



Becoming a Retained Firefighter

with West Sussex Fire
and Rescue Service



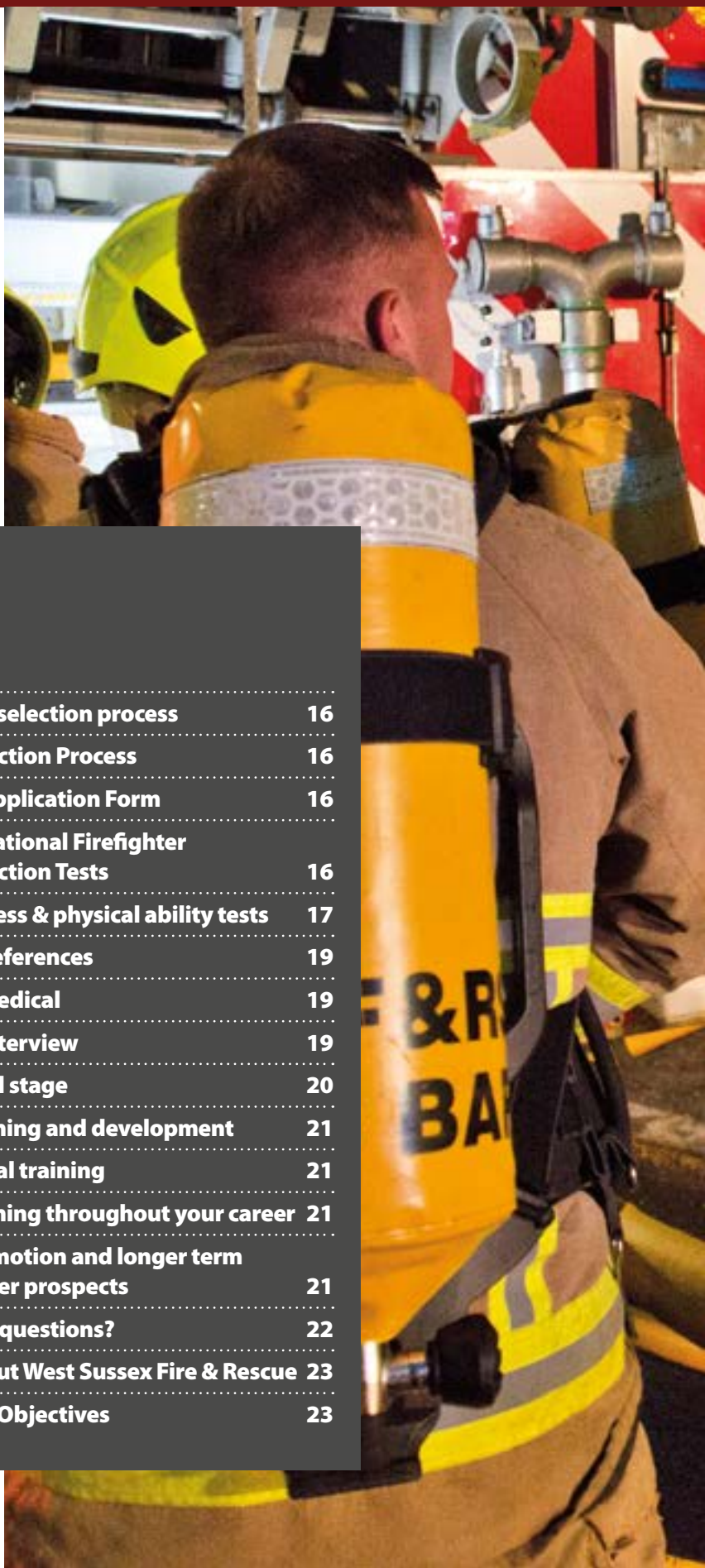
Thank you for your interest in becoming a retained firefighter with West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

This information guide will give you an insight into the role of a retained firefighter.

You will see the types of activity you can expect to be involved in during your career with us.

You will also find details about the current recruitment process.

We commit to fairness and equality in employment and service delivery.



Becoming a Retained Firefighter

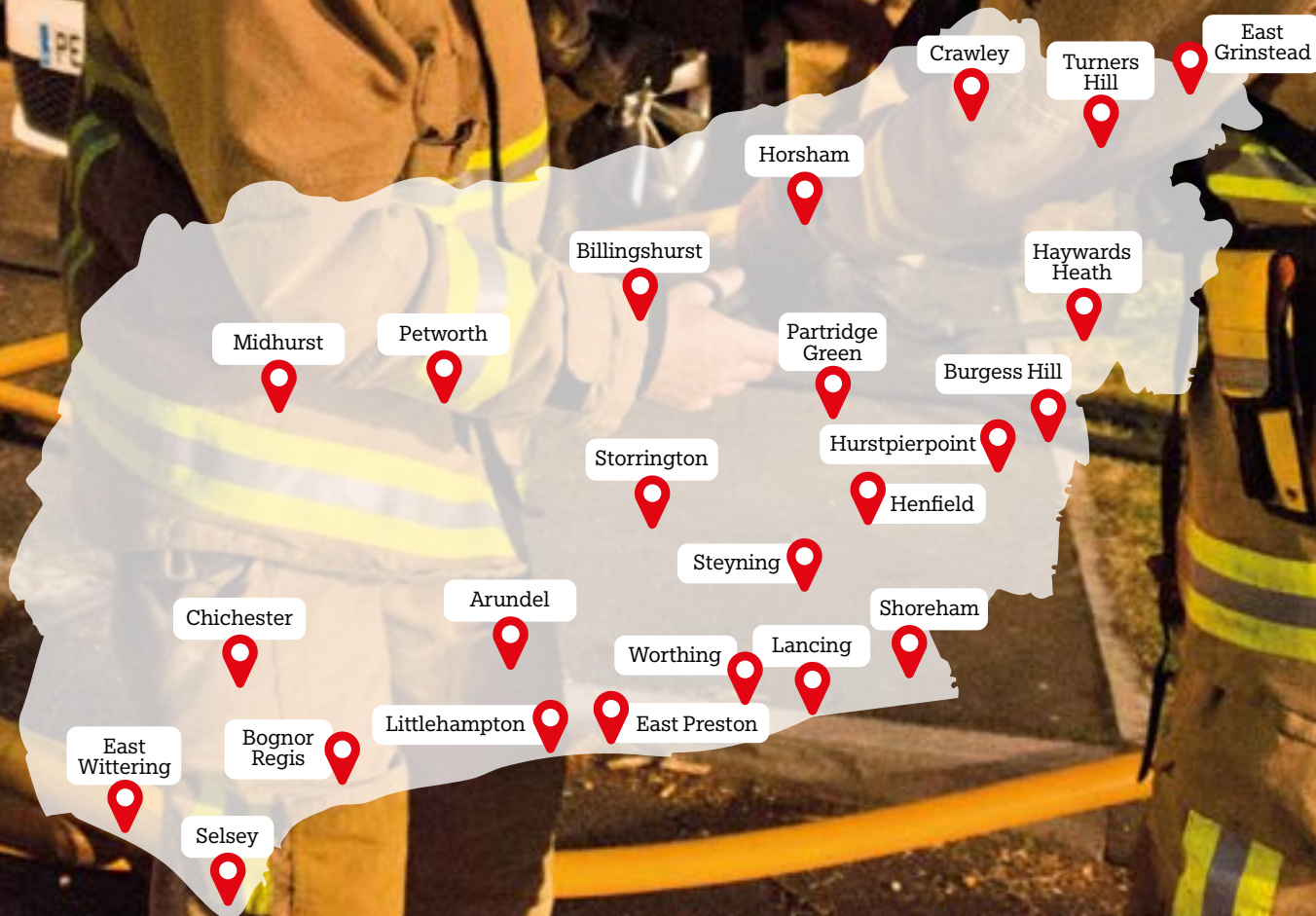
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Introduction

West Sussex is served by 25 fire stations.

- 2 are staffed by full-time firefighters only
- 9 are staffed by full-time and retained firefighters together
- 14 are staffed by retained firefighters only.



CASE STUDY

Sean Alexander

Sean joined Steyning Fire Station as a retained firefighter in 2014.

"My day job doing maintenance for a residential support service for young people is Monday to Friday so I cover evenings and weekends as a retained firefighter.

I'd be lying if I said it doesn't have an impact on my social life. But for me, there is no doubt it's worth it. It does mean I have to be incredibly organised and pre-arrange everything, which doesn't always come naturally, but I wouldn't swap it for the world.

It was a fantastic feeling to have my whole family at my pass out parade. They got to see me doing my drills and officially join the fire service. It was obvious how proud they were of me.

One of my favourite parts of the job is getting involved in the community safety events. Recently we went to Wiston Steam Rally – it was great fun talking to families and letting the kids look around the fire engine. It's good for people to get to know their local fire crew outside of an emergency situation.

Training to become a retained firefighter has certainly increased my self-belief. I have never been shy but had this nagging self-doubt and fear of failing. It took me a while to build up the courage to apply to be a retained firefighter but once I did there was no looking back. The process has taught me that if you put the time and hard work in, you can achieve anything you want."



What are retained firefighters?

Retained firefighters can be anyone and can come from all walks of life.

For example they are builders, consultants, stay-at-home parents, secretaries, engineers, cooks, factory workers, farmers, care workers, students or people not currently employed.

They are people who are able to give their time to assist the fire service in return for payment.

Retained firefighters are not based at a fire station.

They are on call and provide cover during the day, night and weekends.

They need to live or work within close proximity of one of the stations.

They need to be able to stop whatever it is they are doing the moment a message comes through to their pager and go straight to the fire station.

They may be at home and have time available to help protect the community.

They could be working for themselves or perhaps for a company that is prepared to let them have time off.

We ask retained firefighters to commit to providing a specified number of hours of cover a week.

There are a number of contracts types available depending on the hours an individual can commit to.

These range from 40 to 120 hours a week.

We train retained firefighters to deal with a similar range of situations and incidents as their full time colleagues.

Retained firefighters are required to attend an evening training session each week (known as a drill night).

This is at their local fire station for training and maintenance of essential equipment.

Working as part of an effective team, they use the latest equipment, methods and techniques to perform a wide range of duties.

These include:

- **Tackling property fires;**
- **Grass and farmland fires;**
- **Road traffic collisions;**
- **Chemical spills;**
- **Animal rescues;**
- **Floods; and**
- **Much more.**

Part of a retained firefighter's role is to encourage a safe community to prevent fires and emergencies.

They provide community education and advice on fire safety.

They take part in activities such as giving talks to schools and visiting community groups.

This is so people understand the risks of fire and what they can do to protect themselves.

Who can be a retained firefighter?

If you think you know what a typical retained firefighter is like, then think again.

There are no minimum or maximum height restrictions.

Retained firefighters have to be at least 18 years of age with a good all-round level of fitness but there is no upper age limit.

Previous experience or formal qualifications are not required.

That is due to the comprehensive training programme retained firefighters receive.

As we can't predict when they will be called out, retained firefighters need to be flexible in their work or homebased activities and work.

In West Sussex, a large percentage of our retained firefighters are self-employed, including mechanics, accountants, bricklayers, plumbers and shop owners.

Many of these people have found that being a retained firefighter has a positive impact on their business.

This is because they have better links with their local businesses and communities and they are well known and trusted by people in their area.

Retained firefighters need a range of skills and strengths, including:

- **Excellent communication;**
- **Courage;**
- **Understanding;**
- **Reliability;**
- **Flexibility;**
- **Determination;**
- **Self-motivation;**
- **Common sense;**
- **Commitment;**
- **Enthusiasm; and**
- **Ability to work in a team.**

They also need to be able to reflect the fire service's values at all times.

Above all, the role requires a real desire to serve the local community.



CASE STUDY

Laura Fitch

Laura joined Horsham Fire Station as a retained firefighter in 2015.

"I fit being a retained firefighter around my job teaching martial arts to young people. I applied because everyone I spoke to who worked for the fire service said that they absolutely loved their job. You just don't get that anywhere else.

I found the initial training very challenging. The hose runs and ladder lifts were physically demanding and the instructors certainly didn't go easy on me because I'm a woman. You aren't treated any differently and I wouldn't want to be.

Some people are shocked when I tell them that I am a firefighter but I don't think anyone should judge a book by its cover. You do need to be fit, but you don't have to be a bodybuilder to do this job, I'm certainly not. In my opinion there is nothing to hold a woman back from successfully applying. I did and I absolutely love it.

Sometimes being smaller can actually have its advantages; I can get through confined spaces that some of my male colleagues can't. Being mentally tough is just as important as being physically tough.

When my pager went off for my first call I was incredibly nervous but also extremely excited. It gets your adrenaline pumping. The great thing about this job is that you are never on your own or working in isolation. Everything you do, you do as a team and each team member makes up an important piece of the overall puzzle."

Why are retained firefighters needed?

Retained firefighters are a vital part of today's fire and rescue service.

They provide an efficient, effective service that gives emergency cover to more than 90 per cent of the UK.

In West Sussex, retained firefighters make up just under half of our operational workforce and are generally located in rural communities, small towns and villages.

How often would I be needed?

The number of incidents that a retained firefighter attends varies between fire stations.

Contact your local fire station for further information.

We need people to provide cover around the clock, particularly during daytime hours on weekdays and weekends.

We do realise that everyone needs to balance their working life with their private life though.

And that means being able to enjoy some quality time off.

Retained firefighters get annual leave in proportion to the cover they provide.

What do I get out of it?

Firefighting is not like any other job.

It can be unpredictable, exciting and rewarding.

Satisfaction and respect comes with providing a crucial service to the local community.

As well as learning firefighting techniques, retained firefighters learn other skills.

For example, road traffic collision procedures, fire safety and first aid.

We offer an opportunity to train in Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) driving.

Retained firefighters' salary

Retained firefighters receive an annual salary, plus an hourly rate (which is for the hours when they are attending incidents or a drill night), plus a disturbance fee (paid when they are called out to an incident).

The annual salary reflects the amount of hours that a retained firefighter is able to provide.

It falls into two bands:

1. 100% salary – 120 hours of cover per week
2. 75% salary – 40 to 100 hours of cover per week

Position	100% Annual Salary	75% Annual Salary	Hourly Rate	Disturbance Fee
Firefighter				
Trainee	£2,202	£1,651.50	£10.05	£3.86
Development	£2,293	£1,719.75	£10.47	£3.86
Competent	£2,935	£2,201.25	£13.40	£3.86
Crew Manager				
Development	£3,119	£2,339.25	£14.24	£3.86
Competent	£3,253	£2,439.75	£14.86	£3.86
Watch Manager				
Development	£3,324	£2,493.00	£15.18	£3.86
Competent A	£3,416	£2,562.00	£15.60	£3.86

Retained firefighters are entitled to four times their contracted weekly hours of paid annual leave.

They are entitled to an additional one week of annual leave when they have completed five years' continuous service.

From the start of employment, retained firefighters will be able to contribute to the new firefighter's pension scheme.

We also offer an Employee Assistance Programme.

This provides a free and confidential support service, offering unlimited access to advice, information, coaching and counselling where appropriate.

Retained firefighters are entitled to sick pay that is subject to national terms and conditions.

We provide uniform and personal protective equipment.

General information

Information for employers

Retained firefighters who are planning on responding to incidents while at their place of work must have the permission of their employers.

It is important that employers understand what this involves.

Employers need to be aware of the commitment retained firefighters are making to the fire service.

Employers have to sign a form confirming that a retained firefighter can be released from work.

This is part of the application.

Support for partners and family

Without the support and encouragement of partners and families, retained firefighters would struggle to carry out their role.

This support does affect lives of partners and families.

The main disadvantages to being a retained firefighter are:

- The difficulty in planning spur of the moment activities
- Calls in the middle of the night
- Cannot commit to be the sole-carer when on call

Alternative child or dependant care arrangements also need to be made because of the need to respond to an emergency.

But having a retained firefighter within the family has the advantages of:

- Giving and caring to the community in which they live
- Financial reward
- Being able to carry out risk assessments of the home
- Being trained in first aid
- Being a positive role model.

What makes you feel that your partner's work as a retained firefighter is worthwhile?

A recent survey of partners asked the question above. The answers included the following responses:

"As a family we are proud of their work and it's a nice thing to be able to tell people."

"He has helped save lives, made many friends and is proud to be a firefighter."

"She enjoys serving the community and has learnt valuable skills. One of her big achievements was qualifying as a LGV driver."

"It has given my partner more confidence and boosted their self-esteem."

"My partner finds the job rewarding, exciting and satisfying, this is what makes the job worthwhile, not the amount of money she earns."



CASE STUDY



Stuart & Rick Williams

Stuart and Rick are a father and son who both work as retained firefighters at Bognor Fire Station.

Stuart:

"I wanted to be a firefighter for as long as I can remember. I grew up with toy fire engines and listening to my dad's fire service stories. My mum also worked in fire control taking 999 calls for 20 years, so you could say it's in the blood!

It's great being on the same crew as my dad. He's got loads of experience and if I am not quite sure about something or need advice he is always there for me to ask. He's very supportive.

I love working for West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and being a retained firefighter. Firefighters

are admired and respected within their local community and really do make a difference."

Rick:

"I was very proud that Stuart wanted to follow in my footsteps. I was never concerned or worried for his safety because I knew how professional and thorough the operational training is and what a great team he was joining.

If we're at a big job I do look out for him, but I would be like that with any young firefighter on the crew. It also means we can talk about what happened afterwards, which is good for his development or if we've had a tough shout.

Being a retained firefighter is a great job; you get loads of life experience and learn new skills that are useful in other areas of your life."

CASE STUDY

Jon Peake

Jon joined Shoreham Fire Station as a Retained Firefighter over six years ago and is now a retained Crew Commander.

"My 'day job' is actually a night job! I work nights as a security officer at Shoreham Airport and, basically, when I am not working at the airport I am on call for the fire service. Luckily, if I do need to take some time away, my contract gives me the flexibility to do that.

"Shoreham is a variable crewing fire station so we work alongside a small team of wholetime firefighters. It's a very integrated station and we often get the opportunity to work together, which I enjoy.

"As a retained Crew Commander I love coaching and developing other team members, either on a one-to-one basis or as a whole crew during training sessions and weekly drill nights. We train in exactly the same core firefighting and RTC rescue skills as a wholetime crew.

"You need to be both committed and flexible to be a good retained firefighter and have a very clear understanding of why you want to do the job. Yes, we do all get paid to be on call and to attend incidents but to have real staying power in this job your motivation can't be purely financial.

I'm passionate about working for the fire service and playing my part in making sure that Shoreham has a local fire crew always ready to respond. For me, the achievement and personal reward that comes from serving my community definitely makes it worthwhile."



Station visit

We encourage people to visit their local station on its drill night.

This is a valuable opportunity to talk to the retained firefighters about what the role is like.

You will be able to find out if the hours of cover you can provide matches the need of the station.



Declaration of criminal offences

Applicants are required to declare any offence for which the conviction is not yet spent.

Within the meaning of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 – incorporating the Rehabilitations of Offenders Act (exemptions) 1975 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (exemptions) (Amendment) Order 1996 – applicants are advised to declare any charge that is pending, as a later conviction could lead to their dismissal from the service.

The Act provides for anyone who has ever been convicted of a criminal offence and not sentenced to more than two and-a-half-years in prison to become a 'rehabilitated person' at the end of the rehabilitation period, provided there have been no further convictions.

The conviction is spent at the end of this period and treated as if it had never happened.

If you are unsure whether you have to declare a previous conviction, contact:

- your local Probation Office,
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- your solicitor.

Or you can consult the Home Office publication 'A Guide to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974'.

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service equality and inclusion at work

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is a community service.

It is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to giving the highest level of service to our diverse communities throughout the county.

Our aim and commitment is to ensure that no employee or job applicant receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of:

- Race,
- Colour,
- Nationality,
- Ethnic or national origins,
- Religion or belief, gender,
- Gender reassignment,
- Sexual orientation,
- Marital status,
- Disability
- Age; or
- Is disadvantaged by requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable.

In delivering services we ensure that members of the public are treated with dignity and respect regardless of culture, background or lifestyle.

We are committed to listening to the varied needs of our diverse community and to provide services appropriately to them.

We expect the same commitment from any agencies/partners who work on our behalf.

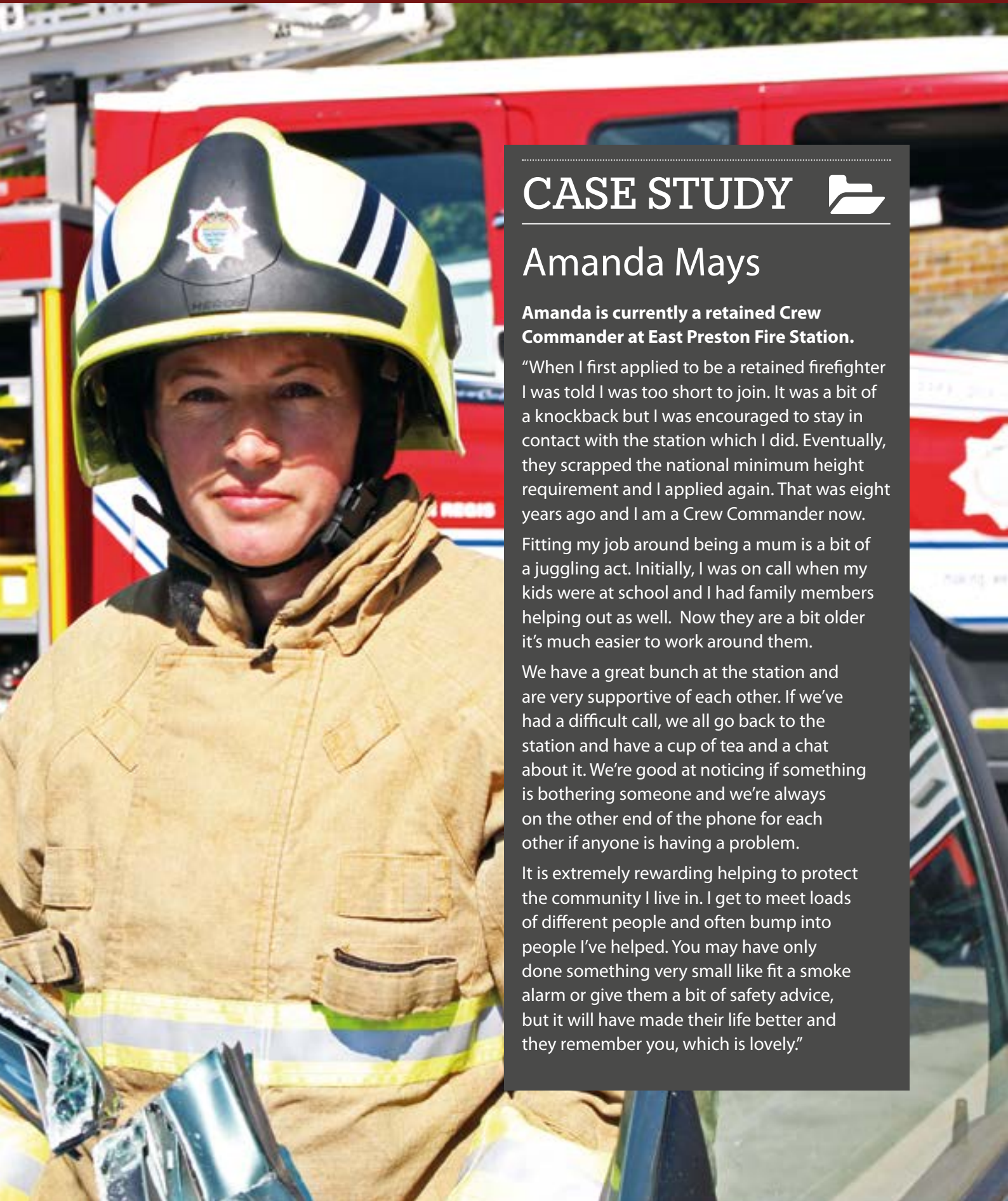
All employees have the right to be treated with dignity and consideration at work.

This extends to the right to work in a safe and healthy environment free from harassment, bullying and discrimination or intimidation either directly or indirectly by other employees.

Personal appearance

Hair (including facial hair) must not impair the seal of the breathing apparatus face mask, or impair vision or hearing.

While on duty the use of make-up or hair preparations, such as gel or hair spray, is not allowed.



CASE STUDY



Amanda Mays

Amanda is currently a retained Crew Commander at East Preston Fire Station.

"When I first applied to be a retained firefighter I was told I was too short to join. It was a bit of a knockback but I was encouraged to stay in contact with the station which I did. Eventually, they scrapped the national minimum height requirement and I applied again. That was eight years ago and I am a Crew Commander now.

Fitting my job around being a mum is a bit of a juggling act. Initially, I was on call when my kids were at school and I had family members helping out as well. Now they are a bit older it's much easier to work around them.

We have a great bunch at the station and are very supportive of each other. If we've had a difficult call, we all go back to the station and have a cup of tea and a chat about it. We're good at noticing if something is bothering someone and we're always on the other end of the phone for each other if anyone is having a problem.

It is extremely rewarding helping to protect the community I live in. I get to meet loads of different people and often bump into people I've helped. You may have only done something very small like fit a smoke alarm or give them a bit of safety advice, but it will have made their life better and they remember you, which is lovely."

The selection process

Joining the fire and rescue service is a great way of meeting new people – both the people you work with and those in the community who you help.

There's a special kind of bond amongst firefighters.

It comes from working together as a team in conditions that are sometimes dangerous or emotive.

That helps bind you together as few jobs could.

The recruitment and selection of retained firefighters is dependant upon you either living and/or working within close proximity of one of the service's retained fire stations.

Details of the locations of retained fire stations in West Sussex are on page 3 of this guide.

The length of time it takes to complete the process varies, but it may take up to six months from the initial application.

Please note that successful completion of any stage of the recruitment process does not guarantee a role within West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

All appointments to the role are determined by the availability you are able to offer your station and what availability we need at that time.

Selection Process

Before starting the selection process we will invite you to the station for an informal meeting to discuss the job and your availability.

1. Application Form

This contains your personal details and asks you to evidence how you demonstrate the skills of a retained firefighter.

2. National Firefighter Selection Tests

Written tests:

These tests consist of a series of multiple choice questions. They assess your abilities and aptitude for becoming a firefighter.

These tests will take approximately three hours.

They split into two categories:

1. Community Firefighter Ability Tests

Three timed tests to be completed in a set time.

They include:

- Working with numbers
- Understanding information
- Situational awareness and problem solving

2. Community Firefighter Questionnaire

This will provide information on your personal style and behaviour.

Your responses to these tests will help us decide if you are suited to becoming a firefighter.



Fitness & physical ability tests

As part of the selection process, you will undertake physical tests.

The aim is to assess your level of fitness, strength and manual dexterity as well as your level of confidence in simulated exercises.

These tests reflect operational practice.

You need to complete a Medical Screening Form before undertaking any of these tests.

This is to ensure that individuals are fit enough to undertake them.

1. Bleep Test/Shuttle Run

The shuttle run (or bleep test) is used by many Fire Services to show an individual's level of physical fitness.

You will be required to run continuously between two marked points that are 20 metres apart.

The runs or 'shuttles' between these points are synchronized with a pre-recorded CD which sounds bleeps at set intervals.

The test starts at little more than a slow jog but builds to a fast sprint.

As the interval between each successive bleep reduces, you have to increase your speed between the two points so that you can touch them in time.

Your score will be the highest level you reach before failing to keep up with the bleeps. The aim is to reach level 9.6 (VO2 45).

An alternative fitness test may be used, such as the 1.5 mile run.

The aim is to complete an undulating course in 11.5 minutes.

2. Physical Role Related Tests

There are currently six tests that make up the National Firefighter Physical Tests. These are:

- Ladder Climb
- Casualty Evacuation
- Ladder Lift
- Enclosed Space
- Equipment Assembly
- Equipment Carry

Ladder Climb

This will show confidence for working at height.

You must ascend a 13.5m Fire & Rescue Service ladder to a point two-thirds of full working height.

You must take a leg lock, lean back releasing your hands from the ladder, and look down to identify a symbol held by the assessor below.

You will be assisted if necessary by the safety officer.

Casualty Evacuation

This is a test of lower and upper body strength.

Candidates in full PPE will drag a 55kg casualty walking backwards (guided by an assessor) around a 30-metre course.

You will have to perform this within a specified time.

Ladder Lift / Lower Simulation

This is a test of upper and lower body strength. It simulates the physical demands of lifting the head of a 13.5m ladder back onto an appliance.

A total load of 16kg lifted to a height of 1.9m is required to pass the task.

Enclosed Space

This is a test of confidence, agility and possible claustrophobia when working in an enclosed space.

Candidates wearing full PPE and a Breathing Apparatus facemask have to negotiate a measured crawl-way in a set time.

Half the route will be with clear vision and the other half with obscured vision.

You will need to perform specific tasks during the test.

Equipment Assembly

This is a test of manual dexterity.

You will assemble and disassemble an item of equipment and follow the colour-coded diagrams provided.

This test has to be finished within a specified time.

Equipment Carry

This is a shuttle test that replicates some of the physical demands involved in setting up a water relay station.

You will be tested going back and forth along a 25m track when wearing full firefighter protective clothing.

This is not a test of memory as the safety officer will remind candidates of the sequence of events.

The equipment consists of:

- 1 x 30m (100') hose reel tubing on a drum;
- 2 x coiled 70mm soft suction hoses;
- 1 x 100mm hard suction hose and strainer basket; and
- 1 x 30kg (5st) barbell.

You will need to complete this exercise within a certain time.

3. References

Two references are required for all candidates.

One referee must be your current employer or, if you are currently not working, your last employer.

For students, one referee should be from your college.

Your second referee should be a previous employer, an academic referee, or someone you know in a professional capacity.

We reserve the right to request further references.

4. Medical

A full medical will be carried out by the Fire & Rescue Service's medical adviser.

This will assess your general level of health including weight, blood pressure and lung function.

You will also have a hearing test, eyesight test and a urine test.

A report may also be needed from a hospital where you have received treatment, or from an independent specialist, if the Service Medical Adviser requires it.

Your consent is needed to access these records.

It is a condition that, for your progression through the recruitment process, this consent is given.

5. Interview

The purpose of the interview is to assess your general aptitude for the role of a retained firefighter.

You will need to answer in a considered way, and give examples about your own experiences that relate to the qualities and behaviours we expect of our retained firefighters.



Final stage

Once you have completed the recruitment and selection process, and subject to your ongoing availability meeting the current requirements of the station, you will receive an offer of employment letter together with your contract.

All offers made are subject to:

- confirmation of your legal right to work in the UK;
- our receipt of references satisfactory to the fire service; and
- medical fitness (including an eye sight examination) appropriate to the job and consistent with our equality policy.

Subject to us receiving the above, you will receive your uniform and be required to attend a two week new recruits course at our Service Training Centre (STC).

You will need to pass the recruits course for your contract to become confirmed.



Training and development

Regular training is essential to ensure you can carry out your duties safely and competently.

Some training courses that you will undertake are compulsory and training venues may be outside of the West Sussex area.

Initial training

If you are selected to join West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, whatever your educational achievements, you and other new recruits will receive the same basic training.

This consists of technical, practical and theoretical work.

The initial training will be held at our Service Training Centre over a two week period and will cover training in breathing apparatus and firefighting techniques.

Once you have completed the initial training, you will then be a retained firefighter and able to go out on 999 calls.

Training throughout your career

To become fully trained you will need to go through a development training package.

Some of this will take place during drill nights and some in your own time.

This takes about two years to complete.

After completing this, you have the opportunity to take part in courses to broaden your existing knowledge of firefighting and rescue.

You will receive further training throughout your career to keep you up to date with the latest technology and equipment.

Promotion and longer term career prospects

There are opportunities for promotion.

You can begin to take on extra responsibilities and grow into a managerial role as a Crew Commander or Watch Commander.

Within West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, career progression for those under retained contracts occurs as follows:

- Trainee Firefighter
- Development Firefighter
- Firefighter
- Crew Manager
- Watch Manager



Any questions?

If you have any questions that are not answered within this booklet, you can call Recruitment on 01243 642134.

Or go along to your local fire station's drill night and speak to a member of a crew.

We look forward to welcoming you as a new recruit soon!

About West Sussex Fire & Rescue

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service forms a part of a team within the Communities and Public Protection directorate of West Sussex County Council.

The Communities and Public Protection directorate role is to ensure people are more than just residents or employees, but members of safe, strong and resilient communities.

The directorate brings together a range of skills backgrounds and experience that we believe can help support that aim across the county.

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service is at the heart of the directorate.

It is a service well-known for its emergency response. It will always be there in times of need but, for some years now, the Service has changed its focus to work more on prevention and protection, rather than just a fire and rescue operation when things go wrong.

Fire & Rescue teams work alongside community professionals, Resilience and Emergency staff and Trading Standards colleagues.

It's a blend of teams working together with the communities we serve to ensure we can jointly deliver the best service possible and help everyone, from the young to the old; from small businesses to major employers, prosper in a safe and productive environment.

Key Objectives

The objectives of a modern Fire & Rescue Service are:

- to build a safer society by working in partnership with others; and
- to reduce death, injury, damage to property and the environment from a range of challenges from public health and education to fire and other emergencies.



All kinds of people can be retained firefighters.

Retained firefighters are paid to be available for an agreed number of hours. During that time you can go about your normal life at home, but if you get a call to say we need you, you must be able to drop what you are doing and be operationally ready to spring into action.

The hours we offer will be based on what the local station needs to deal with the risk in your area.

To be a retained firefighter, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be physically fit
- Have good levels of reading and writing
- Be able to offer the hours we need

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