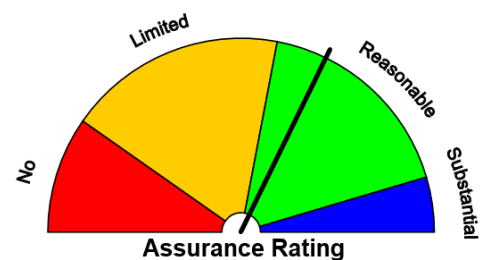




Fire & Rescue - Recruitment 2022-23

Final Audit Report



Our Vision

To bring about improvements in the control, governance and risk management arrangements of our Partners by providing cost effective, high quality internal audit services.

Richard Boneham CPFA
Head of Internal Audit (DCC) &
Head of Audit Partnership
c/o Derby City Council
Council House
Corporation Street
Derby, DE1 2FS
Tel. 01332 643280
richard.boneham@derby.gov.uk

Adrian Manifold CMIA
Audit Manager
c/o Derby City Council
Council House
Corporation Street
Derby
DE1 2FS
Tel. 01332 643281
adrian.manifold@centralmidlandsaudit.co.uk

Mandy Marples CPFA, CCIP
Audit Manager
c/o Derby City Council
Council House
Corporation Street
Derby
DE1 2FS
Tel. 01332 643282
mandy.marples@centralmidlandsaudit.co.uk



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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Scope of Audit

This audit has focused on the governance, monitoring and processes concerned with recruitment to support roles and On Call roles.

The findings of the audit are split into two parts, Section 3 containing formal recommendations to address areas of control weaknesses, and Section 4 which was undertaken in a consultancy role. This contains areas of improvement that could help bolster the success of recruitment activities.

1.2 Summary of Audit Findings

Control Objectives Examined	No of Controls Evaluated	No of Adequate Controls	No of Partial Controls	No of Weak Controls
There are adequate governance and monitoring arrangements over recruitment.	8	2	4	2
Recruitment processes support the Service to attract good candidates and fill vacant positions promptly.	19	12	6	1
TOTALS	27	14	10	3

1.2.1 The following issues were considered to be the key control weaknesses:

Rec Number	Risk Rating	Summary of Weakness	Agreed Action Date
1	Low Risk	Interview records held on HR files were not always complete.	31/03/2023
2	Moderate Risk	Terms of reference for the Workforce Planning Group were insufficiently detailed in respect of the Group's responsibilities, membership, frequency of meetings and arrangements for decision making outside of meetings.	28/02/2023
3	Low Risk	Exit interviews were not always carried out by line managers and information obtained from exit interviews and questionnaires was not routinely analysed to identify trends.	31/07/2023
4	Moderate Risk	Senior leadership positions had become vacant without a clear plan in place for replacement or restructure, and it was not evident that sufficient succession planning and knowledge transfer had taken place.	31/08/2023
5	Low Risk	Date of birth was requested in applications for support roles, contrary to government guidance.	Implemented
6	Low Risk	The Agile Working Framework restricted the amount of remote working available and may make roles less attractive to candidates in some business areas.	31/07/2023
7	Low Risk	The website link from On Call adverts, intended to provide further information on the role and recruitment process, was broken.	Implemented

1.2.2 This report focuses on the weaknesses in the Service's systems of control that were highlighted by this audit and recommends what Audit considers to be appropriate control improvements. This report contains 7 recommendations, 5 are considered a low risk and 2 a moderate risk. Another 7 areas for improvement have been highlighted for management's consideration.

1.3 Summary of Control Assurance Provided

1.3.1 **Reasonable** - There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

1.4 Distribution & Communication

1.4.1 The draft report was issued to Gavin Tomlinson, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive and Helen Minion, Strategic HR Partner for comment.

This final version will be issued to Gavin Tomlinson, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive with copies to:

- Mark Nash, Interim Treasurer / S151 Officer.
- Davinder Johal, Interim Director of People Services.
- Helen Minion, Strategic HR Partner.

This report was produced by Susannah Leask, Principal Auditor and reviewed by Hannah McDonald, Group Auditor and Mandy Marples, Audit Manager. Any enquiry concerning the content of this report or associated issues may be made to Susannah Leask, Principal Auditor on 01332 643356.

2 Positive Assurance

- 2.1.1 We attempted to establish whether the organisation's system of control for the following areas contained all the key controls expected of a sound and robust process. Through a combination of control evaluation and testing we confirmed that the following adequate controls were in operation:

2.2 Governance and Monitoring

- The Corporate Risk Register recognised the following recruitment risks:
 - High risk – Recruitment and retention of staff into support function roles.
 - Moderate risk – On Call leaver and retention profile predicted to exceed typical annual forecast.

The Strategic Workforce Plan (September 2021), part of the People Strategy and jointly owned by Operational Training, Organisational Development and Human Resources, also highlighted that the Service was starting to have difficulty in recruiting to key non-operational professionally skilled and qualified roles. This demonstrated that the Service was aware of the risks it faced around recruitment and retention and was identifying and beginning to implement mechanisms through which these risks could be mitigated.

- The Recruitment Policy, dated January 2019, covered the general principles and processes, details of relevant employment legislation, and referred to the Recruitment & Selection Toolkit as a source of further information.
- The Recruitment & Selection Toolkit, available on the intranet, provided detailed recruitment guidance and related forms for recruiting managers. Flowcharts had also been created summarising both the support staff and On Call recruitment pathways.
- To address the recruitment and retention issues surrounding On Call staff, an On Call Strategy had been developed, supported by a On Call Project led by a Station Manager.

2.3 Processes

- An applicant tracking system, Jobtrain, was utilised. This facilitated the recruitment process, including aspects such as creation of the application form, management of candidate data, shortlisting, and automated communication with candidates.
- The Service maintained an informative careers website, with sections providing information on support, control and firefighter roles. Current vacancies were advertised and applications were made within Jobtrain through the recruitment portal linked to the website. The recruitment portal was the customer-facing part of Jobtrain. For support roles, information on the types of role available, including a more detailed description for a selection of roles, was presented. The On Call firefighter section provided a wealth of information on the role and the selection process, including videos. Several On Call firefighters and support staff had produced 'blogs' which allowed visitors to gain a better understanding of what working for the Service might look like.
- The On Call Project included several workstreams to increase awareness of and interest in the role, for example:
 - Service Delivery Area Open Days focused on On Call recruitment were being scheduled, these would be geographically based, and consideration was being given to the use of digital marketing to promote them.
 - Different working models were being considered to make the role more attractive, allowing On Call staff to gain experience and qualifications in a wider variety of areas.
 - Engagement with local employers, for example targeting supermarkets which have a presence in several areas. An employer information document was available and plaques could be provided to engaged companies for display to demonstrate their connection with the Service.
 - Revising the training schedule to provide more flexibility.

- Consideration had been given to how awareness of the support roles available could be incorporated into the On Call awareness activities. It was planned that the Area Open Days would include information on support roles, including the potential for dual contract working in support and On Call roles.
- An Equality Impact Assessment had been performed on the recruitment process. Job adverts emphasised inclusivity, the template included a statement encouraging applications from all diverse communities, and application forms asked whether any reasonable adjustments were required for interview. There were several blogs linked from the careers website which served to highlight the diversity of the Service to potential applicants.
- Alternative employment models had been considered for support staff, for example recruiting managers were asked to consider whether the position was suitable for apprenticeships, a small number of apprenticeships had been recruited and a strategy for apprenticeships was being considered. In addition, a pool of administrative staff had been set up with the aim of ensuring admin cover could be sourced easily and quickly, although this had been of limited success to date.
- Correspondence with candidates was sent via email through Jobtrain. This included several automated emails, for example a reminder to candidates with incomplete applications after two days to encourage submission of the application, and an acknowledgement following submission of an application.
- Recruitment panels consisted of two or three individuals. A pool of additional interviewers was available should there be insufficient experience on the panel. Those who were new to interviewing were offered opportunities to observe panels and participate in processes to apply learning and gain practical experience.
- All interviewers were required to attend Interview Skills training provided by an external organisation, which included unconscious bias training. We confirmed that when shortlisting candidates, the recruitment panel did not have access to personal details of candidates.
- Shortlisting criteria and the scoring system for support roles were determined prior to a job advert being published, following guidance provided by HR on the Notice to Advertise form. Shortlisting questions were incorporated into the application form to allow candidates to demonstrate how they met the criteria.
- The recruitment panel shortlisted on the applicant tracking system, entering scores on the system once a consensus had been reached. Candidates scoring above a pre-determined threshold were marked as shortlisted and the HR Service Centre proceeded to arrange interviews. The Service Centre also reviewed the eligibility checks for shortlisted candidates (for example driving licence and criminal records), following up any anomalies as necessary.
- For On Call roles, Watch Managers reviewed applications as they were submitted and held an initial telephone conversation with the candidate to discuss availability and the nature of the role, before marking them as suitable on the applicant tracking system. Guidance was provided in the Recruitment & Selection Toolkit to support these conversations.
- When invited to interview, candidates for support roles were able to select their preferred time and date from the options available via the applicant tracking system. Where a candidate was unable to attend on the pre-defined dates there was flexibility within this, dependent on applicant numbers.
- Detailed guidance on the interview process and interview questions, together with template forms to record interview questions, notes and panel scores, was provided in the Recruitment & Selection Toolkit. Job related tests could also form part of the process.
- An Appointment Checklist form was completed for the successful candidate and the HR Service Centre informed of the decision.
- Induction resources, including checklists for managers, were available in the Recruitment & Selection Toolkit. These covered aspects such as IT equipment and systems, uniforms, training courses, policies and introductions to the team.
- The On Call induction process had recently been reviewed, with a new comprehensive induction pack created and induction activities beginning prior to the On Call training course to ensure any administrative issues could be resolved at an early stage.

3 Control Weaknesses & Recommendations

3.1 Governance and Monitoring

3.1.1 We expected that comprehensive recruitment records would be maintained.

We found that the HR system did not currently store all HR documentation, including recruitment documents, although it was planned that these documents would be digitised in later phases of the system's development. Currently a hard copy HR file was maintained for each employee together with information stored electronically on the shared drive. We reviewed a sample of 7 hard copy HR files and confirmed that a signed contract, references, qualification documents and vetting documentation was present, together with a completed recruitment paperwork signoff checklist. However, of the 5 support staff files reviewed, the interview records retained were not complete in 4 cases. Records from all members of the interview panel had not been placed on file and where they were present, they were not always fully completed with the name of the panel member.

If full interview records are not held on file there is a risk that the Service will not be able to demonstrate transparency and compliance with proper recruitment practice, which could lead to possible legal action.

Recommendation 1	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Low Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: Interview records held on HR files were not always complete.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: Recruiting managers should be reminded of the need to ensure interview documentation is completed with all relevant fields and all records are submitted to HR for inclusion on the individual's file within a reasonable timeframe. We recommend that a sample check of completed files is undertaken periodically to ensure compliance.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Helen Minion</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: Reminder to be sent to Managers and Service Centre. Current checklists to be updated</p> <p>Implementation Date: 31/03/2023</p>

3.1.2 We expected that approval would be secured prior to positions being advertised and jobs being offered.

We found that the Workforce Planning Group (WPG) was reconvened in October 2022 and provided the approval for all planned recruitments, including like-for-like replacements, changes to the structure, secondments and flexible working requests, up to and including Group Manager and Head of Department level. A Workforce Planning Group Request Form was submitted by the Recruiting Manager for the WPG to consider, having previously been approved by Accountancy, an HR Partner and an Area Manager.

The terms of reference for the WPG had been revised and, although not yet approved, now took the form of a single statement of purpose:

'The role of the Workforce Planning Group is to provide guidance and make decisions which ensure that the Service has a workforce which is within budget, developed and which ensures capability and capacity to deliver our Service.'

This did not clarify aspects such as the responsibilities, membership, or frequency of meetings of the WPG. We understand that the membership of the WPG would include the Director of Corporate Services and the Joint Director of Finance, however as these roles were currently vacant it was not clear what provisions were in place to ensure the WPG could provide adequate strategic direction over non-operational roles. Furthermore, we established that the WPG intended to meet fortnightly and there was no formal provision for making recruitment decisions outside of meetings; this represented a potential bottleneck in the timely recruitment of staff.

If the terms of reference for WPG are not clearly documented there is a risk of uncertainty over its structure and functions, which may hamper fulfilment of its aims.

Recommendation 2	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Moderate Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: Terms of reference for the Workforce Planning Group were insufficiently detailed in respect of the Group's responsibilities, membership, frequency of meetings and arrangements for decision making outside of meetings.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that the terms of reference for the Workforce Planning Group (WPG) is revised to provide clarity over the responsibilities, membership, and frequency of meetings of the Group. Furthermore, we recommend that consideration is given to arrangements for authorisation of time critical recruitments outside of the formal WPG meeting.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Lee Smith</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: Terms of Reference have been revised and will be confirmed in Jan 2023. Arrangements for authorisation of recruitment outside formal WPG meetings will be discussed and included in the TOR as agreed.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 28/02/2023</p>

- 3.1.3 We expected that a staff survey would be undertaken to inform understanding of possible issues which might impact recruitment.

We found that a staff cultural survey was carried out in 2021. In response to the question 'If asked, I would recommend to friends and family that DFRS is a good place to work' 81% of respondents answered positively.

The Leavers Policy required that an exit questionnaire was sent to each leaver, and an exit meeting should be carried out by the line manager. Guidance on exit meetings was provided in the Leavers Toolkit on the intranet and line managers were prompted to conduct these through an automated workflow. We established that from April 2022 onwards the rate of return of the leavers questionnaire was only 19% and records of exit meetings had only been submitted to HR for 34% of leavers, furthermore the data obtained had not been analysed to identify trends.

If information from those leaving the Service is not captured and analysed, there is a risk that issues leading to reduced staff retention may not be fully understood and acted on, which may lead to issues impacting recruitment not being identified and addressed.

Recommendation 3	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Low Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: Exit interviews were not always carried out by line managers and information obtained from exit interviews and questionnaires was not routinely analysed to identify trends.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that methods to increase the return rate for exit questionnaires and exit interviews are considered, for example the use of escalation workflows, and the review of questionnaires and interview formats to ensure they are fit for purpose.</p> <p>Once returns have increased and there is sufficient data, exit meeting records and exit questionnaires should be analysed to identify trends impacting staff retention/recruitment; this should be reported to the Workforce Planning Group.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Helen Minion</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: HR will undertake a review of the current processes in order to make improvements. This will be placed as an action in the HR portfolio plan. Trend analysis will be reported periodically into WPG and has been incorporated into the Terms of Reference.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 31/07/2023</p>

- 3.1.4 We expected that adequate consideration had been given to succession planning.

We found that the Strategic Workforce Plan included the statement

'We will need to build in lead and hand over time as a matter of course to facilitate succession planning and knowledge transfer where we have not done so in the past. This will have some limited financial implications, but they are currently sustainable.'

However, during the course of the audit, two senior leadership posts were vacated and at that point in time there was no clear plan communicated to us, regarding a decision to restructure or recruit to the posts. Nor had a formal change to the establishment been processed. It was not evident that sufficient succession planning and knowledge transfer had taken place.

There is a risk that if key senior leadership posts become vacant without a clear plan in place for replacement or restructure, there is insufficient knowledge transfer to ensure that duties and responsibilities continue to be fulfilled, which may impact business continuity and result in a lack of strategic direction.

Recommendation 4	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Moderate Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: Senior leadership positions had become vacant without a clear plan in place for replacement or restructure, and it was not evident that sufficient succession planning and knowledge transfer had taken place.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that due consideration is given to the Strategic Workforce Plan, which supports the People Strategy, in making workforce planning decisions. The opportunity for knowledge transfer and continued service delivery should be maximised through timely recruitment and establishment change activities, prior to current staff exiting the Service.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Rob Taylor</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: DFRS acknowledges the comments in relation to Strategic succession planning. To provide some context, the DoCS role was left vacant due to the postholder joining another Service, this move was not in line with the anticipated retirement age of the individual or captured as an intent/aspiration in their most recent appraisal. However, it should be noted that the outgoing DoCS worked with SLT for a period of 3 months prior to their departure, this time allowed sufficient knowledge sharing and appreciation of proposed future portfolio directions. The DoF role was a joint role with Derbyshire Police undertaken on a 70/30 basis, with the Police being the employer. A rapid and unexpected restructure within the Police senior team resulted in the removal of the post, leaving a part role that was incompatible with the fire business need.</p> <p>The lack of a clear workforce plan at all levels is an area DFRS recognises as a risk and as such has initiated a high-priority piece of work to create a comprehensive plan, which will then act as a Service blueprint. This will be used to guide the Workforce Planning Group and ensure decisions made are by design.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 31/08/2023</p>

3.2 Processes

3.2.1 We expected that the application process would be clear and straightforward.

We found that date of birth was requested as standard practice in applications, in addition to the optional equality and diversity information. While date of birth was clearly relevant to operational roles its relevance to support roles was not clear. Government guidance to employers on the subject states:

'You can only ask for someone's date of birth on an application form if they must be a certain age to do the job, for example selling alcohol. You can ask someone their date of birth on a separate equality monitoring form. You should not let the person selecting or interviewing candidates see this form.'

Although we have established that the information was not shared with the recruiting panel for shortlisting purposes and was therefore not used in decision making, requesting this information in applications appears to be contrary to government guidance.

If information requested on the application form is contrary to government guidance, there is a risk of reputational damage to the Service.

Recommendation 5	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Low Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: Date of birth was requested in applications for support roles, contrary to government guidance.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that the requesting of date of birth in application forms is reviewed against the Equality Act 2010 and associated government guidance and removed from application forms if deemed not appropriate.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Helen Minion</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: A review of applications on Jobtrain has been undertaken for support positions. DOB requirement removed. Operational roles will retain the request for DOB as these have a minimum age requirement.</p> <p>Implementation Date: Implemented</p>

3.2.2 We expected that there would be some flexibility introduced into the benefits associated with a role where recruitment proved difficult.

We found that there was scope for market rate supplements to be used in recruitment of support staff, as was evident for roles advertised at the time of the audit. We also confirmed that consideration was given to widening the pool of applicants through advertising roles as career development posts, with associated training and study support offered. The availability of agile working was highlighted in job adverts where it was applicable and application forms asked whether the applicant would like to be considered for a job share.

The Service's Agile Working Framework, introduced in April 2022, required staff with agile working arrangements to attend the office a minimum of three days a week and such arrangements were only open to staff once they had successfully completed a probation period and/or period of initial training or induction process. Furthermore, while there were regional offices available, the location of work for support staff roles was usually advertised as the Service's Headquarters. This limited flexibility over agile working may contribute to deter potential candidates from applying to the Service or accepting roles once agile working has been discussed at interview; this is likely to be particularly relevant to ICT roles.

If working arrangements do not provide the agility potential candidates expect in the current job market, there is a risk that candidates will be deterred from accepting roles, which may lead to essential roles not being filled promptly.

Recommendation 6	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Low Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: The Agile Working Framework restricted the amount of remote working available and may make roles less attractive to candidates in some business areas.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that the impact of the Agile Working Framework on recruitment to support roles is considered at its annual review, and flexibility introduced if necessary to ensure support roles can continue to be recruited to successfully in the current job market.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Helen Minion</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: To conduct a review and obtain feedback from current employees on agile working arrangements. Consideration and broadening of the scope will need to be decided upon by SLT. If agreed, analysis will be required to identify fully agile roles and allow for this at recruitment stages.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 31/07/2023</p>

3.2.3 We expected that candidates would be able to easily contact the Service to clarify information about roles advertised.

We found that email and telephone contact details of both the HR Service Centre and the recruiting manager were provided on job adverts for support roles, enabling potential candidates to find out further information about the role.

There were a series of On Call job adverts on the Service's website, comprising a general advert and adverts for individual stations. These adverts directed candidates towards the careers section of the website providing further information about the role and recruitment process, however the website link was broken.

If candidates cannot easily access the information they require about a role and recruitment process, there is a risk that they may be deterred from applying, which may lead to posts not being filled.

Recommendation 7	Summary Response
<p>Risk Rating: Low Risk</p> <p>Summary of Weakness: The website link from On Call adverts, intended to provide further information on the role and recruitment process, was broken.</p> <p>Suggested Actions: We recommend that the broken website link from On Call adverts is reviewed and fixed.</p>	<p>Responsible Officer: Helen Minion</p> <p>Issue Accepted</p> <p>Agreed Actions: Link has been reviewed and is now fixed.</p> <p>Implementation Date: Implemented</p>

4 Areas for Improvement

- 4.1.1 We have also undertaken a consultancy role in our recruitment review. We have identified a number of areas in which improvements could be made to recruitment governance, monitoring and processes, however these do not warrant a formal recommendation for management to respond to and we do not intend to formally follow up. These suggestions are intended to improve the success of recruitment activities and thereby mitigate the risks to recruitment as identified in the Corporate Risk Register. Management is at liberty to take whatever action it deems necessary with regard to the following suggestions:

4.2 Governance and Monitoring

- 4.2.1 We expected that recruitment metrics would be measured.

A wealth of recruitment data was captured by the applicant tracking system, in addition to data on advert views and applications provided from external platforms. There had, however, been little utilisation of this data due to resource pressures. The data could be used to establish various metrics, for example:

- Applicant drop-off rate.
- Withdrawal rate by recruitment stage.
- Job offer to acceptance ratio.
- Time between offer acceptance and start date.
- Advert success rates by location.

Analysis of such information could offer useful insight into areas of potential improvement in the recruitment process and provide a means of tracking success of any changes made.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If the recruitment data collected is not collated and analysed, there is a risk that information it provides cannot be utilised to identify areas of potential improvement, which may reduce the effectiveness of recruitment.

We suggest that, in order to gain a better understanding of the success or otherwise of the recruitment process, data collected should be used to establish metrics and identify areas of potential improvement.

- 4.2.2 We expected that feedback from candidates would be used to gain information on candidate perception of the Service.

We found that the candidate experience of the recruitment process had not been fully considered, the focus having historically leant towards ease of process from the Service's point of view.

Feedback on the recruitment process was requested from some candidates. Where a candidate withdrew from the application process an automated email was sent asking for the reason for withdrawal, however the response rate was low. Following a recent recruitment, candidates who had withdrawn were contacted for feedback directly by the HR Service Centre Manager, which had prompted some responses. These responses indicated that the process was too time consuming and raised concern over some of the information required upfront. Feedback was not however routinely collected from successful candidates, nor was it collated to allow themes to be identified.

Useful information might also be gained by taking a 'mystery shopper' approach. A resource sufficiently removed from day-to-day recruitment processes could be asked to attempt the application for an advertised vacancy and provide insight into where potential sources of frustration for candidates might lie, particularly in the initial stages of recruitment.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If the candidate experience has not been sufficiently considered, there is a risk that candidates could be deterred from the recruitment process, which may reduce the likelihood of successful recruitment.

We suggest that a combination of candidate feedback and a 'mystery shopper' approach is used to gain a better understanding of how candidates experience the recruitment process. Feedback should be sought from successful candidates in addition to those withdrawing from the process to facilitate this. Areas of potential improvement highlighted should then be acted on.

4.3 Processes

4.3.1 We expected that job descriptions and person specifications would accurately reflect the requirements of the role.

We found that support staff job adverts were generally based on a template advert, which was amended as necessary by the recruiting manager. Job descriptions and person specifications were linked to job evaluations and the Recruitment Policy suggested that recruiting a new member of staff would be an ideal time for the recruiting manager to review the job description and person specification for the post, in consultation with HR Services and Organisational Development.

We reviewed the job description and person specification for the three support vacancies advertised at the time of the audit and observed the following:

- The job descriptions were highly task-oriented rather than outcome-driven, which made them difficult to read and digest easily.
- The focus was on tasks rather than key behaviours.
- A full driving licence had been listed as a requirement in one person specification we reviewed, although there was no clear reason why this was required for the role. The application form for this role requested details of the driving licence in advance, which may deter candidates who did not hold a licence from applying.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If recruitment material does not accurately reflect the requirements of the role or is not easy to digest, there is a risk that candidates will be deterred from applying, which may reduce the success of recruitment.

We suggest that it is emphasised to recruiting managers that a review of the job description and person specification is an important part of the recruitment process. As a minimum, person specifications should be reviewed to ensure that there are no unnecessary requirements present. The Recruitment Policy and Recruitment & Selection Toolkit should be updated to reflect these requirements when next reviewed. Furthermore, consideration should be given to refreshing job descriptions to be more outcome-centred and inspiring to potential candidates, although we recognise that this links to job evaluations and may require a long-term approach.

4.3.2 We expected that job advertisements would emphasise the benefits of working for the Service.

The template job advert highlighted the benefits of working for the Service, for example flexible working hours, health and wellbeing services and ongoing training and development opportunities. The Service's careers website provided further information on these aspects.

However, there was more that could be done to ensure that these benefits were brought to life for potential candidates. For example, blogs had been written by a variety of officers which provided real life examples of how the Service provided family-friendly working patterns, and the applicant tracking system had the capability to embed such links and videos in recruitment material.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If recruitment material does not fully demonstrate the benefits of working for the Service there is a risk that potential candidates may not apply, which may reduce the success of recruitment.

We suggest that the functionality of the applicant tracking system to embed audio-visual material into job adverts is explored further, as a method of engaging potential candidates to develop a better understanding of how a role within the Service might align with their lifestyle and values. The video and blog resources already created and available on the intranet could provide a starting point for this, in addition to closer working with the Communications team with their relevant knowledge and experience of digital marketing. Recruiting managers should be encouraged to consider at an early stage of the process how they might make adverts more appealing through the incorporation of such material.

4.3.3 We expected that the application process would be clear and straightforward.

We found that generally, applications to support roles required candidates to read an advert, job specification and person specification and complete an application form. The advert provided clear information on the process, including the planned interview period and the requirement for Police Security Vetting for the successful candidate.

Applications were made on the Service's website and required a user account to be created, the application form could also be completed on mobile devices. Several personal details were required at the outset, for example the candidate's date of birth, driving licence expiry date, presence of visible tattoos and whether they had personal contacts at the Service; we consider that some of these may be perceived as unnecessarily invasive by candidates at this early stage in the application process.

The application form then required candidates to enter the following information:

- Academic/professional qualifications.
- Employment history (including description of duties).
- References covering the last 3 years.
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion monitoring (optional).
- Criminal convictions declaration.

Finally, a series of role-specific questions were asked, which formed the basis of shortlisting.

Much of the information in the academic/professional qualifications and employment history sections of the applications would be contained within a CV. For some roles, in particular those traditionally more difficult to fill such as within ICT, a CV was accepted in place of this information. However even when a CV was accepted, the application form would require a significant amount of time and effort to complete, the most onerous section being the role-specific questions which were used in shortlisting. For example, seven such questions must be answered for the Senior ICT Support Engineer role currently advertised. The limited feedback which had been obtained from candidates supported that the application form was time-consuming and onerous to complete.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If application forms are time-consuming and onerous for candidates to complete, there is a risk that an interested candidate will not make an application, which may reduce the pool of candidates and may result in vacant positions not being filled.

We suggest that:

- **The questions at the start of the application form are reviewed to ensure they are necessary at this stage of the application process.**
- **CVs are accepted for all roles in place of manual entering of qualification details and work history.**
- **Other options are considered in place of shortlisting questions to reduce the burden on the applicant, for example telephone screening.**

- 4.3.4 We expected that jobs would be advertised in a variety of locations to ensure that a wide pool of talent is recruited from.

Traditional recruitment techniques were used, with job adverts generally being placed on the well-known recruitment websites, on social media, in the Service's weekly vacancy list and on the Service's careers website. Specialist publications were also used should the recruiting manager request it.

All applications were submitted through the Service's careers website and potential candidates could register for tailored vacancy alerts, using their email or social media accounts to sign up.

On Call roles were also subject to advertisement campaigns through social media and banners on stations, led by the Communications team. There was only limited digital marketing experience within the Service and direct targeting of potential candidates via LinkedIn, for example, had not been considered. There had however been some recent digital marketing work done with an external company on Reservist recruitment, and this more targeted approach had had some success.

The use of recruitment consultants was generally limited to the initial stages of recruitment for senior leadership roles and for some ICT roles. Data collected by the applicant tracking system indicated that some roles, particularly financial and ICT roles, attracted low numbers of applicants, however recruitment would usually be attempted in-house as a first step.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If the use of recruitment consultants is not considered at an early stage for hard to fill vacancies, there is a risk that recruitment will take longer than necessary and positions may not be filled.

We suggest that where data shows that similar vacancies have attracted a low number of applications previously, careful consideration is given to the method of recruitment. In some cases, it may be appropriate to utilise the digital marketing expertise of recruitment consultants at the outset of the process, possibly in parallel with in-house recruitment, to identify and attract a wider pool of suitable candidates and increase the likelihood of the role being filled promptly.

- 4.3.5 We expected that pre-employment checks would be carried out promptly.

We found that once a job offer had been made the HR Service Centre initiated various pre-employment checks, including:

- A medical check, conducted by Occupational Health, with differing requirements for support and operational staff.
- References, including checking that the referees provided were appropriate.
- Qualification documentation.
- Right To Work documentation.
- Police vetting.

The HR Service Centre maintained a spreadsheet dashboard allowing them to track progress of pre-employment checks for newly appointed positions which was reviewed at weekly team meetings. Prior to issue of the contract a checklist was completed to confirm that all pre-employment checks had been completed.

The police vetting process differed depending on where in the office the member of staff would be located. The length of time taken for the process had historically been the cause of delays following job acceptance, however a less stringent process was now required for some roles and dedicated officers from Derbyshire Constabulary were now responsible for processing checks. As a result of this, the situation was believed to have improved. However, we identified that Warwickshire Police Force provided a Police National Vetting Service for Non-Police Personnel Vetting, which could represent a possible alternative service should it be required in future.

Potential Risk and Mitigating Actions

If the police vetting process has a slow turnaround there is a risk that successful applicants may secure a role elsewhere before they can take up their position with the Service, hampering recruitment.

We suggest that initial enquiries are made regarding the costs and service level agreement associated with the Police National Vetting Service provided by Warwickshire Police Force so that, where recruitment is time-critical, this could be considered as a possible alternative source of vetting in future.

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The central midlands audit partnership was formed to provide shared internal audit services to local authorities in the region. CMAP currently provides audit services to three District Councils, a Unitary Council, a Housing ALMO and a Fire Authority.

