

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service

Efficiency and Productivity 2024/25



Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service
75 YEARS OF SAVING LIVES

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Treasurer , Sec 151 Officer
Cheshire Fire Authority

Summary

Over the last decade funding has not kept up with cost inflation. We have improved efficiency and productivity over this period, to deliver **more prevention, more protection** and a **better emergency response** for communities in Cheshire.

Compared to ten years ago we would be facing a £5m funding gap in 2024-25 alone had we not improved efficiency and productivity highlighted in this report.

We are very proud of our productivity and efficiency achievements, highlights include:

- Changed crewing systems and **increased fire stations** from 24 to 28 to improve emergency response whilst reducing costs.
- Moved from five to four riders on all pumps, whilst assuring firefighter safety and **saving £0.4m** pa per pump.
- Implemented a Wholetime Duty System based on 12-hour shifts to improve productive capacity by up to 33%.
- Converted wholetime and day crewing fire engines to on-call crewing to balance resources and **save circa £1m pa**.
- Introduced a self-rostering Day Crewing System that provides guaranteed 365/24/7 cover and **saves £1.2m pa**.
- Utilised our wholetime operational crews to undertake protection work so they can visit thousands of businesses annually to help keep them safe.
- Visited over a quarter of a million homes and currently achieving outputs of 19.7 home safety visits per 1,000 population – the **fourth highest output** of any fire and rescue service in the country
- Developed sophisticated targeting methodology so that 93% of our visits are to the most at risk from fire.

We believe this level of productive and pro-active work has made Cheshire safer and driven down fires to the **lowest primary fire rate in the country** (0.75 vs 1.1 fire per 1000 population).

We will continue to review and improve efficiency and productivity to deliver the best value for money.





FINANCIAL CONTEXT



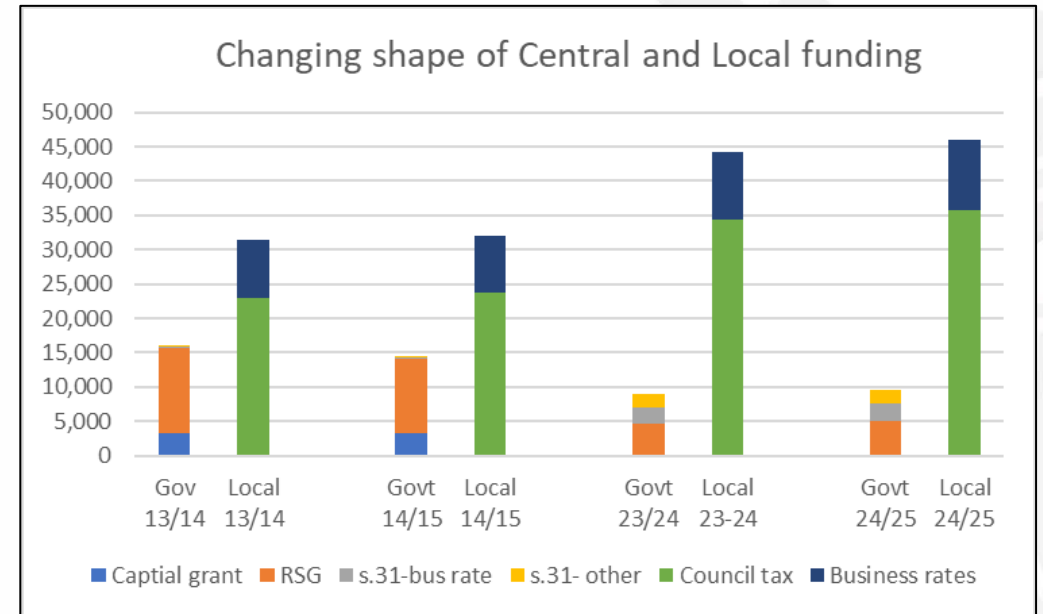
Revenue pressures

In 2024/25, 83% of our funding will be derived from council tax and business rates, compared with 68% 10 years ago. Central government funding, in the form of the Revenue Service Grant (RSG), has fallen and we no longer receive a capital grant to cover spending on equipment and facilities.

Cheshire Fire Authority determines our share of council tax, but the level by which this can be increased is very limited.

Over the last 10 years, our funding has grown by 20%, but to keep up with inflation growth it would need to be to 30%. This means a real-terms shortfall of £5m in 2024-25 compared to 10 years ago.

We have funded this gap by working more efficiently. We have also carefully borrowed money to fund capital projects.



2024/25 funding is shown on same basis as prior year, i.e. pension grant, which has been added to the RSG, has been shown net as in previous years

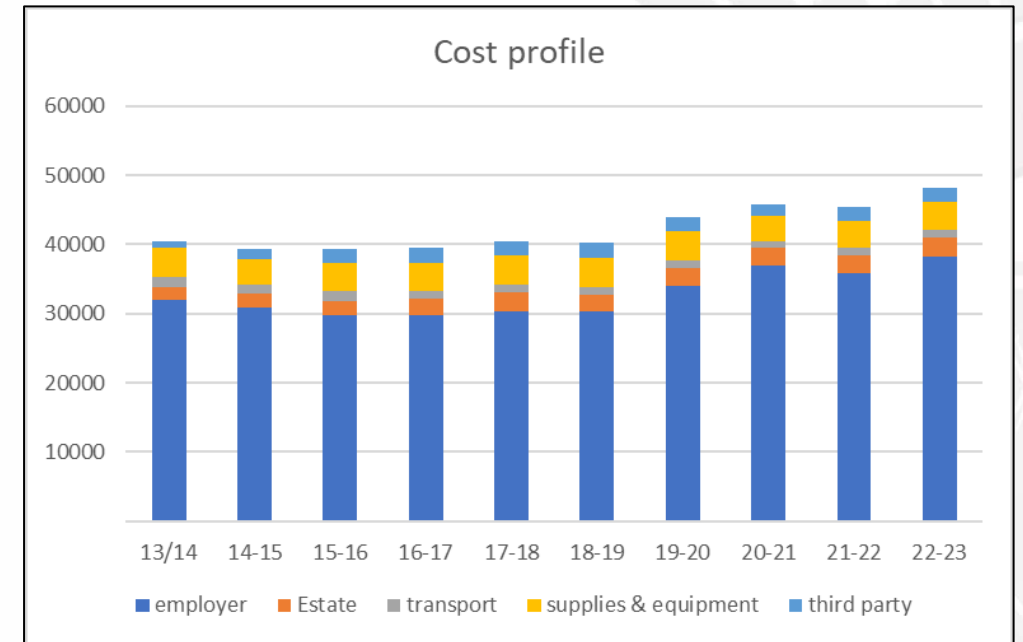


Cost pressures

Payroll costs, including our contribution to Joint Corporate Services, make up 75% of our total spending. Direct employee costs will total £41.9m in 2024/25 (47.7% of this will be returned to Government bodies through PAYE, NI and Pensions). This includes Employer contributions to the Firefighter Pension Scheme of £8.2m, the Local Government Pension Scheme of £1.4m and National Insurance of £2.7m. Employer contributions have increased over the last 10 years, from 19.3% of the total direct employment costs to 30.3%.

The impact is that we have £4.5m less cash available to utilise in the service compared to 10 years ago. We have had to be more efficient and more productive in order to achieve the same (or better) outputs.

Around 25% of our spending is on **non-pay items** such as supplies, utilities and maintenance. These have also been affected by high inflation. For example, we spent £345,000 on gas and electricity in 2013/14 compared with £945,000 now, which has outstripped our funding increases.



Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

We have agreed a balanced budget for 2024/25. This includes significant growth item to account for the pension grant (previously netted off in cost), which is now shown gross (i.e. in RSG funding and cost growth).

The MTFP shows a deficit in future years owing to the difference between cost and funding inflation. We are assuming all central government grants and business rates will remain relatively flat, with only our council tax precept moving with inflation set at 2%.

We will continue to think innovatively to meet the challenge of achieving a balanced budget in the future years.

CFA MTFP

Base budget	50,076	50,076	56,275	56,861	58,130	59,436
Inflation		2,190	1,145	1,172	1,199	1,229
Growth/Committed		4,501	500	500	760	760
One- off	1,668	850	396	396	0	0
Savings		(492)	0	0	0	0
Transfer to/ (from) rev reserves		(798)	(396)	(396)	0	0
Transfer to/from capital reserves		152				
Total expenditure budget	51,744	56,479	57,920	58,533	60,089	61,425
SFA (RSG and Business Rates)	(14,332)	(17,239)	(17,302)	(17,365)	(17,429)	(17,493)
Section 31 Business Rates	(2,388)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)
Council Tax	(34,396)	(35,798)	(36,964)	(38,169)	(39,412)	(40,696)
Other	(628)	(846)	0	0	0	0
Total funding	(51,744)	(56,479)	(56,861)	(58,130)	(59,436)	(60,785)
Budget deficit	0	0	1,059	403	653	640

2023-24 £000	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000	2026-27 £000	2027-28 £000	2028-29 £000
50,076	50,076	56,275	56,861	58,130	59,436
	2,190	1,145	1,172	1,199	1,229
	4,501	500	500	760	760
1,668	850	396	396	0	0
	(492)	0	0	0	0
	(798)	(396)	(396)	0	0
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Reserves

FORECAST LEVEL OF RESERVES TO MARCH 2029

	Actual 31 March 23	Forecast 31 March 24	Forecast 31 March 25	Forecast 31 March 26	Forecast 31 March 27	Forecast 31 March 28	Forecast 31 March 29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
General Reserve	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928
Earmarked Reserves- Capital							
Capital receipts	0	0	0	3,000	1,500	0	0
Capital Reserves	14,233	13,584	9,003	6,832	4,721	2,610	2,499
Equipment & Uniform	1,724	1,668	1,587	662	662	662	662
ICT and systems development	433	461	495	495	495	495	495
Property related	697	462	441	471	500	530	559
Earmarked Reserves- Revenue							
Staff/legal/training	1,967	1,284	1,065	971	971	971	971
Operational delivery	1,645	1,232	1,064	816	816	816	816
Partnerships and projects	1,964	1,931	2,689	2,293	1,897	1,897	1,897
Total Reserves	24,590	22,551	18,274	17,468	13,490	9,909	9,827

Since 2015 our reserves have been built from revenue funding. These will diminish by more than 50% over the next five years, owing to an ambitious but necessary plan to complete a modernisation of our fire stations and invest in new equipment.

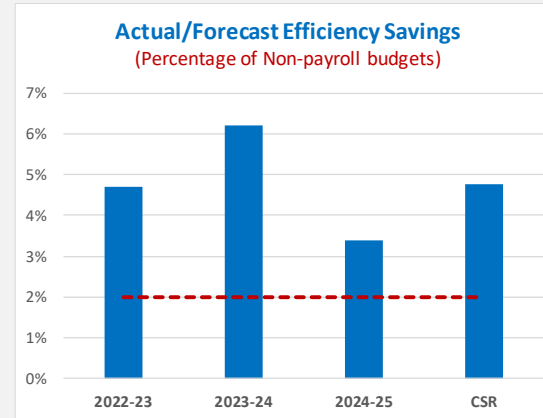
We will take on debt to help complete these capital plans, we will take advantage of mechanisms that enable public sector organisations to borrow money to fund investments in their services. It should be noted, however, that interest and repayments will reduce our available budget in the future.

As such this model of funding capital is not sustainable over the long term.



Efficiency savings

	Actual 2022-23	Forecast 2023-24	Forecast 2024-25	CSR
Opening Revenue Expenditure Budget (Net)	46,587	51,744	56,479	
Less Total Direct Employee Costs	35,736	37,452	41,915	
Non Pay Budget	10,851	14,292	14,564	
Efficiency Target (2% of non-pay budget)	217	286	291	
Efficiency Savings				
<u>Direct Employee</u>				
unbudget increase in pay awards (Grey & Green)		-355		
Reduction in Support Staff				
<u>Indirect Employee (e.g. training, travel etc.)</u>				
All Indirect Employee Costs				
<u>Premises</u>				
Utilities		-11		
Rent/Rates			-35	
Other Premises Costs	-265	-36		
Shared Premises				
<u>Transport</u>				
Fleet				
Fuel				
Other Transport Costs	-164			
<u>Supplies and Services</u>				
Procurement Savings	-81	-69	-80	
Other Technology Improvements			-25	
Decreased Usage		-25		
<u>Capital Financing</u>				
Net Borrowing Costs		-390		
<u>Other</u>				
targeted cost saving			-352	
Total Efficiency Savings	-510	-886	-492	
Efficiency Savings as a Percentage of Non-Payroll Budgets	4.70%	6.20%	3.38%	4.76%
Efficiency Savings Target	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%



This table highlights areas of non-pay where we have sought “cashable” savings. Most items are one-off in nature.

In 23/24 we have experienced a cost pressure from higher than budgeted pay awards on Grey and Green book staff. The £0.3m represents the savings we have had to find to fund the unbudgeted award.

Procurement savings are calculated as per Home Office guidance and are all cashable. We benefit from joint procurement with Cheshire Constabulary and have benefitted from economies of scale in purchasing around IT and telecoms contracts.





ACHIEVING EFFICIENCIES, DRIVING PRODUCTIVITY



Efficiency and productivity through collaboration

- We share our 999 control room **North West Fire Control** with three other fire and rescue services. As a result, we have saved £3m since its launch and are set to make considerable savings when we jointly invest a new multi-million pound computer aided dispatch system over the next few years.
- We achieve economies of scale through our **Joint Corporate Services** arrangement with Cheshire Police, which provides shared ICT, legal, procurement, stores and facilities functions.
- We **share four of our fire stations** with colleagues from Cheshire Police and North West Ambulance Service, resulting in savings in facilities costs across the three blue light emergency services.
- We **work closely NHS partners** to get as much value out of our Safe and Well visits as possible. In return for their data enabling us to target our visits to those most at risk from fire, we have been able to support wider health provision such as blood pressure monitoring, atrial fibrillation testing, falls prevention and bowel cancer screening.
- We support North West Ambulance Service by providing **“gained entry” to people’s homes** 295 times in 2023/24, this was previously done by the Police.



Efficiency and productivity through **technology**

- **Solar panels** on most of our buildings offset some of the cost of energy.
- A third of our **cars and vans are now electric** and by **investing in new fire engines** we have reduced breakdowns by 40%.
- **SAFFIRE** our in-house IT system enables us to manage our ambitious prevention and protection programmes efficiently, while saving money on external licences.
- Our bespoke **Cheshire Planning System** enables colleagues to effectively manage projects, without external licence costs.
- We are working with **PDR Pro**, which tracks staff development and competency, to adapt the system to help us manage assets, equipment and routine testing.
- Crews and community safety colleagues use **tablets** to access policies, and procedures, as well as record the outcome of visits and importance incident data.
- We have invested in **Microsoft 365** and have established a Digital Transformation Board to drive forward the improvements the platform can bring.



Efficiency and productivity in Prevention



- In 2023/24 we reviewed our **Prevention Department** to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- In 2024/25 our firefighters and prevention teams will carry out 27,500 **Safe and Well visits**, using specialist NHS and incident data to target those most at risk of fire in the home. We believe our targeting methodology to be one of the most highly-developed in the country, contributing to lower-than-national average primary fires and deliberate fires (0.75 vs 1.1 per 1k of population and 14.6 vs 28 per 100k of population).
- We are commissioned by Further Education colleges to deliver **Prince's Trust Team programmes** to 16-24 year olds, to get them back into education, training or employment.
- We are commissioned by one of our local authorities to deliver **Key Stage 2 and 4 road safety education**.
- Our **firefighters and prevention teams visit every primary school** in Cheshire to deliver basic fire safety education. Schools in higher risk areas are **prioritised for visits to our education centre, Safety Central**.
- We are working closely with partners to deliver new **road and water safety strategies for Cheshire**.
- We engage around 150 **volunteers** to support our Prevention programmes.



Efficiency and productivity in Protection

- We use Land Registry, local authority data and incident to carefully sort more than 37,000 non-domestic (commercial) properties into **four risk categories to prioritise work and target resources effectively from thematic visits through to enforcement.**
- All our protection teams are trained upto level 4 Diploma in Fire Safety. These **teams visit more than 1,200 highest risk premises.**
- Our **firefighters will be trained to Level 2** in a learning collaboration with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and visit more than 2,000 lower risk premises each year.
- We have a **Primary Authority agreements** with a number of businesses, for which we are paid to support them in their fire safety arrangements.
- We employ a **Business Safety Team** to proactively engage with premises about their fire safety responsibilities and raise awareness of fire risks.



Efficiency and productivity in Response

Riding Four	Tailored shift systems	12-hour shifts	AFA challenge	Station Manager flexi- rota
<p>In 2014, we reduced the number of firefighters riding from five to four, saves circa £0.4m per pump per year.</p> <p>We did so without the need for redundancy, utilising spare capacity flexibly to make on-call stations available. We made a further change to the day crew model to move from 2 watches of 7 to a single watch of nine self-rostered firefighters, this costs £0.3m per pump per year less than the previous model.</p> <p>This enabled further investment in the service and opening 4 new stations</p>	<p>From January 2025 we will operate five different shift systems, tailored to risks and demand in different station areas.</p> <p>We will convert 4 on-call appliances to wholtime weekday pumps, this will increase the number of guaranteed available pumps from 17 to 21.</p> <p>We are converting one on-call station to the Day crew model. This is almost cost neutral but dramatically improving our productivity and efficiency, improving response times and increasing prevention and protection work.</p>	<p>In 2015, we introduced 12-hour shifts at wholtime fire stations. This significantly increased shift productivity (34 %).</p> <p>Increasing the number of productive hours in the daytime for prevention and protection activity, with night shifts being used for checks, admin and learning.</p>	<p>In 2022/23, we reduced our attendance at unwanted automatic fire activations (AFAs) by almost 80% compared with 38% nationally. We have done so by training our control operators to challenge calls from all but the highest risk premises, including certain industry, hospitals, care homes, hotels, prisons or other places where people might be sleeping.</p> <p>Had we not done so our crews would have attended over 2,000 AFAs in a year diverting them from real response activity, prevention duties and training.</p>	<p>To make better use of our Station Managers' time, in 2013 we stopped sending them to command 'two pump' jobs, increasing the threshold to incidents with life risk or with four fire engines and above. We also removed rota days from weekday activity, saving further time.</p>

Detailed analysis of these areas are provided in the Appendix



Efficiency and productivity in Response

Introduced in January 2023, our **Firefighter Productivity Modelling** enables us to:

- **analyse the amount of time** spent training, responding to incidents, undertaking checks and routines, and carrying out Prevention and Protection work in the community
- take into account time allowed for certain activities set out in the **Grey Book**
- informs **station and watch targets** for Safe and Well visits and thematic business safety visits, to maximise our impact in the community.

We have also introduced pro-active absence and overtime monitoring, resulting in us having the lowest wholetime firefighter absence in the country in Q3 2023/24.

Moving forward we are aiming to reduce the number of times a fire engine has to be on standby for another fire station. We also want to introduce dynamic cover tools at NW fire control, moving appliances around the county more flexibly to meet our response time standard.



Efficiency and productivity in **Response**



To inform our **Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-28**, we undertook a review of fire cover. This includes plans to **address decreasing availability of on-call fire engines**, which have fallen to 53% while costs have increased by 42% over the past five years.

We will increase the **availability of fire engines during weekdays** from 17 to 21, and **increase prevention and protection output by almost 3,500 additional home and safety visits**, by:

- **converting four of the most under-utilised on-call fire engines** to new daytime weekday fire engines, operating flexibly across the county
- **converting another on-call fire engine** to Day Crewing
- **reorganising fire cover in one of our local authority areas**, without reducing the overall number of wholetime fire engines available in the borough.

These changes will cost in the region of £57,000, which will be offset by efficiencies elsewhere in our Service



Appendix



Crewing- Ridership & 2-2-4 cover

- 2016- 2-2-4 cover
 - Ridership was moved from 5 to 4
 - Watch strength of 5 down from 7 for one pump stations, 2 pump stations
Watch strength of 11 instead of 12
 - Latent resource- spare FFs sent to bring On-call station available.
 - These changes were achieved through natural attrition *ie* retirements and leavers
 - Based on current pay rates and on-costs a single pump 2-2-4 station operating cost is £426k lower than 7 watch strength per station per annum

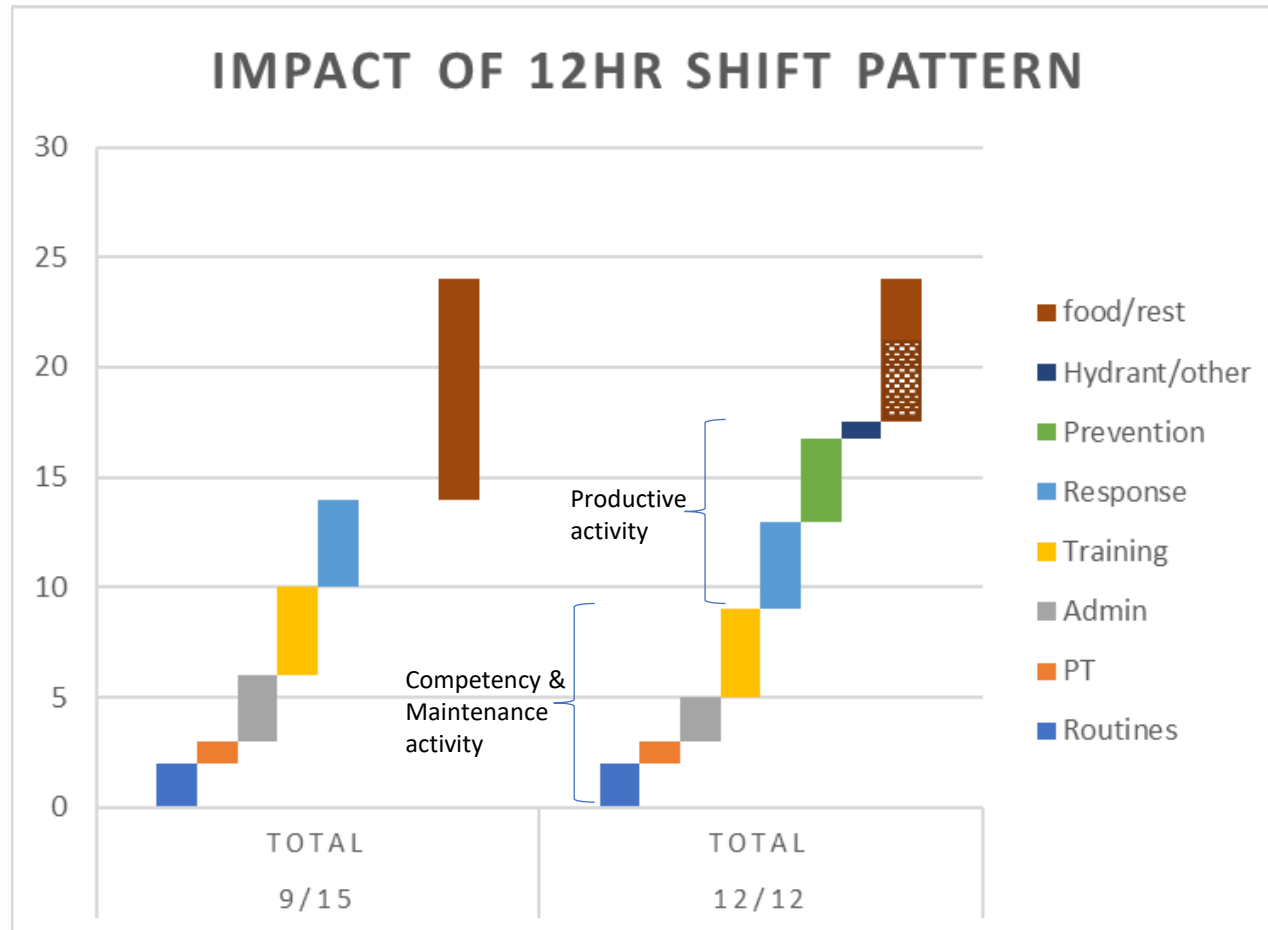


Crewing – Ridership & day crew

- DC 1 day crew model (plus ridership at 4)
 - Single watch of 9- 1 WM, 2 CM, 6 FFs- self rostered
 - Previously 2 watches of 7 – 2WWM, 2 CM, 10 FFs
 - DC1 operating model costs £0.3m less per station per annum than the 2 watch system, based on payroll and on-costs
 - This excludes cost requirement for 9 houses (or allowances) vs 14 houses
 - The DC1 model operates with a fixed enhanced uplift on base salary as opposed to disturbance & turnout allowances on the previous model- this is cost neutral but significantly easier to manage.



Crewing model- 12 hr shift



In 2015 the Authority agreed a new shift pattern within the 2-2-4 duty system with the local FBU. The service moved from a 9 hour day/15 hour night shift to 12 hour day & night shifts, within the 2-2-4 pattern.

This change enabled a transformation in the amount of productive work that could be carried out in the longer daytime shift. Under the previous shift system 10 hours is lost to rest and food breaks.

The chart is an illustrative comparison of what a combined day & night shift over a 24 hour period could deliver under the old pattern and the 12 hour system.

The change to 12 hour shifts continues to support the requirements of the CRMP; we can undertake more prevention and protection work, engaging with our communities, whilst maintaining our response activity during the day shift. The night shift focuses on clearing station and personal admin, the agreement allows for 4 hours of additional rest subject to all work being completed. Training time is maintained across both shifts.



Automated Fire Alarm actuation challenge

- Following consultation the Fire Authority authorised the service to “challenge out” and not to attend unwanted AFAs
- AFAs received at Fire Control are challenged on the following basis;
 - COMaH sites
 - Sleep risk
 - Vulnerable or mobility impaired residents
 - Building construction (*ie* timber frame)
 - Essentially we only attend COMaH sites, Hospitals, nursing/care homes, hotels and significant industrial sites.
 - Any sighted fire or smoke would cause attendance
- As a result of the challenge methodology in 2022/23 CFRS has removed 79.79% of unwanted AFA attendances vs the England average of 37.9%. To date there have been no adverse consequences, but the Authority recognises the risk.
- In 2022/23 the service only attended 482 AFAs, without the challenge methodology we could have potentially attended over 2,000 calls, or a further 1,000 calls compared to the England average. As such the crews have not lost productive time and can continue with prevention & protection activity, training and real response activity.
- The service has been able to offer Special Assistance services to NW Ambulance service (NWAS), in particular “effecting entry”, which was previously carried out by the police. In 2023/24 we carried out 295 NWAS assistance jobs. This has freed up Police colleagues to better protect the community.



Safe & Well methodology & partnerships

- Pre 2018 the service carried out in excess of 60k home safety visits with the focus on smoke detector fixing, however these were of mixed outcomes & interventions. This was a case of quantity over quality.
- Post 2018 a programme of targeted risk based visits was introduced- Domestic Property Assessment Programme (DPAP). The Service reviewed domestic fires to better understand the cause and setting of the fire, from this a set of high risk factors were identified.
- We had pilot partnership with Experion to provide insight data sets to enable targeting of Safe & Well visits to those most at risk.
- In 23/24 the service carried out 23k safe & well visits, with 92% meeting our persons/properties at heightened risk criteria.
- We strongly believe this approach has resulted in the CFRS having one of the lowest primary fire rates in the country at 0.75 vs England avg of 1.1 per 1k of population; Deliberate fires at 14.6 vs England avg of 28 per 100k of population.
- In 24/25 we are entering a partnership with CIPHA and NHS Cheshire & The Wirral to use SNOMED code data (subject to appropriate GDPR regulations) to see if this will help refine our DPAP data set in order to reach those most at risk of domestic fire.
- Local NHS has provided free blood pressure monitoring cuffs and Atrial fibrillation test sticks, so our crews can encourage residents to get tested during a S&W visit.
- Safe & Well Methodology, we had a pilot partnership with Experion to provide insight data sets to help enable

