

# Becoming an on-call firefighter

## Information guide



Essex County  
Fire & Rescue Service

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## Thank you for your interest in becoming an on-call firefighter with Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

Our on-call firefighters are a vital part of our fire service and play a huge role in helping to keep Essex safe. Being an on-call firefighter is a big commitment and one we know our recruits, their families and their employers make sacrifices for. We're incredibly grateful for each and every one of our on-call firefighters and the support they have from their loved ones to help keep their communities safe.

Throughout your career with us, you'll be making a difference to countless lives across Essex. Whether that's at an incident on what can be the hardest day of someone's life or whether it's through the safety advice you give in our communities to help prevent incidents happening in the first place.

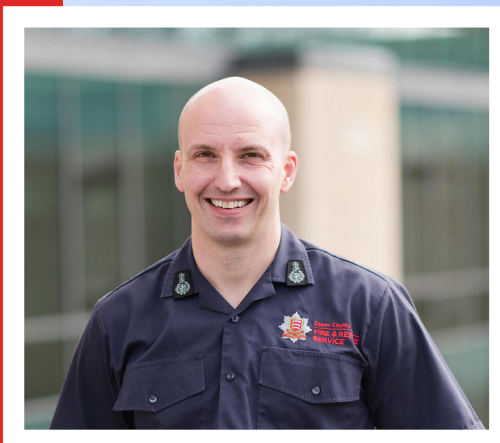
Being an on-call firefighter is more than just a career, it's a lifestyle. It's not just a job you turn up to, get paid and go home, it's a real commitment and one that will come with its challenges throughout your career. And while you do get paid for the role, we know many of our on-call firefighters aren't here for the money, they're here to keep their family, friends, neighbours and colleagues safe.

In return for commitment, we promise to be here for you. To help you develop in your careers, to offer training that helps in other aspects of your life and to welcome you into our fire family.

I started my career as an on-call firefighter and got the buzz for helping others. Almost 28-years later, that buzz still hasn't left!

I look forward to working with you soon!

**Rick Hylton, Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive at Essex County Fire and Rescue Service**



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# Introduction

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has a total of 51 fire stations across the county. Three quarters of these are on-call fire stations or are partly crewed by on-call firefighters.







## A career with Essex County Fire and Rescue

We have more than 500 on-call firefighters in Essex. They're all paid to protect their communities and some have served with us for more than 40 years. They cover more than three quarters of fire stations in Essex and our on-call firefighter model is similar to one used all over the world.

Our on-call firefighters all live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are paged when there is an incident.

This means they're not based at the fire station full time and they can go about their daily business like working other jobs or spending time in their community. All while helping to keep the fire station available when needed.

As well as responding to incidents, on-call firefighters also carry out home fire safety visits, attend community events and visit community hubs like schools and care homes to give safety advice.

On-call firefighters are competent firefighters who receive training throughout their career to help them respond to a variety of incidents from fires, animal rescues and chemical incidents.

The role is paid for the amount of hours you can provide fire cover and a further payment when you attend incidents or training.

On average, our on-call firefighters give around 90 hours a week during the day, evenings and weekends. Giving fire cover means you're within 5 minutes of the fire station and can drop what you're doing to attend an incident. This could be while you're working your day job, in your free time and even while you sleep.

**Any questions? Email:**  
**[Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk)**





## Information about on-call firefighters

### What are on-call firefighters?

An on-call firefighter is a person who is 'on-call' to respond to a range of emergencies and engages with their community. They have everyday lives and jobs, until the pager sounds - then they become professional and paid firefighters.

On-call firefighters come from all walks of life. For example, they could be working full time or part time, studying at college or university, providing fire cover while their children are in school or retired. One thing they all have in

common is they're all working to keep their local community safe. They're working to keep their family, friends, neighbours and colleagues safe as well as being available to help across Essex when needed.

They need to be able to stop what they're doing when the pager sounds and get to the fire station within 5 minutes. They never know what they could be heading to but they receive training to deal with a variety of incidents including fires, chemical spills, animal rescues and water rescues.



## Who can be an on-call firefighter?

Our on-call firefighters are all unique, coming from a range of backgrounds, careers and different stages in their life.

Our only requirements for our on-call firefighters are:

- **You're over 18-years-old**
- **You live or work within 5 minutes of an on-call fire station**
- **You have a good all round level of fitness**
- **Your eyesight meets our requirements**

That's it! There's a lot of myths about who can and who can't be a firefighter and we can tell you that they're just myths.

There are no height requirements to join, we've got firefighters who are under 5 ft and some towering over others at almost 7ft. There's also no upper age limit, some of our firefighters are in their 60s and have dedicated more than 40 years to their communities.

What we do ask for is flexibility. We can't predict what will happen on any given day and we rely on our on-call firefighters to be flexible with their time to help us maximise cover across Essex. We'll give you training to deal with a variety of incidents and with your flexibility, we can make sure we're there when people need us the most.

We know that it's not just you we're asking to be flexible. It's your family and friends too, there will be times where you have to stop whatever you're doing and head to the fire station.

Your employers and colleagues will also need to be flexible. Some on-call firefighters work for an understanding employer who is prepared to release them from their workplace from time to time when the pager goes off, others work for themselves and can arrange their days around their on-call firefighter role.

Our on-call firefighters need to have good communication skills together with personal skills like courage, understanding, reliability, flexibility, determination, self-motivation, common sense, commitment, enthusiasm and the ability to work within a team. You'll also need to be able to reflect our values at all times.

Above all, being an on-call firefighter requires a real desire to serve the local community.



## When would I be needed?

Operational demand and responding to incidents varies, and the time you are needed will align to your availability. Giving fire cover means you're within 5 minutes of the fire station and can drop what you're doing to attend an incident. This could be while you're working your day job, in your free time and even while you sleep.

Part of those hours will be a weekly drill night at your fire station which lasts around two hours. You'll be offered training courses throughout your career which you'll be able to book on to and be paid during.

Once you've passed your assessment process and been offered employment with us you'll be ready to start training to become an on-call firefighter. This will begin with a two-week training course, which runs Monday – Friday. You'll be paid during the course which is based in Essex, primarily at one fire station with occasional travel to our bigger training sites in Wethersfield and Witham.

After this you'll attend evening training sessions which usually last for two hours one evening a week for 10 weeks.

As well as responding to incidents, on-call firefighters also carry out home fire safety visits, attend community events and visit community hubs like schools and care homes to give safety advice.

Each fire station has its own way of maximising cover. There will be times where there are more firefighters available than needed for incidents meaning you wouldn't always be called to every incident.

## What do I get out of it?

Firefighting is not like any other job. It can be unpredictable, exciting and highly rewarding. You're helping to protect your local community - your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

You will learn new skills along the way as you train to deal with fires, road traffic collisions and rescuing people and animals from water, height and depth. You'll also have opportunities to learn other skills like Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) Driver Training, First Aid and Trauma Care Training as well as Health and Safety Training.

It is a paid role. As an on-call firefighter you will receive an annual retainer based on your hours of availability, plus an hourly rate when you attend incidents, drill nights, training courses, community safety activities or carry out equipment maintenance, as well as paid holiday.

## Pay

The amount you get will depend on your availability, but on average on-call firefighters earn anywhere between £4,000 to £8,000 a year, sometimes more.

You'll be paid a standard rate for the hours you are available as well as additional payments when you are called to incidents, training or community events.

Contract type	Hours per week	Description
Whole rate	120+ hours	A higher rate is paid for on-call firefighters who can give 120+ hours
Reduced rate	90+ hours	A rate paid for on-call firefighters who can give 90+ hours
Station Manager agreement.		This rate is paid for on-call firefighters whose availability can help to keep the fire station available.





### **Holiday**

Like most full time jobs, you'll be entitled to four weeks paid leave a year. After five years' service, this entitlement increases to five weeks. A week's leave means a period of seven consecutive days free from duty but can also be taken as individual days.

### **Pension**

From the start of your employment you will be able to contribute to a firefighter's pension scheme, which we will also contribute to.

### **Benefits**

At Essex County Fire and Rescue Service your payslip is only part of the package. As well as the more obvious benefits, like working for one of the largest fire and rescue services in the county and keeping your community safe, our competitive pension scheme and rates of pay, there are additional perks that make us an employer of choice.

From career development to our in-house Occupational Health services, access to affordable private health care and a Blue Light Card that gives discounts at 1000s of retailers. There's lots of benefits in becoming an on-call firefighter.

Find out more about the benefits at [join.essex-fire.gov.uk/jobs/benefits/](https://join.essex-fire.gov.uk/jobs/benefits/)

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.

be able to contribute to a firefighter's pension scheme, which we will also contribute to.

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 among firefighters that comes from working together as a team in conditions that are sometimes potentially dangerous or emotive. This helps bind you together as few jobs could.

**Any questions? Email:**  
**[Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk)**

## How being an on-call firefighter can fit in with your life

On average, our on-call firefighters give around 90 hours a week during the day, evenings and weekends. This might sound like a lot but it can all be done around your life outside of the fire service. The vast majority of fire cover given by our on-call firefighters is during the evenings and nights while they sleep. So, provided you're ready to hop out of bed and make it to the fire station when called, you could be paid while you snooze. If you work in your town too, it could be that you give cover during your working day as well as a few evenings a week or the weekend.

Giving fire cover just means you're within 5 minutes of the fire station and can drop what you're doing to attend an incident.

Once a week for around two hours, you'll need to attend a drill night at your fire station. You'll be paid for this as well as any additional training you need to do.

The number of incidents that an on-call firefighter attends varies between fire stations - on average, our on-call firefighters are called out two or three times a week for a couple of hours at a time.

We recognise that there will be times that unexpected family or work demands prevent you from being available and on those occasions you will be allowed to 'book off-call'. Like most other jobs, you will also be entitled to paid annual leave.

Because you'll have to drop what you're doing at a moment's notice, we recommend you plan any caring commitments like childcare or caring for a relative for when you're not on-call.

Before you're thinking of applying, make sure to have a chat with your employer about how they could support you in the role.

Lots of employers would let you give fire cover during your working hours or be flexible with your hours if you've had a call in the night. We've made an Employer Information Guide you can give to your employer for more information.

### Information for your family

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

This support does mean that occasionally the lives of partners and families can be affected. The main disadvantages to being on-call are:

- It can be difficult to plan spur of the moment activities
- You can be called out in the middle of the night
- You won't be able to be the sole carer for children or dependants as you'll need to respond quickly in an emergency

We think the positives outweigh the benefits, being an on-call firefighter means:

- You're protecting the community you live in
- You'll be a positive role model within the community
- You'll learn new skills and your confidence will increase
- You'll be an expert in all things fire, road and water safety which could help you make your home and workplace safer

### What if I move house?

There are 40 on-call fire stations in Essex, so the chances are you might end up moving close to another one. You'll be able to transfer to another fire station when you move.



# Training throughout your career

Once you've passed your assessment process and been offered employment with us you'll be ready to start training to become an on-call firefighter.

This will begin with a two-week training course, which runs Monday – Friday. You'll be paid during the course which is based in Essex, primarily at one fire station with occasional travel to our bigger training sites in Wethersfield and Witham.

After this you'll attend evening training sessions which usually last for two hours one evening a week for 10 weeks.

To become a fully trained firefighter, you will need to go through development training, some of this will take place during drill nights and some will need to be completed in your own time. This normally takes up to 24 months to complete and includes:

## **Breathing Apparatus initial course:**

Two weeks, Monday – Friday

10 day course covering the use and operation of all breathing apparatus equipment.

## **Fire behaviour training:**

One week, Monday – Friday

Five day fire behaviour training course combining elements taught on the breathing apparatus initial course with the realistic conditions encountered at operational incidents. It is held at Wethersfield Training Centre.

## **Development and maintenance of skills**

After successfully completing your development training, you'll have the opportunity to complete training courses to broaden your knowledge. You'll receive further training throughout your career to make sure that you're kept up to date with the latest technology and equipment.

## **Promotion and longer term career prospects**

Once you've completed your firefighter development, you'll have the opportunity to complete training in leadership and management to progress to the roles of Crew Manager or Watch Manager.

# General Information

## Information for your employer

On-call firefighters who are planning on responding to incidents while at their place of work must have permission from their employer.

It is important that employers understand what this involves so please make sure they receive the Employer Information Guide.

Employers may need to sign a form confirming that an on-call firefighter can be released from work, which is included within the application pack.

## Becoming an on-call firefighter when you're self employed

In Essex a large percentage of our on-call firefighters are self-employed, including mechanics, accountants, bricklayers, plumbers, project managers and shop owners.

Many of these people have found that being an on-call firefighter has a positive impact on their business. This is because they have better links with local businesses and their communities and they are well known and trusted by the people in their area.

## What if I'm an HGV driver?

The EC Drivers' Hours and Tachograph Rules for Goods Vehicles (Regulation 561/2006) limit driving time and make sure that proper rest periods are taken to prevent road traffic collisions.

The rules apply to anyone who drives an 'in-scope' vehicle. 'In-scope' describes a goods vehicle over 3.5 tonnes, or a passenger vehicle with nine or more passenger seats.

You'll be asked in your application form if your primary employment involves driving 'in-scope' vehicles. This is so the Station Manager can

make sure you're getting proper rest periods and imposed limits are observed.

## Do I need any qualifications?

No, but you will need to pass the online English and Maths assessments as part of your application. You will not need to do these online assessments if you hold a Level 2 pass in Maths and English. This means you will need to have a GCSE pass at grade C or 4 (or above), or have completed a functional skills (level 2) in Maths and English. You will be required to provide evidence of these qualifications.







## Personal appearance

While we encourage your individuality with different hair styles, hair colours and tattoos, we do expect our employees to present themselves and dress in a professional manner while at work.

***A uniform that reflects the professional image of the Service is provided and allows on-call firefighters to be appropriately dressed for the range of activities in which they are involved.***

For safety reasons, jewellery including rings, earrings and facial piercings may not be worn while on duty. Hair (including facial hair) must not impair the seal of the breathing apparatus face mask nor must it impair vision or hearing.

Some facial hair is allowed like a goatee beard or moustache. As a firefighter you will be required to wear a facemask when you are wearing breathing apparatus.

Semi-permanent or false eyelashes may not be worn while on duty.

While on duty, the use of makeup or hair preparations, such as hair spray, is allowed.

## Vision

Your eyesight doesn't have to be perfect to be a firefighter, but you will have to take an eye test as part of the recruit medical.

You must meet the required vision standards to pass the recruit medical which is at the end of the application process – if you are unsure of how well you can see then go to an optician, take the below information with you and get an eye test **before** you apply to make sure you have the required standard.

Firefighters require a certain level of eyesight to enable them to carry out their role safely and must meet a nationally required standard of both distance and near vision when applying to join the fire service.

Safety glasses are provided by the service, including inserts for Breathing Apparatus (BA); all contact lenses are discouraged on operational duty though, as they may compound eye contamination with chemicals or particulate. Hard lenses cannot be worn with breathing apparatus masks.





# The application process

Once you've checked you meet the basic requirements, eyesight requirements and you're fit and ready, you're ready to apply...you won't regret it!

If you have any questions before applying, please email [mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk)

**Apply online at [essex-fire.gov.uk/recruitment/on-call](https://essex-fire.gov.uk/recruitment/on-call)**

After we receive your application form we'll contact you to go through the next steps. If you meet the requirements and your local station is recruiting you will go through the following stages:

## 1 Stage One – Informal meeting at your local fire station with the Station Manager and Watch Manager

This is your chance to meet your managers and it's your opportunity to ask any questions you have with the team you'll be working with.

## 2 Stage Two – Online English and Maths assessments

You will need to pass the online English and Maths assessments as part of your application. You will not need to do these online assessments if you hold a Level 2

pass in Maths and English. This means you will need to have a GCSE pass at grade C or 4 (or above), or have completed a functional skills (level 2) in Maths and English. You will be required to provide evidence of these qualifications.

## 3 Stage Three – Pre-fit with the fitness team

This one isn't mandatory but if you wanted to give the fitness test a go ahead of the assessment day, you can book in with our fitness team to have a go at some of the elements of the assessment day. The fitness team has given lots of advice on how to train for the assessment day here.



## 4 Stage Two – Physical assessment day

All applicants will have to pass our assessment day in order to progress through their application to become an on-call or wholetime firefighter.

You'll have to pass the National Fire Selection Test, more details about the assessment day can be found [here](#).

1. Bleep Test or Chester Treadmill Test
2. Ladder climb
3. Casualty evacuation
4. Ladder lift
5. Confined spaces
6. Equipment assembly - manual dexterity
7. Equipment carry

## 5 Stage Five - Formal interview

Next, you'll have a formal interview with your Station Manager. It will be a values-based interview where we will find out more about you and assess your values and behaviours.

This is your time to shine, we want to hear all about how you've demonstrated behaviours like problem solving, working with others and your commitment to diversity and integrity.

It's also another chance to ask any questions you have about the role.

## 6 Stage Four – Occupational health assessment

Here you'll attend a medical appointment to make sure you're fit and healthy to carry out your role safely.

## 7 Stage Seven – Background checks

We'll need references from you to cover a minimum of three years of your employment or educational history before we can give you an offer of employment.

All members of staff will be required to complete a Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check.

## 8 Stage Eight - Four week on-boarding

While we wait to get you booked onto a training course, we'll ask you to start attending weekly drill nights at the fire station. You'll be paid for the time you attend the fire station.

## 9 Stage Nine – Two week basic training course followed by additional evenings and Sundays

Finally, once you've passed your assessment process and been offered employment with us you'll be ready to start training to become an on-call firefighter.

This will begin with a two-week training course, which runs Monday – Friday. You'll be paid during the course which is based in Essex, primarily at one fire station with occasional travel to our bigger training sites in Wethersfield and Witham.

After this you'll attend evening training sessions which usually last for two hours one evening a week for 10 weeks.



CASE STUDY

## Firefighter

on-call firefighter shares his story

Ever wanted to be a firefighter and protect your local community? The excitement and camaraderie associated with being a firefighter is like no other job.

James Boothby, 28, has been protecting the community of Burnham-on-Crouch at a moment's notice for a combined four years.

James is a Burnham local, who grew up in the town. James said:

*"I've lived here since I was 8. I went to school here, did engineering at college and then went to work full-time at a local restaurant, where I've worked ever since."*

*"Because Burnham is such a small area and a close community, everyone knows everyone. People know who you are and what you do, so there's a certain level of respect that you get."*

*"It's inevitable that you're going to be going to incidents involving places and people you know and there are a lot of people who I deal with in my other job – customers of the restaurant – who recognise me."*

James joined the Service in 2016 and has since provided cover for most days and evenings, with the support of his other employer.

*"My work is really good with accommodating my life as an on-call firefighter. A lot of the time, when I'm not literally cooking food, they let me go and be available".*

*"I really feel like I'm giving back to the community and I genuinely enjoy it."*



CASE STUDY

## Ongar Fire Station:

Dita Kotoulova shares her story

**“Find your inner strength and never give up,” said Dita Kotoulova, on-call firefighter at Ongar, who is determined to prove that if you have enough determination then you can achieve anything.**

***“About a year and a half ago I was thinking about what I wanted my future to look like and there it was – firefighter,” she said. “My physical strength, my calm thinking during stressful situations, wanting to help others and my life experience – I thought it would be perfect.”***

Already confident about her fitness and strength levels visited Ongar Fire Station to introduce herself and was welcomed by the crew immediately.

And from day one Dita has proven she’s up for the challenge. ***“I’ve found the fitness part quite easy,” she said. “You do need to be strong and tough to deal with the heat, but the experience is pretty much exactly as I expected, and I think that’s because I’d already spoken to so many people about doing it.”***

Dita has also found that it fits into her life well. Being self-employed and not working a typical 9-5 job means she can offer daytime cover, while still going about her life as normal.

***“There’s a gym just up the road so I’m able to carry on training very close to the station and then just do my longer runs when I’m not providing cover.”***

Dita has ambitions to become a wholetime firefighter in the future, and is determined that by keeping up the hard work and motivation she’ll continue achieving her goals.

**Want to join the group and be a community hero?**

**Find out more at [join.essex-fire.gov.uk](https://join.essex-fire.gov.uk)**

**Any questions? Email:  
[Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:Mailbox.oclo@essex-fire.gov.uk)**



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