**Guidance for applicants to the Talent Pipeline Process.**

**This guidance is relevant to CM, WM, SM, and GM applicants**

Further to feedback provided by some of our previous applicants to other pipeline processes, these guidance notes are intended to clarify, assist and elaborate on various parts of the pipeline process for future candidates.

Please note that each pipeline process will be slightly different, so please ensure that you refer only to the current advert, guidance and documents and not previous versions. This applies to all roles; eg. the CM process in 2022 will be updated from the 2021 and 2020 versions.

It was noted that some candidates simply repeated their applications – without amendment – from 2020 to 2021, and were surprised to be sifted out at an early stage. This was because in 2020, HFRS Values and Principles were referenced during that pipeline but by 2021, we had implemented the Core Code of Ethics and the pipeline reflected this.

It is therefore advised that you make your application to the pipeline, specific to that particular year, and do not simply cut and paste information you have used previously. In any event, year on year, you will be gaining more experience and be exposed to different situations that you can usefully reference in your application – particularly how you have developed in your role.

It is therefore essential that you read all documents and instructions for the pipeline you are applying for carefully – and more importantly, follow the instructions provided. Eg. If the word count for the report is 1000 words, please do not write 1500 words.

All documents, from the application form through to the report and presentation must be prepared by you personally – and you will be asked to declare that this is the case. We need to understand what **your** thoughts, experiences and capabilities are – not those of your partner, friend or parent, etc – please expect to be asked to elaborate on anything included in any of your submissions.

**Talent Pipeline – Development and Selection**

The Talent Pipeline processes were developed for two purposes;

1. as a framework for supporting development of individuals via the PDR process and jointly prepared Individual Development Plans (IDPs)
2. to provide a transparent process for selection for promotion.

Development is a joint journey in which the employee plays a significant part.

‘Development’ isn’t just something a manager ‘does to’ an employee – it’s a jointly owned process which the employee needs to play an active part in. For this reason, IDPs are a document developed and owned by both the employee and their manager and it is up to the employee to seek out development if they wish to progress or they feel they have gaps in their skills and knowledge.

The Talent Pipeline process is detailed as part of the advert for each campaign, is evaluated after the completion of each campaign and is therefore likely to be subject to further changes as a result. For example, in the 2020 scheme, candidates were asked 8 questions. When the process was evaluated, this was reduced to 6 questions. Similarly during the 2020 campaign, HFRS values and principles were referred to, however these were replaced by the NFCC code of Ethics during 2021 which were therefore reflected in the 2021 pipeline processes.

Feedback suggests that some candidates found the 2020 selection processes very challenging – however, in order to select our managers, the process needs to test a variety of elements.

Being a manager, from CM upwards requires more than excellent technical operational skills and we are seeking to ensure that everyone who is substantively promoted has the necessary ‘raw’ skills and attributes to allow them to be a successful manager.

**Reports and Presentations**

We have included the preparation of a report and presentation within our selection process as most levels of manager – especially within the public sector - should reasonably expect to do this as part of their normal duties and it’s important that all our managers are well rounded in managerial skills as well as technical operational skills.

In response to feedback that a few candidates indicated that they would like more support with report writing and delivering a presentation, we addressed this by providing some supportive resources and links on the Organisational Development Sharepoint pages for those who would to access them.

This is a development need individuals could identify for themselves and can be included on their IDP so they can take opportunities to develop this skill with their manager in their existing role and work location.

There is also a reasonable expectation that applicants will carry out their own research to assist them to develop their own presentation and report submissions, for example via a google search.

Please note that applicants are not sifted out of the process based solely upon the report they submit; sifting is carried out using the application form against the person specification and RSTO.

Candidates will be expected to summarise their report verbally during the interview process. This is not because the panel have not read it! The purpose is for us to be assured that you know your subject, that it was actually written by you (not for you!) and that you can speak competently about why you have written what you have written.

You must limit your report to the prescribed word count. Other than a few words over that complete your final sentence, any additional words that you have written will be disregarded and not marked.

All reports will be anonymised and sent to two separate markers (consecutively) so that we have a ‘second opinion’ on each the report result to ensure fairness to all candidates.

**Application form**

It’s important that the applicant completes the application form themselves as thoroughly as possible to demonstrate their skills, experience, knowledge and attributes.

The application form is now broken down into specific areas to ensure that the applications can be sifted more effectively against the relevant specifications. Again, these sections are word counted and you should restrict yourself to the maximum allowance. Content in excess of the word count will not be considered.

It is also necessary for your application to be supported/signed off by your line manager before it can be submitted.

If your application is not supported by your manager, they will have a discussion with you to explain why you are not being supported and if you wish to develop and progress, to assist you with an IDP which will prepare you for future processes.

Please note, it is YOUR responsibility to submit your application form and documents by the closing date of the application process to the email address/person specified.

It is NOT up to your manager to do this for you.

**Sifting**

Application forms will be sifted by the sifting panel – this is where your skills and experience are taken into consideration against how you meet the person specification and the RSTO

Thorough completion, within wordcount of the application form is therefore essential – and your opportunity to demonstrate how you meet the specification – and how you have taken opportunities to develop yourself.

Some applicants who applied for the 2020 pipelines were under the impression that previous experience and skills were not taken into consideration, but this is not accurate.

Applications not supported by line management are sent to the sifting panel so they can also be checked for fairness and consistency against the person specification and RSTO.

**Application form feedback**

It is unusual for any organisation to provide feedback on the content of application forms when an employee is unsuccessful at sifting stage. Whilst we did provide limited feedback to the 2020 candidates, during evaluation it was decided due to the volume of feedback required and the logistics of providing that feedback when candidates were on shift/available, that it was not feasible for the sifting panel to do this. Therefore, for subsequent campaigns, all candidates who do not pass the sift will be referred back to their line manager for further support and feedback.

**Interviews**

Candidates are expected to prepare for their interview via their own research and consideration of issues that they think may be facing HFRS and the UK Fire Service generally. Other issues to consider are our strategic priorities, Code of Ethics and HFRS values and how you can demonstrate that you meet them.

We do not issue interview questions or topics ahead of the process simply because we are not looking for a ‘rehearsed’ version of what you think we want to hear.

Having further reviewed our commitment to ensuring that all candidates are adequately supported at interview, particularly if they have neuro diverse needs, A printed copy of the interview questions will be issued to every candidate as they enter the interview – which will be collected at the end of the interview.

If neuro diverse candidates require additional support by way of a period of quiet time just before the interview, they should request this via HR at the earliest opportunity so that this can be arranged, similarly, if they require additional time during the interview to respond to questions, this must be requested well in advance so that interview schedules may be adjusted accordingly.

We are looking for well rounded applicants who can demonstrate that they’ve given some personal thought to what they think is important to the role they are applying for and can respond to questions posed by the panel in considered, logical and thorough way.

We are all expected to ‘think on our feet whilst remaining calm’ at times in our jobs – especially operational staff and therefore an interview is simply a reflection of that demand.

**It is useful to remember STAR when responding to interview questions;**

S – what was the situation and when did it take place?

T – what was the task and goal?

A – What action did YOU take?

R – what was the result?

HFRS use the ORCE (Observe, Record, Classify and Evaluate) methodology during interviews and presentations which means that all of our assessors need to do a lot of writing whilst you are talking, to capture as much of what you are saying as possible.

Some candidates from the 2020 processes commented that they found that a little uncomfortable, but rest assured we are all listening and taking in what you are saying!

**Incident Command Requirement**

We do not require that candidates undertake a physical technical skills assessment – it is taken as read that you are all able to perform the technical demands of your jobs – otherwise it is likely that anyone not able to fulfil this element would be subject to a capability or performance management process.

As part of the purpose of this process is to select managers who will be required to ‘take command’ at various situations it is essential that candidates either hold an IC qualification or they pass an IC assessment at the end of the selection process.

Candidates having to undertake the IC assessment will need to be considered appointable in the other elements of the selection process before the IC assessment can take place.

**Scoring**

It was a very deliberate move to assess candidates as follows;

1. Appointable
2. Appointable on a temporary basis only
3. Not appointable

This is because, until a suitable vacancy arises that the appointable candidate at the top of the scoring list can be offered (and they accept), they cannot be considered as ‘successful’.

The candidate can only be deemed ‘successful’ when they accept and take up a substantive promotion.

If too few opportunities for promotion/vacancies arise during the 24 month period, remaining appointable candidates will not be substantively promoted – and therefore cannot be regarded as ‘successful’.

The outcome and scores of all candidates will not be published. GDPR means that individual results are confidential to the person concerned only.

**Feedback**

Feedback regarding your application form will come solely from your manager and not the sifting panel. It is expected that you will be having development discussions with your manager around your skills and any resulting IDP and should your application not be supported, or rejected by the sifting panel because you do not meet the necessary criteria, you will need to discuss this with your manager. You will be expected to seek this support from your manager yourself, should you require it.

Feedback from the selection process (ie interview, presentation and report) will be provided by the panel if you wish. The feedback will not be a complete review of every step you took through the process, but will highlight where you performed well, and areas you need to focus on developing.

Feedback is provided as a means for you to consider how you can perform better next time, but it is not a ‘justification session’ where your scores and performance are debated in fine detail.

Feedback on your presentation and report will again highlight good performance and areas for development. It will not however tell you what you should have written or included.

If you are unsuccessful, part of the process and personal development is learning how to manage your own disappointment.

Individuals who find themselves in this position are advised to seek feedback and focus positively on how they can improve for future processes and channel their efforts towards this aim.

**24 Months in the Pipeline**

It was decided at the outset of the introduction of the process that appointable candidates would remain in the pipeline for promotion for 12 months only to ensure that all appointable candidates maintain their skills and IDPs in readiness for substantive promotion. Having run five of these processes in swift succession since 2020, this has now been re-evaluated and extended to 24 months.

At the end of 24 months, any remaining appointable candidates will be removed from the list (there will be no ‘carried over’ rights to be substantively promoted) and will need to apply again at the next process, should they wish to gain substantive promotion.

Previous processes did not focus on the maintenance and development of those candidates’ skills whilst waiting in the ‘promotion pool’ – and this was not helped by some candidates remaining ‘in the pool’ for several years.

We want to maintain the best possible pipeline of talented, committed and well equipped appointable candidates for all roles and pipelines and as a result we will be running those processes in line with the workforce planning needs (usually annually) to maintain and develop our ability to fill vacancies with quality candidates.

This allows all concerned to understand the process, and should they not be ready or supported for the current years’ pipeline selection process, they are clear in what is required and able to develop and prepare themselves to apply at the next process.

**Vacancies and Selection Process – Full Time**

When vacancies arise; appointable candidates will be offered the next available vacancies taking into consideration the score order of candidates and any critical Service need for specialised skills or qualifications.

All Operational staff sign a contract at the outset of their employment to agree that they will serve anywhere within the service area, and on any shift system.

This means that if you are offered the vacancy as a substantive promotion, you will be expected to take up that vacancy where it exists.

That said, if there are several vacancies to fill at the same time, we will match skills and locations to appointable candidates wherever possible

Anyone declining the opportunity to be substantively promoted will be moved to the bottom of the appointable list.

In the event that the appointable list is exhausted, temporary appointments may be made with the candidates who score an appropriate level (as detailed within the pipeline process) supported by the completion of an IDP.

Being temporarily promoted and completing an IDP however, will not constitute the right to be substantively promoted and those candidates will need to undertake the next available pipeline process should they wish to apply.

**Transparency**

We have made the process as clear and transparent as possible. All relevant documents are published with the advert so all candidates know what is required and what will be expected of them during the process.

We know from recent feedback that this is a significant improvement on previous processes and the majority of candidates found the process fair and clear. We aim to be as consistent as possible and to give all candidates a multifaceted approach to demonstrate their readiness for promotion.

Whilst we are able to outline a timeline for our pipeline processes, we are not able to provide the fine detail of when interviews will take place for individuals at the outset of the process as a lot depends upon how many applicants are selected at the sift to progress through the process.

This process also requires significant service resources to run it – in addition to all concerned carrying out their normal duties. Therefore, again, this prevents explicit arrangements being released at the outset of the process, but is arranged as each step progresses.

**Summary**

The talent pipeline development and selection process has been developed to be as transparent as possible so that all candidates know what is required.

We have also provided resources and signposting for all applicants so that they may equip themselves in report writing, presentation and interview skills.

That said, there is also a significant onus on each candidate to carry out their own research and preparation for both the content and style of their submissions, and interview technique as detailed above.