



DEVON &
SOMERSET
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



On-call Firefighter Information Booklet

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Who we are

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (DSFRS) is the largest non-metropolitan fire and rescue service in England. We are here to make the counties of Devon and Somerset a safer place to live, work and visit. We have 85 fire stations, the second largest number in England and around 2,000 staff consisting of a mix of wholetime, on-call and volunteer firefighters, control staff and professional support staff.

All our employees work hard to achieve our priorities of public safety, staff safety and continuously improving our effectiveness and efficiency. You can find out more about our strategy and purpose in [Our Plan 2016-2021](#)



Station locations





Working for us

**Think you know firefighters,
think again...**

**Firefighting involves much more than
putting out fires. We play a crucial role in:**

- **educating** young drivers to prevent accidents and injuries
- **rescuing** people from road traffic collisions
- **keeping** our communities safe from fire and other dangers with home safety checks
- **supporting** the ambulance service with medical emergencies
- **educating** children in road and fire safety through school visits and community events
- **rescuing** people from fast flowing water and protecting properties from flood damage
- **making** people safer in their places of work by advising business owners on fire safety regulations
- **rescuing** people from height and confined spaces
- **providing** specialist animal rescue services

**and we will also rescue you from
a burning building.**

Diverse incidents require a diverse workforce



The wide range of incidents we respond to require highly trained, highly performing teams with a mix of skills, knowledge, personal qualities, backgrounds and experience. The communities we serve can be as diverse as the situations we tackle and knowing and understanding those communities is an essential part of the job.

We want to ensure that our workforce reflects both the community and the mix of skills and qualities required to do the job. We particularly welcome applications from women as they are under-represented in our operational service. We also welcome applications from people who are Black, Asian or minority ethnic as they are also under-represented in our workforce.

Though being a firefighter requires a good standard of fitness and practical ability, having a disability does not necessarily prevent you from applying. There is some general guidance but most situations will be considered on an individual basis.



Core values

Our core values were agreed following discussions with employees. They set out what the Service stands for and what matters most to us as individuals and as an organisation. They are:

- **we are proud to help**
- **we are honest**
- **we are respectful**
- **we are working together.**

We are working hard to make sure that these important principles underpin everything we do and the way we operate.

If you are applying for a vacancy with the Service, it is important that you read and understand the Core Values Behavioural Framework. During the application process you will be asked to commit to practicing and actively promoting the values, along with the ideal and expected behaviours and ways of working.

Read the framework here [Core Values Behavioural Framework](#)

Being a firefighter



Firefighters often work in challenging, unpleasant conditions, work long hours, carry out drills and repetitive tasks and deal with people who are in distress.

Firefighters see people on possibly the worst day of their lives; when their home is on fire or they are trapped in a car or their partner or loved one is seriously ill. Every action you take and every decision you make will affect both them and the rest of your team.

It can be a highly rewarding role; knowing that you have helped to protect someone from injury or worse or helped to protect a property from damage. Training and maintenance of skills is a core activity on most days so even if some of this seems daunting now, you will be given the right training and close supervision. For those difficult memories, help and support is always available from your team mates, support staff and other professionals.

What is an on-call firefighter?

On-call crews are paid, trained professionals working to the same high standards as wholetime firefighters as they will also need to attend the full range of incidents including fires, floods, road traffic collisions, chemical spills and more, where all crews work alongside each other.

Apart from a few hours a week for training sessions and to carry out other pre-arranged duties, on-call firefighters only attend the fire station when they have received an emergency callout. For much of the time, an on-call fire station is not crewed. Each on-call firefighter carries a pocket pager, which is activated when they are needed and they have a maximum of five minutes to report to the fire station and mobilise the necessary appliance(s).

On-call firefighters will have other occupations, but when the call comes they drop whatever they are doing and become part of a highly motivated team. Depending on the type of cover given, an on-call firefighter may respond from home and/or work, day and/or night.



Call rates vary from station to station with some on-call stations responding to over 800 calls a year and others responding to less than 50. On average you can expect to be called out two or three times a week for perhaps a couple of hours.

In addition when you really can't spare the time, you can sign off duty, providing there are enough staff available to crew the appliance for that period.

DSFRS have several types of on-call contract with different levels of commitment based around the hours of cover you can offer. A full rate contract is usually based on offering 84 hours of cover per week and a reduced rate contract is 63 hours per week. The service use an electronic system for recording availability, which is pre-populated with each crew member's availability. Dependent upon the level of commitment provided and crewing levels the time on-call can be varied.

On-call firefighters are paid, trained professional firefighters who carry out similar duties to a wholetime firefighter. You will need to carry out initial training before you can safely respond to emergency call outs. There will be some on station training and attendance at a training centre. On-call firefighting is a professional role which can offer progressive career opportunities. If you have a primary employer, we can help explain the realities and benefits to them.



Recruitment procedure

There are seven different stages to the recruitment process and it is only when you get through all the stages that the work really begins; as with everything in the fire service this process demands determination, concentration and 100% effort. If you are successful in the process a long and rewarding career in the fire and rescue service awaits you.

1

Stage one: register interest, realistic job preview, eligibility check

When selecting candidates to be brought forward for assessment we will first look at the cover you are able to provide, which you will have stated on your application form. If a station is looking for additional cover, for example, during the day, then we will bring forward all candidates offering that particular level of cover. It is important you are clear about what level of cover you are able to give us, that is, what days of the week and at what time of the day you will be able to respond to emergency calls.



2

Stage two: written tests

This section consists of three different written tests and will take approximately two hours to complete. The tests are as follows:

- understanding information - assesses an applicant's ability to read and understand written information
- working with numbers - assesses an applicant's ability to understand and work with numerical information.
- problem solving and situational awareness - assesses an applicant's ability to ensure the safety of themselves and others and their ability to use information to solve problems.

Please download the [National Firefighter Ability Tests Practice Leaflet](#) to prepare you and give guidance as to what to expect at the written assessment.

If your assessment is successful, you will be invited to attend the next stage of the process.

3

Stage three: fitness assessment

This stage consists of the 'Bleep Test' and practical job related tests.

The fitness test will be the multi-stage fitness test, also known as the 'Bleep Test'. The test involves running continuously between two points that are 20m apart from side to side. The runs are synchronised with a recording, which plays beeps at set intervals. As the test proceeds, the interval between each successive beep decreases, forcing the participants to increase their speed over the course of the test until it is impossible to keep in sync with the recording. The required level is 8.6 shuttles.

4

Stage four: practical assessment

These tests are designed to assess your level of fitness, strength and manual dexterity as well as your level of confidence in simulated exercises. This will include five different tests:

- **The ladder climb** - this tests your confidence for working at height and while not physically demanding can be challenging.
- **The equipment assembly test** - this tests manual dexterity and the ability to follow instruction.
- **Ladder lift** - the ladder lift test simulates the individual physical demands of lifting and lowering the head of a 13.5 metre ladder back on top of a fire appliance. A total load of approximately 30kg, lifted to a height of 1.90m is required to successfully complete this test.
- **Equipment carry test** - the equipment carry test is essentially a shuttle test that will test your levels of aerobic endurance, muscular strength and muscular endurance. It is designed to replicate some of the physical demands involved in setting up a water relay station to supply water to a grassland

fire. The test is performed back and forth along a 25 metre shuttle whilst wearing full firefighter personal protective equipment (approx. 10 kg) and must be completed in five minutes, eight seconds or less. The total distance covered is 550m.

Confined Space/BA test - this is more a test of your ability to cope with dark and confined spaces and has only low to moderate physical demands, although good levels of flexibility and body awareness will be an advantage.

Full instruction is given on the day and you will be provided with fire service protective clothing to wear.

During the day you will have your uniform/ PPE measurements taken, for the purposes of ordering kit later on.

These tests will be conducted at a location in/near Exeter. Full instruction is given on the day. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have a series of videos demonstrating the tests together with some suggested training techniques.

Physical training guidance

The role of a firefighter can be physically demanding and it is important to consider your physical fitness before taking part in the selection process. General exercise guidance is available on the [FireFit steering group website](#). These guidelines are not compulsory for the selection process, but may help if you wish to improve your physical fitness. If you are in any doubt about your health or physical ability to exercise, or have not done much physical fitness training before, consult your doctor or seek advice from a trained professional before your start.



5**Stage five: interview**

If successful at the practical assessment you will be invited to interview. This will be a behavioural interview, meaning that the questions asked are focused on your past experiences. The interview panel will consist of two or three members of staff and you will be asked questions relating to your skills and personal attributes to determine your suitability to the role of a firefighter.

We recognise that potential recruits may have little to no experience of the job role and it would be unreasonable to expect you to know about it in advance.

6**Stage six: medical assessment**

You will be invited to attend our Occupational Health Centre for a medical and fitness assessment. The medical currently includes;

- **height**
- **weight**
- **blood pressure**
- **urinalysis (urine tested for various abnormalities)**
- **eye test – near and distance vision (with and without spectacles if worn)**
- **breathing test (lung function)**
- **hearing test (audiometry)**
- **fitness assessment**

You will be asked questions about your health and any disabilities/medical needs you may have.

We receive many enquiries regarding current and/or past medical issues and cannot give definitive guidance regarding these issues as consultation between service doctors and GPs will decide if an applicant is suitable to carry out the role of a firefighter and it should

be understood that all cases will be viewed individually. In line with the Data Protection Act, we do not divulge any medical information to anyone outside of occupational health without your written consent. A fitness assessment will be carried out by the fitness adviser as part of your medical. Here you will be asked to take a gas analysis assessment. The VO2 max test will consist of a maximal exercise test on a treadmill whilst connected to the analyser with a face mask. The procedure that will be adopted utilises a slight jogging speed and increments in gradient as well as speed. This is a proven cardio pulmonary assessment for measuring aerobic capacity.

Firefighter eyesight requirements

As we get older our eyesight deteriorates. Firefighters require a certain level of eyesight to enable them to carry out their role. With this natural deterioration it stands to reason that firefighters must meet the required standard of vision when applying to join the fire service.

7

Stage seven: references

In the course of the process you will be requested to provide references. References will be taken up at medical stage. You should provide two references on your application form, one personal and one business, the latter of which should be your current or most recent employer.

On successful completion of all the stages you will be issued a contract of employment and a start date for your initial training.

For further details regarding all stages of the application and recruitment process please visit www.fireservice.co.uk

To complete the Disclosure & Barring Scotland checks, i.e. the criminal records check, you will be asked to complete a form which is then sent to Disclosure Scotland. You will be sent the results which you will need to present to the service at the earliest opportunity.

When the references have come back positive and the DBS checks are satisfactory, you will be issued with a contract to start training.

Salary and allowances

As a trainee firefighter on the Retained Duty System (RDS) you will initially be placed on the trainee rate of pay.

Upon completion of your training course your pay will increase to the development rate until you have completed your development phase and are deemed competent. You will then be paid at the appropriate competent rate of pay.

The retaining fee is for staff offering full cover. Part cover staff are paid 75% of the full cover retaining fee.

On-call firefighter rates of pay				
Retaining fee (annual)	Hourly rate	Attendance fee	Turn out fee	Drill night
Trainee				
£2,291	£10.46	£9.25	£14.48	£20.92
Development				
£2,386	£10.90	£9.47	£14.92	£21.80
Competent				
£3,053	£13.94	£10.99	£17.96	£27.88

Pension scheme

We offer pension schemes which attract an employer's contribution. Information is provided upon your starting with the Service about the levels of contribution and the benefits that this attracts.

Training

Pre-course training

Each station has a drill night on a specified evening each week which lasts for approximately two hours. You will attend your station on their drill night for induction training. This will provide the opportunity for you to get to know the crew and procedures. Following your induction you will attend firefighting training either at Severn Park Fire & Rescue Training Centre in Avonmouth, Bristol, or Academy Training Centre Plympton.

The training consists of the following modules;

- Core Skills (12 days)
- BA Week 1 (5 days)
- BA Week 2 (5 days)
- RTC (3 days)

Your development

Once you have successfully completed and passed the 12 day Core Skills course, and have been provided with a de-brief from your local manager, you will be issued with your alerter/pager and be able to respond to operational incidents in a limited capacity. You will then follow a development programme, which may take between 18 months and two years to complete. Once you have successfully completed the programme, you will be deemed competent. Further training and development will continue throughout your career. Payment for attendance on all courses will be made.

Benefits of employing an on-call firefighter

On-call firefighters have the same training as wholetime firefighters, and will when required respond, using the latest equipment and techniques, to a wide range of incidents.

During their training, firefighters learn many different skills which could enhance your company, with knowledge relating to fire and road safety, becoming a beneficial transferable skill into the workplace. Their work is vital to the safety of people and properties in the area and the support of employers allowing their staff to respond is essential.

If you have a fire at your business, who better to tackle the fire than a firefighter who has a good working knowledge of the building?

Key benefits

- Transferable skills - during training firefighters learn many useful skills. They learn to work well in a team, to think quickly, take responsibility and use their initiative, to communicate fast and accurately and to keep calm in a crisis.
- Trained in first aid - firefighters learn first aid to a high standard. This will help to keep other employees safe but also contributes to legal obligations for first aid cover, cutting the cost of training.
- Large goods vehicle training – some firefighters are trained to drive LGVs and also receive Emergency Fire Appliance Driver (EFAD) training which is very similar to an advanced driving test in that it raises their awareness of road conditions.
- Trained in manual handling - all firefighters are trained by a recognised instructor in the correct procedures when lifting or moving items, the training involves learning simple techniques that could prevent injuries occurring, thus potentially reducing time lost at work through sickness.
- Help with health and safety regulations - risk assessments and fire hazards are all part of the training for firefighters resulting in skills useful to support health and safety officers and improve the safety of all your staff.
- Motivated staff - staff who are able to fulfil their ambitions and potential are usually happier and more productive in the workplace. Firefighters must be highly motivated to take on the tasks and this motivation will help them in everything they do.

- Committed employees – taking on the role of a firefighter takes commitment and energy. Committed firefighters responding from work are likely to be committed staff.
- Good publicity and local reputation for your company - the PR opportunities can be tremendous. Promoting your company as caring about its community and support of its staff can be very beneficial; and the rest of the workforce can be encouraged by knowing that a colleague is doing something interesting and worthwhile with the support of their employer.
- Trained to deal with emergencies - firefighters are trained to deal with a whole range of situations, never knowing what they might find when responding. This would help them when dealing with the ups and downs of working life.

What the employer needs to be aware of

We rely massively on the partnerships we build with local employers allowing staff to be released during their normal working day.

We appreciate the disruption that this can have on your business and we aim to ensure everyone is fully aware of the commitment prior to your agreeing to release the member of staff.

We will endeavour to explain to all staff the potential impact on their primary employment and that this should be taken into consideration when making themselves available for duties.



Case studies

Grant Lewis

On-call firefighter, Bridgwater

It's fair to say that being a on-call firefighter for over 32 years, tells you that there is something very special about the job. Having the opportunity to serve the community I live in is very special, and the challenging incidents the modern fire service are called to today, ensures no two jobs are the same. I receive great support from regular training sessions, and working as a team has most definitely helped shape me into the "confident" and "can do" person I am today.



Debbie Pease

On-call firefighter, Hatherleigh

Debbie is a part time hairdresser and an on-call firefighter for Hatherleigh since 2003.

I was approached by my neighbour who was a firefighter who asked if I would be interested in joining and although it wasn't something I had ever considered I wanted to find out more and 14 years later I am still here and enjoying being part of the fire service team.

I had my doubts as to whether I could provide the commitment as far as work life balance goes as 84 hours cover a week sounds a lot but have found that it just fits in around your everyday life, wearing a pager just feels normal and family and friends have got used to me rushing off when the pager goes off.



Sophie Banham

On-call firefighter, Ivybridge

Sophie is a marine biologist and has been an on-call firefighter since October 2013, initially for Kingston (volunteers) then transferring to Ivybridge.

Becoming a volunteer firefighter within a small village allowed me to help support a very close-knit community of friends and family. When I moved to Ivybridge, a small town, I didn't know many people, but my new team at the fire station were very welcoming.

The fire service becomes almost another family, where you're always meeting and working alongside a wide variety of people.

Marine biology was a difficult career to pursue, but having the on-going skill development the fire service offer gave me the motivation and support to keep going.

As a firefighter I enjoy the extensive range of skills you learn, that is useful not only in my other job, but in everyday life. It has also provided me with more self-confidence and the ability to make safe and quick decisions.

The anticipation of what call you're going to get next is like no other and I love having the ability to help people that need it.



Myth buster

There are a number of myths around on-call firefighters and how the principles actually work in reality.

1 It's only young macho men that are firefighters.

Anybody can become a firefighter. We want to reflect our diverse communities and welcome applications from anyone who fits the criteria.

2 Only the young can become firefighters.

There are no upper limitations on age when applying to become a firefighter. You do however, have to be 18 or over.

3 On-call firefighters stay at their stations until they get called.

On-call firefighters carry pagers whilst on duty. They could be at work or at home and respond when needed.

4 There are beds and a firefighter's pole in every station.

As mentioned previously on-call firefighters go about their normal working or personal lives and respond when required. They sleep at home in their own beds, within a five minute response time.

5 You can't wear glasses and be a firefighter.

You can still be a valued member of a firefighting team if you wear glasses. See the [Recruitment Procedure Tab](#).

6 Firefighters just put out fires.

On-call firefighters respond to a variety of different incidents, such as animal rescues, flooding, assisting other agencies, chemical spills and more.

7 Physical strength is the most important quality for a firefighter.

Numerous qualities combine to make the best firefighters, including the ability to think and act in a calm manner whilst under pressure, communication and team working skills. Not how strong you are. You do have to have a good level of fitness.

Benefits of working for us

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (DSFRS) welcomes all new members of staff into our work community. We pride ourselves on having a 'family' feel to our Service, and offer many benefits to help and support you during your employment in the Service.

1. Family friendly policies

We have a range of policies including Family Leave which sets out provisions for maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, adoption and foster care leave and time off for dependants.

Maternity

The policy helps employees to balance personal and work requirements throughout pregnancy, especially around the time the baby is due and immediately afterwards. We also aim to give partners the opportunity to support the mother of a child during the period immediately following the birth of a baby.

Child Care Vouchers

We have opted into the Child Care Voucher Scheme, which can be accessed tax-free and used to help towards your child care costs. You could claim up to £50 per week, which will be paid to you with your salary each month. The amount you require can be adjusted to suit your needs. You will need to check your eligibility to apply for the child care voucher scheme and that your child care provider accepts these vouchers.

2. Training and development

Training

When you join you will have access to a range of training and support facilities. This includes training in activities such as operational incidents on the fire ground and leadership and management development programmes. Our own internally trained assessors and trainers have a wealth of experience, but we also access external trainers to build on the skills, knowledge and understanding for the benefit of all staff.

3. Trade unions

Trade Unions

Trade Unions are there to support you in your work life and they all offer a range of services and support.

There are three options for union membership:

FBU - www.fbu.org.uk

FOA – www.fireofficers.org.uk

RFU – www.therfu.org.uk



4. Staff supporters

We have a Welfare Officer who can provide individual assistance and signpost towards other sources of support including a mediation service, free one to one counselling and individual critical incident defusing. We have a team of volunteers throughout the service who are confidentially available to support members of staff who may be experiencing difficulties whether at home or at work. They aim to be a support where possible and signpost to other agencies and counselling services.

5. Fire Fighters Charity

The Fire Fighters Charity is the UK's leading provider of services that enhance quality of life for serving and retired fire service personnel and their families. They are available for all members of the fire service community during their times of need, assisting thousands of individuals every year by providing pioneering

treatment and support services. The charity has three centres in Devon, Cumbria and West Sussex that offer rehabilitation programmes to eligible beneficiaries of the fire service community, as well as recuperation breaks that provide the chance to relax in peaceful and tranquil surroundings, which can aid emotional recovery following illness, injury, or other problems.

6. Support networks

Fire Pride

The Service is committed to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) equality and, through initiatives such as the Fire Pride network and attendance at Pride festivals, aims to create the right working environment for LGBT colleagues to feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, if they choose.

DSFRS has signed up to Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme which provides us with advice, support and networking aimed at improving and promoting diversity in the workplace. For three consecutive years we submitted evidence for Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index and achieved a position in the prestigious top 100 employers in the index, demonstrating that the Service is continuing to create an inclusive working environment.

WANDS

Our women's network identifies and provides solutions for the barriers faced by women in recruitment, retention and progression. In carrying out this role, the network supports the Service's aim to become an excellent organisation and enable all employees to reach their full potential.

The network brings women together to provide mutual support and encouragement and the opportunity to discuss and resolve issues of concern. The network is affiliated to the national Women in the Fire Service network.

Dyslexia support

The Service is committed to providing support for dyslexic employees to reduce the barriers they face in the workplace and enable them to be fully productive in their roles. This also means increasing awareness amongst all employees about what being dyslexic means, both the positive and the more challenging aspects.

B&EMM

The FBU have a Black and Ethnic Minority Member section which provides a focal point for advice and support.

7. Facilities

Staff car park

Parking facilities are provided at all of our sites, these are generally on first come first served basis.

Gym facilities

All of our sites have access to on-site gyms or other types of exercise facilities and you are encouraged to keep fit and stay active in many ways.

All sites have shower facilities to use after your fitness session. We have Fitness Advisors who can provide you with health and fitness guidance and support, and an exercise regime/plan if required.

8. Sports and Social Association

With currently 12 different sports sections within the SSA you can try your hand at anything from martial arts to mountaineering and we welcome new initiatives. We also have a monthly lottery.

9. Staff discount scheme

As a member of DSFRS's staff you can receive discounts in shops and/or on-line services. On production of your ID card some shops give as much as 20% discount. This benefit can range from holidays, outdoor activities stores, jewellers and much more.



Further information



www.dsfire.gov.uk Frequently asked questions can be found here.



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