

County Durham and Darlington  
**Fire and Rescue Service**



# Apprentice Firefighter Candidate Information Booklet



## Introduction

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) are pleased to invite applications to join us as an apprentice firefighter.

Our communities value the services we offer and need to feel confident in our highly skilled teams, who reduce risk as well as respond to emergency situations. Our teams continually evolve and improve how we operate whilst maintaining the highest standards for our communities.

If you feel that you have what it takes, we'd like you to join our 2021/2022 recruitment process. To pre-register, go to [www.ddfire.gov.uk](http://www.ddfire.gov.uk)

This document has been written to provide you with details of each stage of the recruitment and selection processes for the role of apprentice firefighter. It is important that you are aware of how you will be assessed and what to expect at each stage.

If you have any queries prior to entering into the recruitment process, please refer to the frequently asked questions (FAQs) at the back of this document in the first instance. If you still have an outstanding query, email [humanresources@ddfire.gov.uk](mailto:humanresources@ddfire.gov.uk)

## GDPR Statement

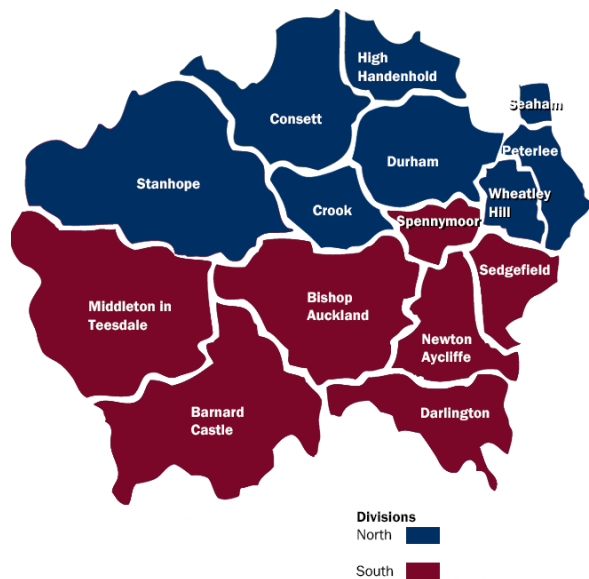
How we use your data.

- We will hold and process your data for the purpose of administrating the selection process for apprentice firefighters.
- We are committed to protecting your data and it will only be used for the purpose of recruitment.
- We will not share your data with any other agency.
- We will hold your data in line with our current retention schedules after which time it will be permanently deleted.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent for us to hold your data at any time. This can be done by emailing [dpo@ddfire.gov.uk](mailto:dpo@ddfire.gov.uk)

## About us – County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue

CDDFRS provides a fire and rescue service from 15 strategically placed fire stations managed via two divisions, north and south. The fire stations are staffed by either wholetime firefighters, part-time ('on-call' previously termed retained) firefighters or a combination of both.

Placing our operational, community and fire safety staff in local areas enables us to provide a more integrated, cohesive and focused approach to addressing local risks, as well as improving access to services and advice for local residents and members of our business community. The map below shows where the stations are located throughout the service area.



Some of our stations are on call and occupied only on a need basis.

CDDFRS are here to make the communities within our area a safer place to live, work and visit. We are governed by a separate statutory body known as the Combined Fire Authority. Our Service is accountable to the Combined Fire Authority, which is comprised of locally elected councillors, who are members of the authority.

County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority is responsible for the fire and rescue service across the two unitary authority areas of County Durham and the borough of Darlington, serving a population of over 620,000 people spread over almost 2,460 square kilometers. Fire cover is provided 24-hours a day, every day of the year.

All 999 calls are received by our control room at Service Headquarters at Belmont. Fire appliances are then mobilised from 15 fire stations across the Service area. All front-line fire appliances are equipped with state-of-the-art rescue equipment and there is also a fleet of specialist appliances, which are used during road traffic collisions, water rescues and other specialist rescues. Firefighters are trained and ready to respond to a range of emergencies, not just fire. These include road, rail or air crashes, flood, animal rescues, chemical spills and even terrorist attack.

CDDFRS operates a variety of rota systems, which may involve working anti-social hours, weekends and public holidays. The majority of our stations follow a four-day shift pattern working two-day shifts, two nightshifts, and four days off. We also have a day crewing station which is Monday to Friday day shifts and two-day crew stations which work self-rostering day shifts. You may be expected to work any of these working patterns whilst employed by us.

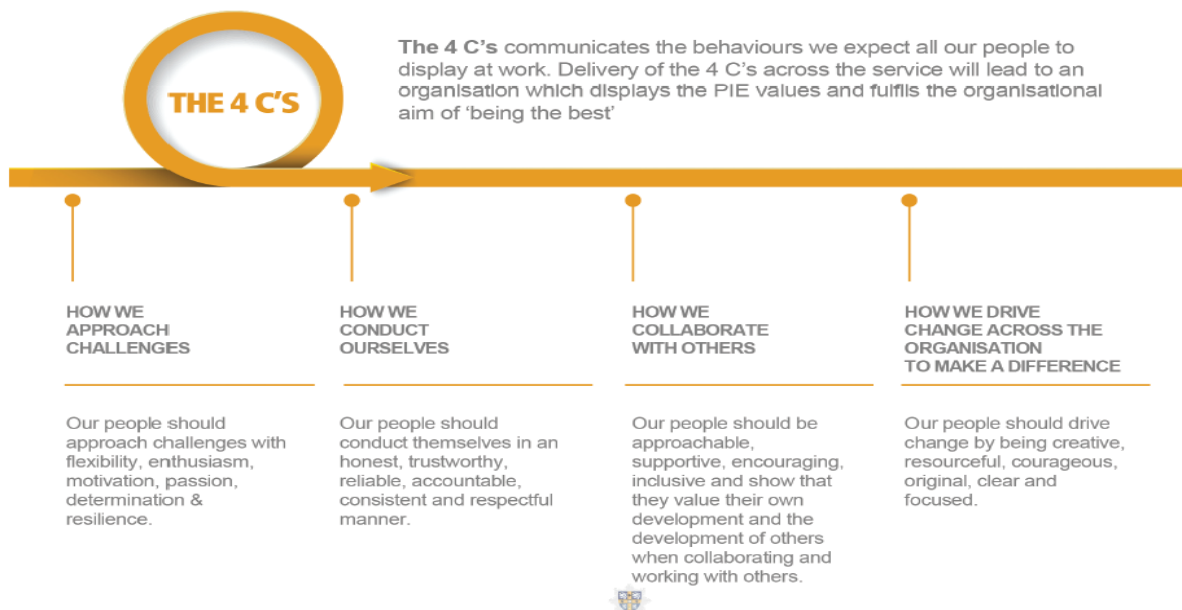
## Our Values and Behaviours

The Service's vision is simple - we want to have the safest people and safest places. Our three **Core Values** describe the service our customers should expect from us at all times and how the organisation expects us to operate as employees. These values are our identity and should help us to distinguish ourselves from other Fire and Rescue Services.



PIE represents our values and describes the service our customers should expect. This element of 'being the best' is the external key message around the service we provide.

The 4Cs **Behaviours** are what we expect all our people to display at work; and form part of how your performance will be measured.



## The role of an apprentice firefighter

In their daily work, a Firefighter interacts with individuals, groups and the wider community to provide information, advice and guidance around health, safety and wellbeing.

The broad purpose of this role is to deal with a wide range of emergency situations where problem solving, and initiative is vital to resolve incidents effectively and professionally. These situations vary from preventing fires, tackling fires, searching, rescuing and protecting people and animals by sustaining/preserving their life, to protecting life and the environment from the effects of fire, natural and human disasters and hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives). They also respond to incidents involving planes, trains, road traffic collisions and marine emergencies.

A Firefighter may also carry out fire safety checks of business premises and liaise with specialist fire safety staff to assist in driving down risk in the built environment. They may contribute to home fire safety checks of more vulnerable members of the community, providing advice, fitting fire safety equipment and making referrals to other agencies as necessary. They may also assist at fire safety and community safety events by providing demonstrations and home safety advice.

The working day could include theoretical and practical training along with testing and maintaining equipment to ensure operational preparedness. It is essential that a Firefighter is prepared and ready to respond at all times when on duty. Firefighters must be able to carry out physically demanding work; at height, in enclosed spaces, and outdoors, working in all weather and environmental conditions, and they will need to be prepared to wear appropriate personal protective equipment when training for and attending incidents.

Firefighters work as part of a close-knit team of professionals across the organisation that provides 24-hour response cover to resolve fire and rescue operational incidents. They adopt multi-agency working principles with partners and other organisations to respond to complex situations. They will also need to be able to carry out tasks individually. A Firefighter in this role should behave in a professional manner at all times adhering to the values and behaviours of the organisation

Do you really want to be an apprentice firefighter?

The following list of questions has been designed to help you decide whether being a firefighter is really for you. Simply tick Yes or No to each of the following questions.

	Yes	No
Are you interested in people?		
Can you get on with people from different backgrounds and cultures?		
Do you want to work as part of a close-knit team?		
Can you work under pressure?		
Can you think on your feet and solve problems when you know a lot depends on your suggestion?		
Do you have the sensitivity to deal with members of the public when they are distressed, confused or being obstructive?		
Can you take responsibility for representing the Service when you are at work and when you are not?		
Are you committed to always maintaining and developing your skills?		
Are you committed to maintaining your health and physical fitness?		
Are you prepared to work in situations where you may see blood, seriously injured or dead people?		
Are you prepared to talk to people in the local community about fire safety?		
Are you a practical person who likes to work with your hands/equipment?		
Do you enjoy making things or finding out how things work?		
Are you someone who can always be relied on to be somewhere on time?		
Are you prepared to work at height?		
Are you prepared to work outside in all types of weather, when it is wet and cold?		
Are you prepared to work unsociable hours?		
Are you prepared to work in enclosed spaces?		

**If you answered 'Yes' to most of the above, and you think that you have what it takes to protect the community you live and work in, read the information provided and join our recruitment campaign.**

## Apprenticeship Standards

If successful, you will be required to undertake 2 apprenticeship standards. Details of both are given below along with how the apprenticeship programme works.

<b>Work based activity</b>	<b>Apprenticeship Standard</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Headquarters based – working with all sections, undertaking basic training and attending college 1 every two weeks (9 months)	Business Fire Safety Advisor – Level 3  <a href="#">Business fire safety advisor / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education</a>	18 months + 3 months (End point assessment)
Station Rotation – working a set day shift pattern (7am – 6pm) rotating around all Wholetime Fire stations (12 months)		
Station based (on any shift pattern) (21 months)	Operational Firefighter – Level 3  <a href="#">Operational firefighter / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education</a>	18 months + 3 months (End point assessment)

Our provider is New College Durham for both apprenticeships and you will be required to attend college depending upon the needs of your programme.

## Recruitment process

This selection process is robust and time limited. We are not able to offer time extensions. The information below indicates when each stage of the process is likely to take place and how long you will be given to complete each one.

The following notes are designed to give you an understanding of the recruitment process, what you can expect and what will be expected of you.

**Stage 1. Registration**  
Closes 1 December 2021

**Stage 2. Ability Tests (online)**  
06 - 13 December 2021

**Stage 3. Role Related Tests**  
17-21 January 2022

**Stage 4. Competency Based Interview**  
07 – 18 February 2022 – 2 weeks

**Stage 5. Occupational Health Medical, Fitness Test, Pre-employment checks**  
21 February 2022 onwards

**Apprenticeship begins**  
From April 2022 onwards



## Stage 1. Eligibility and Registration

To apply for the role, you must 'pre-register' via our website. This will give you access to APOLLO, the online recruitment portal which must be used to apply. CVs or any other form of application will not be accepted.

You will only be able to register once. It is important that you have completed all relevant sections of the forms and have checked that all details are correct before submitting your registration.

We will communicate with you throughout the process via email, so please make sure that you provide the correct email address. Due to the volume of applications, we are unable to reopen the registration to correct any errors. There are systems in place to sift out those who have registered more than once and who have submitted incomplete forms. In such cases, we will not progress your registration.

### Eligibility information

#### **Age**

You must be at least 17 years of age or over to apply. Your date of birth is verified as part of the process.

#### **Work permit**

As an employer, the Fire Authority is subject to the provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. It could be guilty of committing a criminal offence if it employed someone who does not have permission to be in or to work in the United Kingdom. The Fire Authority reserves the right to request relevant documentation from all those offered employment, in order to satisfy its obligations. For more information you may find the following immigration advice websites useful: [www.workpermit.com](http://www.workpermit.com) or [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk).

#### **Identification**

As an employer we need to ensure all prospective employees have the right to work in the United Kingdom. You will be asked to bring some form of photographic identification with you e.g., passport, driving license, any other relevant documentation and a work permit if applicable, at the interview stage of the recruitment process. Please visit [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk) for more information on prevention of illegal working.

#### **Driving**

If you hold a driving licence you must inform us if your licence is endorsed, giving details about the nature of the offence, offence code (e.g., CD10 driving without due care and attention) and also give details of the penalty (e.g., £ fine and number of penalty points). If you had to attend court, you will need to give details of the outcome.

#### **Diversity monitoring**

This helps us ensure we are accessible to all groups in the community. The data is held in accordance with the GDPR and is not used to assist or make selection decisions. It will be used for statistical analysis only.

**Declaration of offences**

You 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 – you are advised to declare any charge that is pending as a subsequent conviction could lead to your dismissal from the Service.

Broadly, the Act provides for anyone who has ever been convicted of a criminal offence and not sentenced to more than 2.5 years in prison to become a ‘rehabilitated person’ at the end of the rehabilitation period, provided there have been no further convictions. At the end of this period, the conviction is considered spent and should be treated as it had never happened. Generally speaking, there are fixed rehabilitation periods for specific offences. If you are unsure whether you have to declare a previous conviction you should contact your local Probation Office, Citizens Advice or your Solicitor. Alternatively, you can consult the Home Office publication ‘A Guide to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974’.

A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be carried out. Please note that all convictions, including those that are spent will be declared on the DBS certificate and this will require further consideration by the ‘employer’ Service.

**Dyslexia**

If you have dyslexia and require reasonable adjustments, you must contact the human resources team by emailing [humanresources@ddfired.gov.uk](mailto:humanresources@ddfired.gov.uk) as soon as possible. Evidence of your dyslexia will be required. The team will advise you of how to continue with your application.

**Disability or medical conditions**

Due to the nature of the role, you will need to undergo a full medical examination which will consider your current and historic medical conditions. You are encouraged to speak to your doctor or optician as soon as possible if you have or have had any conditions that you feel may affect your eligibility for the role. We have provided guidance on the National Standards for eyesight to help you with your discussion with your medical practitioner.

If you meet the eligibility requirements you will be invited to complete Stage 2 of the selection process.

## Stage 2. Ability Tests

**You will receive an email from Test Partnership to access the tests, please check your junk/spam folder.**

The ability tests comprise of 3 different tests:

- Numerical reasoning – You will be required to calculate basic numerical equations that are equivalent to GCSE level maths.
- Verbal reasoning – You will be required to answer questions on short passages of information. No prior knowledge is required.
- Mechanical reasoning – You will be required to apply cognitive reasoning to mechanical, physical and practical concepts in order to solve problems.

The tests are timed, with a set amount of time per question. Practice tests are available at

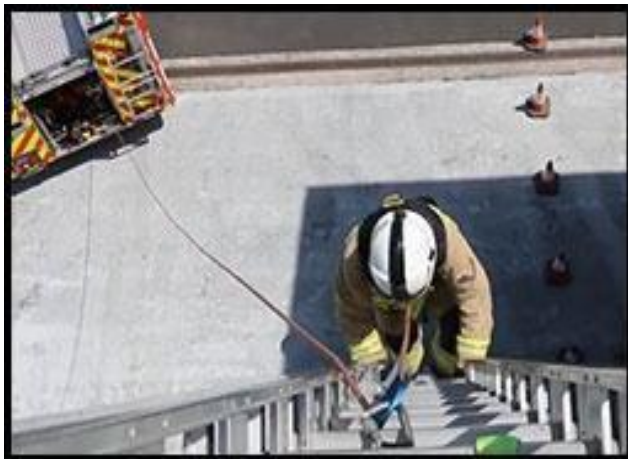
- <https://frs.tptests.com/candidate/practice?accesskey=31524637>
- <https://frs.tptests.com/candidate/practice?accesskey=1445204>
- <https://frs.tptests.com/candidate/practice?accesskey=321455714>

All test results are final and there is no right of appeal. Outcomes and feedback reports will be emailed to you.

**Ability tests will be available for completion from 09:00 on 06 December 2021 and will close at 08:59 on 13 December 2021.**

### Stage 3. Role Related Tests

The role related (practical) tests will be held at CDDFRS training centre at Bowburn. The role of a firefighter is physically demanding and it is important to assess your ability to handle the situations and challenges you will face. The tests are designed to assess your level of physical fitness in line with the requirements of the role. You must perform all the tests whilst wearing firefighter personal protective equipment (PPE), provided on the day. For each test, full instructions will be provided. You will work in groups but will be tested individually. Your behaviours will be observed throughout the time you are on our premises. The session will last about 1 hour.



#### **Ladder Climb**

Designed to assess confidence at heights. Wearing a safety harness, you are required ascend two thirds of the way up a 13.5 metre ladder and secure yourself by hooking one leg through the ladder.

You will be asked to lean backwards and outstretch your arms to the sides, then confirm a symbol being shown by the assessor at ground level.



#### **Casualty Evacuation**

Designed to assess upper and lower body strength and coordination.

You will drag a 55kg dummy backwards around a 30M course, by a carrying handle fixed to the dummy.



### **Ladder Lift**

Designed to assess upper and lower body strength and coordination.

You will raise the bar of a ladder lift simulator to the required height with 10kg of weight placed on the simulator cradle, which gives a total lift load of 19kg.



### **Enclosed Space**

Designed to assess confidence, agility and stamina. You will put on a facemask and with un-obscured vision make your way through a crawl and walkway.

Once inside the crawl/walkway you will have your vision obscured and return to the start.



### **Equipment Assembly**

Designed to assess manual dexterity. You are given a demonstration of the test before having to assemble and disassemble a number of components to make an item of equipment.



### **Equipment Carry**

Designed to assess upper and lower body strength and coordination. You will carry items of equipment up and down a course between two cones placed 25m apart.

You will be given a brief, a demonstration of correct lifting techniques and you can practice picking up the correct items.

**The role related tests will take place between 17 January and 21 January 2022**

### Stage 5. Competency-based interview & Presentation

Upon successfully passing the practical tests you will be invited to attend an interview which will last around 45 minutes. This will be our chance to get to know more about you and for you to tell us how you meet the requirements for the role. The panel will be made up of 2 panel members.

The questions you are asked during interview will be competency-based, i.e. based on the skills and attributes required for the job. The aim of competency-based interviews is to explore in detail how you have used specific skills and your approach to problems, tasks and challenges.

If you are not familiar with competency-based interviews, you will find it helpful to refer to the additional guidance and use YouTube videos to help you develop your interview technique.

**The interviews will be held between 7 – 18 February 2022**

If you are successful at this stage, you may be invited to undertake medical and fitness testing, with the potential to be offered a role.



## Stage 4. Occupational Health Medical, Fitness Test and Pre-Employment Checks

### **Medical**

We will need you to take a full medical assessment prior to joining us, which will be conducted by our occupational health provider. As part of the medical, you will need to complete a questionnaire about your medical history and the following tests:

- Hearing test
- Lung function
- Eye test
- Grip strength
- Blood pressure
- General tests based on your completed medical questionnaire

It is important that you do not complete any exercise or consume alcohol or caffeine immediately prior to the medical.

### **Fitness test**

If you successful at interview stage, you will be invited to attend a fitness assessment.

As a guide, you are likely to have the minimum level of cardiorespiratory fitness for UK firefighting if you can:

- ✓ Run 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometres) continuously in 12 minutes or less (this is equal to running 6 laps of a 400m outdoor athletics track in 12 minutes).
- ✓ Run on a treadmill at 7.5mph (12 km/h) for 12 minutes.
- ✓ Perform the multi-stage shuttle run test (bleep test) to at least level 8 shuttle 8.

We have published a copy of a 12-week fitness programme to help build up your strength and stamina: [www.ddfire.gov.uk](http://www.ddfire.gov.uk)

### **Pre employment checks**

If you are successful at all stages of the recruitment process, there are a number of checks that we will undertake to confirm: your identity, your right to work in the United Kingdom and any criminal convictions.

You will need to provide at least 3 continuous years of references. There must be employer, professional or academic references.

If any part of your pre-employment checks do not meet the required standards, we will be unable to confirm your appointment and any offer will be withdrawn without notice.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Taster sessions**

**1. How do I book onto a session?**

In late October, we published the venues, dates, times and of the taster sessions as well as instructions on how to book. The sessions are taking place across County Durham and Darlington. You can only book a place at one session.

**2. How long does each session last?**

Each session is about 90 minutes in total. In these sessions you'll gain a greater understanding of what it means to be a firefighter, be better prepared for selection tests and have the confidence to apply for the role of a firefighter. You will have an opportunity to try some of the equipment that will be used as part of the role related tests (Stage 3).

**3. If I am unable to attend a session, will I still be able to apply?**

Attendance is not mandatory. You will not be disadvantaged if you are unable to attend a session.

**4. What do I wear for a taster session?**

Please wear clothing and footwear suitable for physical training.

### **Application and eligibility**

**5. What is 'pre-registration'?**

Pre-registration is a way of expressing an interest in applying. By pre-registering you will activate your access to the online system that we use for this recruitment, known as APOLLO.

**6. When can I apply?**

Pre-registration is open now, please go to our website for more details.

**7. Is there a limit to the number of applications you are taking?**

No, there is no limit to how many registrations we will accept. We will consider all of those who have completed the Registration within the published deadlines.

**8. There is a problem with the system, who do I contact?**

You should email [humanresources@ddfire.gov.uk](mailto:humanresources@ddfire.gov.uk). Please note that we will respond to you as quickly as we can, however, help and advice are only available during our normal office hours: 08:30 – 17:00 Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).

**9. I have missed the deadline to pre-register and apply, can I have an extension?**

Unfortunately, no. This campaign is strictly timetabled, which is why we pre-publish the dates of each stage.



**10. I have unspent convictions; do I need to declare these?**

Yes, all unspent convictions must be declared. You do not need to declare unspent convictions, but please note that if you are offered a job, you will need a DBS check.

**Online tests**

**11. What happens if I lose internet connection whilst completing the tests?**

An interrupted internet session will not affect your scores, as your responses are recorded during your session as you enter them. This information is auto saved so that when you log back in you can continue from where you left off.

**12. Is the scoring system reliable?**

Yes, the scoring system is very reliable. When you submit your responses, these are scored automatically by computer against a pre-determined scoring key which is applied to all applicants in exactly the same way.

**13. Can I see my test results?**

We do appreciate that you may want to know more details about your results, but we are unable to give out any additional information because we need to maintain the security of the scoring process. This is to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly in future recruitment campaigns. While we understand this may be frustrating for you, we hope you can understand the importance of ensuring a fair process for all.

**14. Why is my score so low?**

It's helpful for you to understand how scoring is applied to your responses to generate the final result you get. The score you are given is a 'percentile' score not a 'percentage' score and is different to what you might be used to when completing tests. Knowing the difference between the two types will help you appreciate how you scored.

A percentile score is a score generated by comparing the results of your responses to a group of individuals who have also completed the test. This group is called a comparison group or norm group. Percentile scores show your results in relation to how you performed in comparison to this norm group. For example, if you have a percentile score of 60, then this means that your score is better than 60% of people in that norm group. It does not mean that you have answered 60% of the questions correctly.

**15. I have missed the test window; can you reopen the test for me?**

Due to the large volume of applications, we are unable to re-open the tests after their closing date. Dates of tests are advertised prior to the start of the recruitment process so it is the candidate's responsibility to ensure they are available for all dates.

**16. I completed the test on my mobile phone or tablet and the system crashed, can I retake the tests?**

No. You are advised not to use a mobile phone or tablet to complete the tests, so it is your own responsibility to ensure the correct browser is used.

## National Standards for Eyesight

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 a required standard of vision when applying to join the fire service as firefighters.

If you have any doubts regarding your eyesight we suggest that you book an appointment with your optician and take the information below to ask his/her opinion.

### **Colour blindness**

Candidates who believe they have colour blindness may wish to be formally assessed prior to submitting an application form. The minimum standard accepted is the Farnsworth D-15 standard test. We also conduct functional tests as part of the medical process if candidates display difficulties with colour perception. Candidates must also pass the Ishihara test.

### **The vision standards for eyesight are:**

Visual acuity

Use of aids to vision should be possible at the recruitment stage

Corrected visual acuity should be 6/9 binocularly, and a minimum of 6/12 in the worse eye  
The minimum uncorrected vision for recruits should be 6/18 in the better eye and 6/24 in the worse eye for both full time and retained firefighters. The current 6/60 unaided limit should be retained for serving firefighters:

An upper hypermetropic limit of +3.00

Testing for myopic corrections is no longer required

VA testing protocols must be better defined (e.g. for Snellen, distances, ambient lighting and use)

Vision must be binocular

Be able to read N12 at 30cm unaided with both eyes open (applicants aged 25 and over)

Be able to read N6 at 30cm unaided with both eyes open (applicants under 25 years of age)

### **Visual fields**

Normal binocular field of vision is required.

### **Eye disease**

You should have no history of night blindness or any ocular disease that is likely to progress and result in future failure of the visual standards for firefighters

Individuals with keratoconus are unlikely to be fit for firefighting duties

Compound astigmatism assess for capability, history of headaches and eyestrain

### **Refractive surgery**

Successful Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK), laser assisted in-situ keratomileusis (LASIK), Laser Epithelial Keratomileusis (LASEK) and EpiLASIK treatments should be allowable if post-operative visual tests are satisfied

RK (radial Keratotomy) and astigmatic keratotomy are NOT suitable due increased risk of rupture and fluctuation in vision

Intraocular Refractive Surgery – used for high myopes. Therefore, there are still risk of complications

Wavefront Guided Laser Refractive Surgery – since a Wavefront treatment aims to reduce aberrations, in theory it should produce better outcomes for night vision and vision in difficult low lighting levels or reduced contrast as might be encountered in a smoke-filled room; this technology could therefore have great relevance for firefighters – research is still underway to aid our understanding of this relatively new technology

Assessment after Refractive Surgery – an examination to consider the suitability of a refractive surgery patient for operational firefighting should include:

A slit lamp examination to confirm that the eye has returned to normal and that there is no significant loss of corneal transparency over the pupil area

Refraction, topographic examination and pachymetry to screen for keratectasia

Candidates should have their visual performance assessed using a technique sensitive to the presence of scattered light and aberrations.

Candidates should not be considered until at least 12 months post-surgery and when all medication has ceased.

**We would like to take the opportunity to wish you every success throughout the recruitment process.**