Communication is delivered via the Senior Management Team's blog, the Leadership Group, and the intranet. The success of the Authority's apprenticeship programme is showcased internally and externally through virtual visits from other Services and national events.

Background papers:

The Authority introduced its apprenticeship programme in 2016, ahead of the Government's reform agenda, and this was driven by its workforce plan. Its key areas of focus were:

- How apprentices can be utilised most effectively
- Highlighting the importance of improving the diversity of our workforce
- Offering career development opportunities to our existing employees and increasing the resilience of our workforce.

Report to the Overview and Audit committee held on 22 July 2020: Apprenticeship Programme – Annual Statutory Reporting 2019/20

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/07/item-17-apprenticeship-programme-annual-statutory-reporting-2019-20.pdf/>

Report to the Overview and Audit committee held on 17 July 2019: Apprenticeship Programme – Annual Statutory Reporting 2018/19

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overview_and_audit_committee_agenda_and_reports_170719-min-min.pdf/

Report to the Fire Authority held 13 June 2018: Update on Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority Apprenticeship Programme

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/130618_fire_authority_agm_agenda.pdf/

Report to the Fire Authority held 14 February 2018: Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/140218_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/

Report to the Fire Authority held 18 October 2017; Update on Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority Apprenticeship Programme

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/181017_fire_authority_agenda_part2.pdf/

Report to the Executive Committee held 29 July 2015:

Apprenticeship Scheme

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/2990715_exec_committee_papers.pdf
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Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Government Guidance – Meeting the Public Sector Apprenticeship Target	
2	Data Publication and Apprenticeship Activity Return 30 September 2021	