

# Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority

Monitoring visit report

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**Name of lead inspector:** Victor Reid, Her Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** Employer

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

The Staffordshire Commissioner assumed responsibility for the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in August 2018, taking over the statutory duties of the former Fire and Rescue Authority. The Fire and Rescue Service is led by a chief fire officer who directly reports to the commissioner. The Fire and Rescue Service became a levy-funded apprenticeship provider in January 2018. At the time of the visit, the service had recruited a total of 20 firefighting apprentices who are operationally based at community fire stations spread across the county. All the apprentices are enrolled on the emergency fire services operations standards-based apprenticeship programme at level 3.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?**

#### **Significant progress**

Senior leaders and managers set high expectations for their apprenticeship programme. They have established a clear institutional vision and strategy that is well understood at all levels of the organisation. Leaders ensure that the fire and rescue service responds effectively in meeting local needs and national priorities. Leaders have contributed well towards the development of the 'trailblazer' standards to ensure that they reflect the needs of fire and rescue services nationally.

Leaders are ambitious for their apprentices to develop the skills and competencies needed for employment and career development within the service. They have prioritised significant investment to support the apprenticeship programme. For example, they have increased trainer numbers and, as a result, the service is very adept in ensuring that apprentices routinely benefit from high-quality training. This equips them with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to become competent firefighters.

Leaders ensure that apprentices receive particularly close and beneficial support from their station assessors and watch commanders. Staff involved in the delivery of the training are serving firefighters. They draw upon their extensive range of operational experience to inspire and enthuse apprentices. All apprentices routinely work to the high and exacting standards required of an emergency response service.

Leaders closely monitor the operational effectiveness of the apprenticeship programme through a well-developed set of information dashboards. In addition, managers have developed good assurance procedures to monitor the quality of learning and assessment. Observers provide incisive and helpful feedback to assessors and watch commanders that helps them to keep their vocational training skills well-honed.

Governance arrangements are robust. A range of independent scrutiny boards and panels monitor the operational effectiveness of the service closely.

Leaders have yet to develop a formal strategy setting out how apprentices are to be supported in developing their English and mathematical skills beyond their initial starting points.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Significant progress**

All apprentices follow a detailed and well-structured individualised training programme that ensures they develop the specific skills, knowledge and behaviours related to a career as a firefighter. Following completion of a 15-week basic firefighting programme, apprentices are deployed to community fire stations across the county to consolidate their fire and rescue skills. When on operational deployment, apprentices undertake a monthly programme of training with their watch colleagues to ensure that they are competent in carrying out rescue procedures.

The training received by apprentices is meticulous and exacting. Training simulation activities are carefully constructed to replicate a wide range of emergency response situations that apprentices are likely to encounter. For example, how to use 'Jaws of Life' safely to pry open and free people trapped in their vehicles, or how to search for methodically and rescue a casualty from a fire- and smoke-filled building using breathing apparatus. As a result of this training, apprentices quickly become valued members of the watch crew.

At all stages of their training, apprentices receive thorough initial briefings, ongoing support and subsequent debriefs that help them to identify what they did well and how they can improve. Staff assess apprentices' learning frequently through a range of methods that include reflective accounts of activities. The feedback they provide is thorough and precise.

Staff monitor apprentices' training well. Trainers use a comprehensive tracking and monitoring system, enabling them to review and plan timely interventions that support apprentices to make good progress. Apprentices have an excellent understanding of endpoint assessments. They use their assessment plans as a guide to what they need to know and be able to do. As a result, they are familiar both with the assessment tasks they are required to complete and the criteria they are required to meet to achieve. All apprentices are making the progress expected of them, and a majority are ahead of target.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place?      Significant progress**

Leaders have developed an impressive culture of safeguarding that permeates all aspects of the service. They ensure that all staff involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship are carefully vetted to ensure their suitability to work in a training environment and in positions of trust.

Leaders ensure that all personnel, including apprentices, receive suitable training covering health and safety, safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Apprentices have a precise understanding of how to keep themselves safe while at work and in their personal lives.

Leaders maintain a comprehensive oversight of all safeguarding and welfare incidents relating to apprentices. They ensure that assessors and watch commanders have a high level of vigilance for apprentices, particularly when they attend incidents of a distressing nature.

All designated safeguarding officers are suitably trained and experienced. They deal with safeguarding and welfare incidents swiftly and maintain accurate records of the actions taken, including referrals to other designated support agencies and partners.

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