



Corporate Plan & Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP 7) and Budget Consultation Report

March 2010

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1) Introduction

This report contains the results of a detailed consultation exercise regarding the Service's draft Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2010-11 (IRMP 7) which was carried out between December 10, 2009 and March 6, 2010.

The following groups were consulted:

- Members of Response, Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service's dedicated residents' consultation panel via a postal or online survey
- The Cheshire Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council's (CHAWREC) BME consultation panel via a postal survey
- Residents via the media and the Service's website, including use of the Service's social networking channels on Facebook and Twitter
- Key stakeholders of the Service via a direct mail out
- MPs via a dedicated Westminster briefing
- Businesses – via the website and through a direct mail out
- Employees of the Service via manager briefings and an online survey on the Intranet
- The Representative Bodies – Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire Officers Association (FOA), UNISON and the retained firefighters union (RFU).

A series of seven local stakeholder and resident consultation events also took place across the four unitary performance areas. Three further public meetings and a dedicated briefing session for local councillors were also held specifically on the proposals for Birchwood Community Fire Station. Summaries of questions and issues raised at these events are set out in the Appendices.

Response Rates – all consultees

At the end of the formal consultation period, 123 responses had been received from members of Response; 29 responses were received from members of CHAWREC's panel; 66 employees responded and 33 members of the public responded.

The full results for all consultees will be included in the full consultation report and all comments received will be included in the full consultation report.

Please note that respondents did not always answer every question in the consultation questionnaire.

All the results received were fully analysed and this report was written by the Service's Electronic Communication Officer in March 2009.

2) Executive Summary

Reviewing the crewing and response arrangements at Birchwood Community Fire Station

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 80% | 4% | 12% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 93% | 3% | 3% |
| Businesses | 69% | 7% | 21% |

We received 22 comments from the public about this proposal. 86% of comments oppose the proposal, while 5% of comments support the proposal.

We received 16 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 56% of comments oppose the proposal, while 37.5% of comments support the proposal.

The main reasons given for the opposition include:-

Information at public meeting was not clear enough; cuts should be made elsewhere; Birchwood is being penalised for it's own success in driving down local incident rates through working with the community; night time is the worst time for a fire station to be shut - most fatal house fires happen at night; this will put safety and lives at risk; Birchwood is a densely populated area as well as all the industrial/manufacturing processes/businesses; Birchwood suffers with total grid lock when there is a motorway closure on one of the surrounding motorways; it will cause delays in attendance times (e.g. during the night and to distant communities like Culcheth); it can be difficult to get to Birchwood Fire Station due to heavy traffic congestion in this area at times (e.g. especially if there is an accident on the motorway); savings (as suggested in IRMP) are not correct; people living in Birchwood want the same cover as everyone else in Warrington; money has to be saved; more research is needed into the changes, before this goes ahead.

Public Meetings

During January and February a series of briefings for key stakeholders and public meetings for residents and businesses were held to outline the business case for the Service's proposal to change the way Birchwood Community Fire Station is crewed. All of the presentations set out in detail the rationale behind the proposal to change the current wholetime crewing system to one where staff work a 12 hour day shift, with evening cover provided by Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel.

The headline concerns and the Service's responses are summarised below:

- The change to RDS in the evening will delay the Service's response to fires and put lives at risk. Attendance times in the evening will increase by a maximum of five

- Birchwood has a lot of motorways and the delay in evening response times will risk the lives of people trapped in road traffic collisions (RTCs). Despite the extent of the road network in Birchwood, the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in RTCs during the evening is very low. The Service is still confident it could meet its response standard for RTCs under the new proposal.
- Staff on the RDS will not be able to get to the station quickly because of traffic / weather problems. The Service currently employs around 200 RDS staff and they consistently achieve turnout times under the five minute standard during all times of the day and in all weathers. The RDS system at Birchwood would operate during the evening when traffic is a lot quieter.
- Staff on the RDS are not as well trained as wholetime firefighters. All CFRS firefighters receive the same level and standard of initial training. The training is delivered in modules over a longer period but all firefighters have to achieve the same standard before they are signed off as competent.
- Overall incident numbers at Birchwood are as high around midnight as they are during the day – why not put in a crewing system to match this? The Service's main focus is on the risks of people being killed or injured in fires. The number of house fires in Birchwood during the evening is extremely low – there were only three in the whole of 2008 and none were serious nor required the Service to rescue anyone. Most of the Birchwood incidents in the late evening have been small rubbish fires where neither people nor property was at risk – many fire and rescue services don't even respond to these under blue lights.
- If risk levels in Birchwood increase in the future, would the Service bring back a wholetime service. The Service reviews risk levels on at least an annual basis. It would adapt the resources it has available in a particular area if risks changes and there are examples of where this has happened recently.
- Will any firefighters lose their jobs and what will happen to those who don't want to go on to the new system at Birchwood? There will be no redundancies and any staff who don't want to move to the day shift system will be transfered to another station. We are confident we would be able to accommodate most if not all of staff transfer preferences.
- Finance – the proposal has been put forward simply as a cost cutting exercise. This is strongly rejected. The proposal has been developed in response to a detailed analysis of the balance between local risk levels and resources. There will be substantial efficiency savings - which will be reinvested in frontline firefighting equipment – but cutting costs is not the main priority in this case.

In addition to the comments made at public meetings, letters of objection to the Birchwood proposal have also been received from Warrington North MP Helen Jones, Warrington Borough Council, Birchwood Town Council and Culceth and Glazebury Parish Council. While the letters and responses are in the full consultation report, the main concern highlighted is the increase in attendance times in the evenings.

Members of a campaign group against the Birchwood proposal have been collecting signatures for a petition which is expected to be presented at the meeting. An e-petition on the 10 Downing Street website has also been started and at the time of writing the report had received 230 signatures.

The three possible options for Birchwood Community Fire Station

External Views – Response & CHAWREC Panel Members

Members of the Response Panel and the CHAWREC panel both agreed that their preferred options for Birchwood were as follows:-

- 1) Option 2 – Having staff on station in the day and using retained duty staff who are on call in the evening.
- 2) Option 1 – Making it a day crewed station &
- 3) Option 3 - Having staff on station in the day and then moving in an appliance and crew from another wholetime station at night.

External Views – Businesses

Members of the business community had a slightly different preference (although it is important to point out that there is very little difference).

- 1) Option 2
- 2) Option 3
- 3) Option 1

Protecting our Communities

Review the balance of resources between community fire safety and road safety

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 85% | 4% | 7% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 86% | 3% | 10% |
| Businesses | 72% | 24% | 0% |

We received 7 comments from the public about this proposal. 14 % of comments oppose the proposal, while 57% of comments support the proposal.

We received 15 comments from internal staff about this proposal.

73% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments.

Most people support this proposal and agree that we should balance the focus between Community Fire Safety, Community Fire Protection & Road Safety. People have commented that this is a good idea, but more information is needed.

There was positive feedback from MPs on this proposal. However, one Member questioned the Service on whether this activity exceeded the FRS remit. Other MPs provided reassurance and gave clear support for FRS interventions on road safety, the partnership approach and the review of the balance of resources.

The Development of the Volunteer Programme

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 98% | 5% | 12% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 93% | 0% | 7% |
| Businesses | 83% | 17% | 0% |

We received 9 comments from the public about this proposal. 11% of comments oppose the proposal, while 44% of comments support the proposal.

We received 15 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 27% of comments oppose the proposal, while 60% of comments support the proposal.

While most of the comments support this proposal, many people believe that volunteers should not undertake fire fighting duties. Most people agree that volunteers are a valuable resource, but they must be managed and trained well. There are concerns about volunteers taking on an operational role.

Fire Protection inspections

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 90% | 2% | 3% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 97% | 0% | 3% |
| Businesses | 97% | 7% | 0% |

We received 9 comments from the public about this proposal. 78% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments from the public.

We received 22 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 100% of comments support this proposal.

Many internal respondents said that fire crews used to do the Fire Inspections and that they would be willing to complete these again. Many people said that they welcome this proposal and look forward to it being implemented.

Efforts to improve the processes for undertaking Fire Safety inspections are supported by MPs.

Tackling the Corporate challenges of the Authority

Shared Services

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 90% | 3% | 3% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 93% | 7% | 0% |
| Businesses | 86% | 7% | 7% |

We received 8 comments from the public about this proposal. 25% of comments oppose the proposal, while 63% of comments support the proposal.

We received 14 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 79% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments.

Many believe that it is an excellent way of building working partnerships in our communities. Although, we must ensure that we work with staff so that they understand the arrangements. A comment from a uniformed member of staff suggests that more information is needed about the corporate roles/areas within the Service.

There was very positive feedback from MPs around this proposal and a pragmatic stance taken in relation to the issue of regional collaboration (with other FRSs), where it realised efficiencies. There was a strong inference that shared services must not produce further bureaucracy and where possible, should be pursued at a local level.

Equality and Diversity

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 72% | 5% | 20% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 93% | 0% | 7% |
| Businesses | 62% | 3% | 36% |

We received 5 comments from the public about this proposal. 40% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments from the public.

We received 16 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 69% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments.

Key themes include:

Everyone should be treated equally and fairly across the organisation; concerns about

positive discrimination; 12-hour shifts may harm this objective (affecting recruitment of females, mothers and single parents).

Environment

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|----------------|---------|------------|-----------|
| Response Panel | 79% | 6% | 11% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 79% | 7% | 14% |
| Businesses | 79% | 7% | 10% |

We received 8 comments from the public about this proposal. 75% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments.

We received 22 comments from internal staff about this proposal. All comments support this proposal.

Responding to Emergencies

Revision of working arrangements for operational staff (including 12 hour shifts & changing the crewing arrangements for hydraulic platforms at Stockton Heath and Macclesfield fire station.

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|----------------|---------|------------|-----------|
| Response Panel | 67% | 6% | 22% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 86% | 10% | 10% |
| Businesses | 45% | 52% | 52% |

Introduction of 12 hour shifts.

We received 12 comments from the public about this proposal. 67% of comments oppose the proposal, while 8% of comments support the proposal.

We received 55 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 87% of comments oppose the proposal, while 2% of comments support the proposal.

The main reasons given for the opposition include:-

The shifts are not family friendly and will have a negative impact on work-life balance; they will cause childcare problems and increased childcare costs; they may cause problems for female firefighters; they like the current shift system and it works well; targets are achieved using the current shift system (CFRS is one of the top performing Fire & Rescue Services); training needs reviewing, but not necessarily the shift system; Morale on station will be affected; the costs to implement the new shift system are unnecessary; there will be no financial savings.

Change crewing arrangements for hydraulic platforms (HP) at Stockton Heath and Macclesfield fire stations

We received 7 comments from the public about this proposal. 71% of comments oppose the proposal, while 14% of comments support the proposal.

We received 27 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 63% of comments oppose the proposal, while 30% of comments support the proposal.

The main reasons given for the opposition include:-

Retained do not have the training, time and experience; the retained staff would not have the time for the regular training needed; this will cause delays in attendance times; there is no guarantee that RDS staff is available for incidents requiring the HP; whole time firefighters will have to cover for the shortfall in HP trained RDS staff; retained don't have enough training time to become skilful Hydraulic Platform Operators; HPs are crewed by full time firefighters, with extensive experience and a high amount of time available to train for the use of the HP; RDS staff do not crew this appliance at night and are not trained to crew it - whole time day crew staff who crew this appliance 24/7; Warrington needs a HP quickly to launch the boat – so must stay in the area.

This proposal raised concerns at the public meeting held at Crewe Town Hall, where calls for more community information and consultation as the HP crewing arrangements at Macclesfield are developed.

Flexible Rostering

We received 20 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 40% of comments oppose the proposal, while 30% of comments support the proposal.

Many people believe that it is a good thing and will help people with young families

The main reasons given for the opposition include:-

People are unsure about what this involves – Firefighters need more details about this; people will not be able to plan ahead – like they can with the current system.

Remove the second Crew Manager post on two pump stations and replace it with a Firefighter post.

We received 38 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 92% of comments oppose the proposal, while 5% of comments support the proposal.

The main reasons given for the opposition include:-

We will lose the experience/knowledge of the CM's. This will cause a dilution of skills; there will be an increase in CM expenses due to covering sickness of other CM's; potential loss of CPD payments when a FF 'acts up'; due to the increase in administrative tasks recently, there is currently a need for more Officers on stations; we do not have enough CM's at the moment; CM's are extremely important – two are needed; removing a Cm would affect productivity; there will always be a shortage of competent crew managers; firefighters may not want to act up.

The Budget

Council tax precept for 2010/11

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 73% | 13% | 10% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 66% | 17% | 14% |
| Businesses | 66% | 7% | 24% |

We received 18 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 72% of comments support the proposal. We did not receive any negative comments.

The majority of respondents support this proposal. Many of the comments suggested that this is a cheap increase for the service we provide.

Continue focusing on both community safety and emergency response activities.

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 89% | 1% | 4% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| Businesses | 97% | 0% | 3% |

We received 13 comments from internal staff about this proposal. 23% of comments oppose the proposal, while 31% of comments support the proposal.

Based on the comments received, people need more information about this proposal before they will agree or disagree with it.

Although a few people suggested that we need to get emergency response right first.

Future Council Tax precepts to remain under 3%

| Consultee | Agree % | Disagree % | Neither % |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Response Panel | 57% | 20% | 19% |
| CHAWREC Panel | 76% | 14% | 10% |
| Businesses | 48% | 28% | 24% |

We received 4 comments from internal staff about this proposal. All comments support this proposal.

General Comments

General comments from the public include:

Concerns about unnecessary changes; concerns about 12-hour shifts; concerns about changes to fire stations; concerns about risk management; concerns about partnership working.

Internal staff are concerned by the 12-hour shift proposal and the majority of internal staff are not in favour of this shift pattern.

During the public meeting held at Crewe Town Hall, the discussions concerned:

- Future development of RDS in Cheshire
- Support for RTC proposals
- Queries over the future of the 'Vale Royal Triangle' of stations
- Calls for more community information and consultation as the HP crewing arrangements at Macclesfield are developed.

Appendix A

Cheshire FBU Response to 'Draft' Corporate Plan & IRMP 2010/2011.

In responding to the draft IRMP document it remains the intention of the FBU in Cheshire to be supportive of any improvements to the Fire Service and to help in improving the service we offer the public. Equally, where we believe proposals within the IRMP will not improve the Service, we will voice our concerns and expect our views to influence the final draft and proposals. We hope, therefore, that any changes can be approached in a spirit of partnership, where modernisation of the way we work and deliver our services can be guided by ministerial frameworks and remain within the spirit and intent of nationally negotiated conditions of service.

The changes proposed in the IRMP7 are considerable and extensive, so to avoid confusion, and to instil a sense of workforce inclusion in these proposals, we ask that all matters affecting FBU members be the subject of thorough consultation/negotiation with a view to reaching agreement prior to the implementation of changes to policies, practices or protocols.

In an effort to assist in this process we make the following preliminary observations to the points raised in the draft IRMP7 document.

We make no apology that our response continues to highlight a number of concerns and observations that have been consistent within our previous responses. Whilst we accept a number of proposals will improve CF&RS response to risk and FBU members will be fully supportive of these initiatives, we can not accept the IRMP process being used to continue to reduce emergency cover and worsen firefighters working conditions and therefore will campaign to protect the level of service, safety of firefighters, public and our members conditions of service.

A further criticism of the IRMP process is the lack of FBU and staff involvement in the development of the IRMP. The national guidance document does advocate FBU and staff involvement and had this been the case, in the early stages of the IRMP process, a number of contentious issues could have been resolved more quickly without conflict and the need for dispute resolution. By the time the IRMP proposals are released for consultation, timescales for implementation are already tight and the opportunity for stakeholders including rep bodies to influence the final IRMP is limited to a few weeks. Many members have decided not to respond to the IRMP via the intranet as they believe it is not confidential and the questions are phrased in an ambiguous way narrowing the response. Other members have been waiting for their programmed meeting to discuss the IRMP, but these are taking place after the 3rd February deadline.

As with previous IRMPs we believe too much emphasis has been placed on efficiency savings rather than fully introducing policies that reduce the risk to life, property and the environment across Cheshire. Many proposals are simply as a result of budgetary constraints, yet within the IRMP they are dressed up as 'modernisation' or 'improvement'. This introduces confusion in to the consultation. If providing value for money means providing a lower service because less money is available the IRMP document has to say so. It is the only way that the public can be sufficiently informed to make choices about the services they receive and what they are prepared to pay for them. The failure to be clear what the IRMP document means or by wrapping up cuts as an improvement means returns from consultation with the public are flawed and worthless

The Bain report '*The future of the Fire Service*' gave the impression that fire prevention and intervention were two separate entities. This idea was then perpetuated in documents such as the national framework document with questions being asked, "*is the balance between prevention and intervention right*". We believe this has encouraged Fire Services to make savings from emergency response to finance prevention initiatives to demonstrate modernisation. The cost analysis of providing the emergency response is based on activity levels in a given area with little consideration being given to the additional fire prevention and community safety benefits that this resource brings to the reduction of risk in that community.

Risk profiling of station areas and now individual wards has been a feature of IRMPs, however proposals to reduce emergency response almost always are purely based on activity levels. No analysis into the true cost of reducing emergency cover, reducing staffing levels or increasing response times in an area is provided. The IRMP does not highlight the increase in the risk to life, injuries or property, that such proposals bring to the communities affected or across the county.

Assessing Risk

We reiterate our concerns highlighted in the previous two IRMP responses regarding the software and reliability on such systems when producing evidence to support the reduction in emergency response. This is particularly concerning when the inevitable increase in risk that would be identified with the application of the national FSEC model is not highlighted within the IRMP.

Responding to Risk

We have repeatedly voiced our position that we believe the move from National Standards of Fire Cover to local based standards has led to slower emergency response times and has been used as an opportunity to cut front line emergency cover. The local standards are also being used as a target and not as a minimum standard for emergency response.

The Cheshire Standards for emergency response do not set out a minimum standard for the full response required to deal effectively, efficiently and safely with emergency incidents. Unlike other North West Fire Services our standards are based only on the time of the first appliance in attendance. Some imaginative ways of improving these attendance times are

concerning. The attendance time of a small fire appliance or emergency vehicle that is ill equipped to deal with the incident, may show an improvement on paper but doesn't necessarily improve the emergency response or safety. Increasingly and far too often risk assessments are being introduced that require crews to wait for back up. Non activity is not an option for firefighters under the weight of public expectation.

Key Proposals

Volunteers

As with a number of statements within IRMP proposals, we would appreciate more detail consultation to increase our understanding of exactly what is proposed. Whilst we recognise the dedication and contribution the Service's volunteers can make, we are alarmed by such proposals as volunteers responding to small fires.

Environment

Again the FBU are supportive of this proposal, however we would wish to see details of how CF&RS intend to cut the Service's carbon footprint by 30%. We recognise environmental impact assessments are made within all new policy proposals, but would welcome more awareness training for staff so that the effects to the environment are considered during all day to day activities.

Community Safety

We note that a greater proportion of deaths and injuries are attributed to road traffic collisions, an area where the Service is a lead player in partnership to reduce this statistic.

We therefore understand the logic behind reviewing the balance of resources between community fire safety and road safety and support the need to increase preventative work in this area, we do however have concerns with this proposal.

In earlier IRMPs this issue was not identified and we believe the reason for this was that the Fire Service was not funded for this area of work and although a moral obligation to tackle this problem has been accepted, we see little evidence that additional funding will be made available despite the potential to make a significant difference.

Another concern is that preventative work is only effective for certain length of time and if resources are shifted from away from home fire safety to finance road safety initiatives it will not be long before this would impact on the downward trend in house fires.

Shared Services

We support this investigation and would welcome better ways of delivering support and back up to the front line services.

In recent years back up support to fire stations and front line services has improved although this has been achieved by increasingly directing resources from front line to support services. Whilst the number of operational staff has decreased over the last number of years the number of support staff positions has risen dramatically.

We again advise caution as despite the emphasis on regional collaboration, individual Fire Services have not recognised the expected benefits. Regional control centres are a perfect example of this, where anticipated benefits will not be met, bringing no improvement to emergency response times and the costs of the project continuing to escalate.

Fire Protection Inspections

We are fully supportive of this initiative and welcome the fact our observations made previously are now being proposed with the re-introduction of fire prevention/protection training for operational crews. As highlighted above, fire prevention and operations have been seen as two separate entities and each department becoming somewhat divorced from the other.

In the past, one of the greatest strengths of F&RS was that while they delivered fire prevention and protection advice as well as intervention services, skills in all three areas were reasonably well distributed throughout the organisation. Fire safety inspectors had operational experience and operational staff had knowledge of building construction and grounding in fire safety systems.

It is true that F&RS did not always have systems in place to make the most of this strength, but in general:

- Fire safety inspectors could incorporate operational needs into their fire safety advice – especially during building control consultations.
- Operational crews could recognise fire safety infringements when they attended fires.
- Fire safety inspectors could identify issues relevant to operational firefighters when carrying out inspections and could pass that information on to the relevant crews.
- Operational crews could use their knowledge of building construction and fire safety systems to assist in firefighting and to secure their own health and safety.
- Operational crews were far more aware of the risks they may face within their station areas in the event of fire or other emergency.

Shift patterns

We are disappointed that once again IRMP is being used as a vehicle to change the shift pattern of firefighters that staff our 24/7 fire stations. Firefighters are united and strongly opposed to the introduction of 12 hours shifts and have made that abundantly clear to all concerned.

In our response to IRMP6 we did state that there were problems with the optimum crewing arrangements. We highlighted the inability to detach firefighters and supervisory managers for training and problems with the Central Resource. These problems have been exasperated in recent months with confidence levels at an all time low. The service managers have failed to maintain firefighter levels and the results have now surfaced. Currently there is little scope for firefighters to be able to take leave carried over from 2009 and even less

opportunity to forecast leave for the foreseeable future in 2010. After months of reviewing Optimum Crewing no fundamental changes have been suggested to improve the duty system.

The Service has put forward a case for 12 hour shifts but this has not been integrated with the Optimum Crewing review but merely reflects the business case put forward by other Fire & Rescue Services. In fact the business case produced some months after the proposal is obviously that of South Yorkshire. Are we to take seriously the Services arguments for the need to introduce 12 hour shifts if it's not based on it's own business case?

We believe the perceived advantages, can be achieved without the need to introduce 12 hour shifts that firefighters with childcare responsibilities are so fearful of and opposed to.

Additional productive hours: These have been achieved with previous changes to the station routines and the re-negotiation of the rest periods in 2007. These changes and the willingness of staff have meant that operational crews have consistently exceeded workloads set i.e. HSA targets. Some Fire & Rescue Services are now experiencing difficulties with community safety commitments since they have introduced later evening start and finish times. West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service after recently introducing a longer a day shift, have proposed a return to a 6 pm start & finish time and have tabled the same reasons to the FBU, put forward in 2005 during the Optimum Crewing negotiations.

Time available to attend Learning & Development at Winsford: staffing problems and day to day management of appliances are more attributable to these problems than start and finish times. Crews only attend these events a couple of times each year and L&D have not identified a need to increase the training day of crews and therefore we question, how this is seen as a reason to introduce 12 hour shifts. More productive training time could be made by the trainers travelling to stations rather than full crews travelling to the centre. Extending the working day will also impede availability of crews to attend events in the evening which facilitate joint training with RDS firefighters i.e. cluster exercises.

Ability to introduce more flexible working: A change from one rigid shift pattern to another is not going to improve this situation and start and finish times are not the answer to this problem. A more imaginative approach is required to solve the problems that are inherent in any 24/7. For instance; we have already accommodated flexible working requests from two female firefighters within the current start and finish times.

The changes introduced in 2005 and again in 2007 through the previous negotiated agreements have already identified a number of efficiency gains, both financial and productive. These gains have not been achieved in the majority of other Fire & Rescue Services. For example; Reduced staffing levels, rostered leave, attendance at development events off duty, medicals and management meetings on rota days, removal of the beds, a buffer system to cover short term absences, removal of the ability to take back time in lieu of overtime, annual leave entitlement linked to sickness levels, these are all matters that were negotiated into the current agreement in return for the maintenance of the current start and finish times.

Birchwood Community Fire Station.

Birchwood opened in 1980 and under the old standards of fire cover was classed as B, C and D risk, which meant an attendance of one pump within 5 minutes, with a second pump within 8 minutes. However, Birchwood never enjoyed that level of cover. In the mid-1980s the risks were re-classified to C and D with special risk. This meant that attendance times were one pump within 8 – 10 minutes and an increased pre-determined attendance to special risks.

Birchwood has always had one whole-time pump and has satisfied the re-classified standards. The second pump for two-pump incidents (most property fires) normally comes from Warrington and Birchwood makes up the third pump to most three-pump incidents in Warrington, such as the Town Centre, Warrington General Hospital and other large risks.

The new Cheshire Standards allow a response time of fifteen minutes for the first appliance (5 – 7 minutes longer) and no specified time for the second appliance in medium risk areas. This is the LOWEST standard in the North West of England. Merseyside's response is one appliance in six minutes the second in eleven, Greater Manchester is one in seven and two in nine minutes, Lancashire is one in ten and two in thirteen and Cumbria, a less populated and more rural area than Cheshire, aims for one in ten minutes and two in fifteen.

Birchwood has a residential population of 42,000 and forms part of the busy urban area of Warrington, with a population of over 200,000. Besides the risk to residents in their own homes, we have two major motorways, a COMAH site, the busy Manchester to Liverpool railway, the Manchester Ship Canal, Risley Prison, hotels, a large shopping mall and industrial and commercial premises of all descriptions.

The FBU strongly oppose this proposal because we are not convinced the case has been made to remove full time fire cover from Birchwood. The delays of at least 5 minutes will undoubtedly increase the risk to life at both residential premises, business premises and at road traffic collisions. This proposal will mean longer attendance times at night and as most life-threatening fires happen at night time this would leave the public at greater risk. CF&RS's web site (kid's zone) states it takes only 3 minutes for a fire to develop into a serious incident.

The case for change is flawed on the basis that comparison operational activity levels are being made against the two busiest day crewed stations. These stations support each other in terms of fire cover backup and the possibility of these being upgraded to 24/7 shift station has been recently considered.

In line with our comments above no assessment has been made regarding the additional benefits to community safety, fire prevention and fire protection the current whole time status brings to the Birchwood community. The removal of wholetime fire cover during the evening and at night with the loss of 10 firefighter posts will not only reduce the emergency intervention but also the prevention activities currently undertaken.

We do not believe the case has been made that the risk to life and property in the area has decreased and no evidence has been produced. FSEC modelling should be used to predict the increased risk to life with the slower response times. This would then give a more informed view on which to make a decision.

Equality & Diversity

The FBU are supportive that CF&RS aims to become an 'excellent' Authority under the Equality Framework for local Government. We recognise the Service has raised awareness amongst staff, despite some previous unsuccessful initiatives i.e. E-learning module. The Service needs to build on this increased awareness and ensure that staff fully understand the legal obligations as well as the moral obligations placed on public bodies. If CF&RS are to achieve an excellent rating in this area, then E&D training needs to be mainstreamed as health and safety was a number of years ago. The same resources need to be given to equality impact assessments as was the case with risk assessments if these are expected to be equally suitable and sufficient. Currently far too many impact assessments are returned stating policies have no equality issues or a full impact assessment is not required. We believe that this is the case due to the manager responsible, either not possessing the required level of understanding or the system is seen as far too complex. We believe worsening duty systems will put off women from joining the Fire Service and our female wholtime members have indicated they are certainly opposed to the introduction of 12 hour shifts.

Flexible Rostering

It is difficult for the FBU to comment as no clear vision with regard to community needs has been provided by the Service.

The requirements to change the duty system have not been identified in the IRMP and whatever duty system is proposed needs to comply with '*Section 4 Part A – Hours of Duty and Duty Systems National Scheme of Conditions of Service*'. We would emphasise paragraph 3(4) "*It should have regard to the special circumstances of individual employees and be family friendly*".

We would re-iterate our observations to the 12 hour shift proposal particularly our comments regarding the Optimum Crewing review and the flexible working requests that were introduced under the current duty system arrangements. The FBU brokered a solution to these previous flexible working requests. We would welcome a proposal that would allow more flexibility for staff, however we are sceptical that this proposal is more about supporting the introduction of 12 hour shifts. Our members are also concerned that the proposed stand-in policy will limit the current flexibility regarding stand-ins and coupled with the inability to book floating leave our members are faced with a less family friendly situation.

Hydraulic Platforms

The FBU do not support this proposal and again we question on what evidence is this proposal to cut the front line emergency response service based.

We take issue with the statement within the IRMP that Stockton Heath hydraulic platform is already crewed by RDS staff at night. The hydraulic platform is staffed by wholtime firefighters working the day crewed system. The RDS pump struggles to be maintained on the run without the need of RDS availability to ensure the availability of a HP in the Warrington area.

Our primary concern is that this proposal is building in a delay of at least 5 minutes in the response times of the Aerial Platforms. This delay could have serious consequences as far as a life saving appliance, delay the implementation of a safe system of work for firefighters at an incident and reduce the efficient working of the appliance. Delays of five minutes can make the difference between saving and losing a building to fire and increases the difficulties with gaining access to effect rescues and to set up as a water tower.

Currently CF&RS provide 3 aerial appliances with 24/7 availability, however by crewing the appliances by RDS this would no longer be the case in East Cheshire and Warrington. Cornwall recently experienced the consequences of the loss of an aerial appliance.

We have many concerns regarding the training and assessment that is needed to maintain competence in the case of hydraulic platform operators and question how this will be achieved under this proposal. We wish to see evidence that such a proposal has been achieved successfully in any other Fire & Rescue Service.

Increasingly new buildings are being constructed of light weight materials and at heights much above the capabilities of the Services ladders and using aerial appliance is the only effective and safe way to deal with fires in these types of buildings.

Very often where an aerial appliance has been effective at a fire, the financial savings from the reduced fire damage can be in excess of the savings that this proposal will realise.

Under the working at height regulations, working from height should be avoided and aerial appliances offer a safer method than ladders. Therefore increasing use should be made of the aerial appliances at incidents across the county, however Incident Commanders will be more reluctant to call upon these appliances with the proposed delay to response times.

We believe this proposal is purely financial based and not by risk assessment of life and property. The proposal within IRMP6 was to introduce combined aerial rescue platforms (CARPs) and although there are inherent problems with that proposal, it would have meant the appliances would have been crewed with wholetime firefighters. The CARPs proposal has been dropped on the basis that the costs became prohibitive and this is seen as a cheaper option.

Review of local management arrangements

CF&RS have already reduced the number of crew managers on 2 pump stations and we can not see the scope to reduce the numbers further. We are already over reliant on temporary promotions and firefighters volunteering to act up to cover short term gaps. Some of the most risk critical decisions are made by this level of management and a number of firefighter fatalities have occurred at incidents with this level of incident command. Far too often, we have situations where individuals are tasked with incident command without the necessary training/development and experience. This proposal will greatly increase this situation and therefore we are opposed to a reduction of supervisory managers at operational stations.

Currently many experienced firefighters are unwilling to accept the additional responsibility of acting up and the fear of getting it wrong, coupled with being paid development pay and losing their CPD payments on temporary promotion.

Should you require further clarification regarding the points raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact a Brigade Official.

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