

Report of Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

Principal Officer Temporary Structure Proposal

Purpose of report

1. In the light of the retirement of the current Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) in July next year - and the formal submission to government of the Police & Crime Commissioner's (PCC) full business case for taking over governance of the two Fire & Rescue Services in the West Mercian area - this paper provides the Fire Authority with a recommended approach to effectively maintain the Service's Principal Officer function over a 12-18 month period, whilst minimising both the organisational and operational risks to the Fire Authority.

Recommendations

It is recommended that with effect from the date of retirement of the DCFO (or as agreed by the CFO):

- i) the current Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) be temporarily promoted to the post of DCFO for a period of at least 12 months (with an option to review and extend depending on prevailing circumstances) and that the resultant temporary vacancy at Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) be filled internally - potentially using a number of candidates; and***
- ii) the remuneration level of the temporary DCFO & ACFO posts will be the same as the substantive DCFO & ACFO posts respectively, albeit that the positions will not attract any pensionable benefit (due to the temporary nature of the position).***

Introduction and Background

2. The current DCFO has tendered his resignation, with a view to retire from the Service in July next year. This will leave the Service with a vacancy at Principal Officer level.
3. However, in October this year, the West Mercia PCC submitted a full business case to Home Office, recommending that he takes over governance of the two FRS's in the area.
4. In that business case, it is argued that efficiencies could be made across the two FRS's by rationalising the senior management structure – and in

- particular reducing both the Chief and Deputy Chief Officer positions from four (currently two CFO's & two DCFO's) to two (one CFO and one DCFO).
5. Irrespective of the practical deliverability of the business case, the publication of such a revised senior management structure across the two FRS's creates significant uncertainty as to the long-term viability of those posts, which in turn will detrimentally impact on the Service's ability to successfully attract suitably qualified and experienced candidates to apply for those positions.
 6. It would therefore be inopportune to seek to appoint a permanent DCFO at this time. The current substantive ACFO has the requisite skills and experience to undertake that role until clarity is determined in respect to the future structure. I therefore propose that postholder be temporarily promoted to DCFO.
 7. None of the current Area Commanders within HWFRS have any demonstrable experience at Principal Officer level: a quality that would potentially be deemed as essential for any Person Specification when considering future candidates for the substantive DCFO appointment. I therefore propose that suitable internal candidates be given the opportunity to gain experience through a series of temporary promotions to ACFO.
 8. Therefore, this proposal seeks to address two issues. Firstly, it would enable appropriate Principal Officer cover to be effectively maintained during this period of uncertainty. Secondly, it would allow suitable internal candidates (who would have already demonstrated their ability to effectively manage a simulated multi-agency major incident) to gain valuable organisational and political experience at that level. This, in turn, will also provide those individuals with sought-after, relevant experience to support any subsequent application for substantive Principal Officer posts that will arise in any clarified or revised senior management structure.

Corporate Considerations

9. Although, on the face of it, the recommended approach has the disadvantage of delaying the substantive appointment of a key Principal Officer post, this is more than compensated for by effectively maintaining the function via a temporary arrangement that not only provides continuity of management and opportunity for internal development, but also eliminates the risk of undertaking a process that may result in no suitably qualified and experienced candidates applying due to the uncertainty of future organisational changes.
10. Furthermore, the Fire Authority will be able to demonstrate due diligence in its decision making, by taking into account and acting upon foreseeable possible organisational changes that, if not considered, may result in avoidable future costs to the public purse (e.g. redundancy from supernumerary posts).
11. In order to undertake the temporary ACFO role, suitable internal candidates will need to first successfully undertake an operational assessment commensurate with Principal Officer responsibilities at a large scale, complex, multi-agency incident.

12. The aim will be that all candidates who are successful at the operational assessment will then be given an appropriate opportunity to act up in the temporary ACFO role over the designated period.

Conclusion

13. This approach will maintain the current Principal Officer function in all substantive operational and organisational regards.
14. Taking into account the complexity and uncertainty of the current operating environment and the advantages and disadvantages highlighted above, this report recommends to the Fire Authority to delay the permanent appointment of a DCFO, but instead, make temporary appointments to the DCFO & ACFO posts in order to maintain the Principal Officer function with minimal impact on both organisational and operational effectiveness and efficiency.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	None – although there is the potential to accrue a small amount of savings in pension contributions over the period, as both posts will be temporary in nature (i.e. promotions will be non-pensionable).
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The commitment to having the right people, with the right skills and training is part of 'Our Strategy'.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	The recommendation is itself the management of the risks arising from the potential change in organisational structures outlined in the PCC Business Case.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	N/A
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Any temporary promotion opportunities will be based on both the operational and organisational needs of the Service and will take equalities issues into account

Supporting Information

Background papers – West Mercia PCC Full Business Case

Contact Officer

Nathan Travis, Chief Fire Officer

(01905 368202)

Email: ntravis@hwfire.org.uk