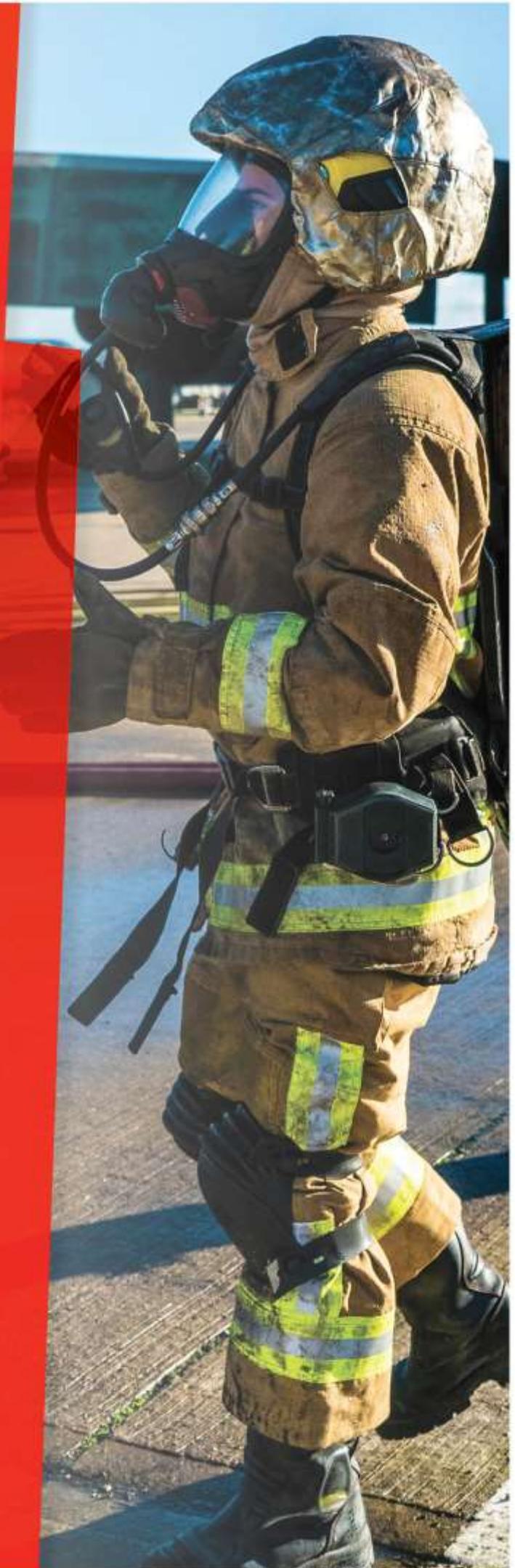




Cheshire
Fire Authority



2022-2023 Draft Annual Action Plan

Introducing a Day-Crewing Duty
System at Wilmslow Fire Station:
Supporting Information

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Introducing a Day Crewing System at Wilmslow Fire Station

Background

Since 2010 Wilmslow fire station has operated a Nucleus Duty System to provide 24/7 cover. The system uses a combination of both wholetime and on-call staff. Wholetime (full time) staff work at the station between 7am and 7pm and they respond to emergencies within 90 seconds of notification. Overnight cover (7pm to 7am) is provided by on-call staff, who are part-time firefighters that live or work near to the fire station. They are alerted by pager and then travel to the station to respond to emergencies within five minutes of notification.

Recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters is challenging in Wilmslow. Currently staff numbers are low and the team can only crew the fire engine for 12% of the time overnight. The Authority ensures availability of a fire engine in Wilmslow 99% of the time by bringing in supporting resources from elsewhere in Cheshire, so is reliant on the availability of surplus resources and the willingness of staff to undertake overtime.

Introduction of a Day Crewing Duty System

The Authority commissioned a review in 2019/20 to explore alternative crewing options and identify the optimum solution for Wilmslow. The findings were consulted upon through the Authority's [Integrated Risk Management Plan](#) (IRMP) and on 1 July 2020 the Authority decided that Wilmslow should change to Day Crewing (You can view the details of this meeting [here](#))

Day crewing is proportionate to local risks and demands in Wilmslow and operates successfully at other locations across Cheshire. The fire station would still operate 24/7 and would be staffed by full time firefighters during weekdays (9am-7pm) and on some weekend daytimes. The firefighters are paid a supplement to provide guaranteed on-call fire cover outside of these hours to achieve 24/7 cover.

For Wilmslow, it would mean that the fire engine was available 24/7 and provision of on-call cover overnight would be guaranteed in a sustainable way without the need to depend on supporting resources from other locations across Cheshire. The downside is that the average response times in Wilmslow could increase by around 47 seconds. Importantly, the fire engine would still arrive in time to meet the Authority's response standard, which is to attend life risk incidents within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions.

To operate Day Crewing the Authority would provide housing within 5 minutes of the fire station for the firefighters, so they can respond when on call. The cost of buying the housing would be covered by the annual revenue savings from the new duty system. The Day Crewing system costs are around £200k less than the current system.

More information is provided in the FAQ section over the page.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 Why change to a Day Crewing system?

The current Nucleus system at Wilmslow sees firefighters on station during daytime (07:00 – 19:00), with on-call cover provided outside of these hours. On-call firefighters need to live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond to emergencies when alerted via a pager.

While the Nucleus system works well in other fire stations across Cheshire, the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters has long been a challenge in Wilmslow, despite the Authority's efforts to increase the number of on-call firefighters at the station. These difficulties mean that it is not always possible for the on-call crew to be available to respond. In fact, during 2020 overnight cover was provided by on-call crews for only 12% of the time.

To ensure the fire engine at Wilmslow remains available to respond, the Authority sends in supporting resources from elsewhere in Cheshire. This is not a sustainable arrangement and relies on the availability of support and the willingness of staff to undertake overtime.

The introduction of a Day Crewing system removes the need for supporting resources and provides guaranteed on-call cover at Wilmslow.

Q2 Why is the Authority consulting on the change to Day Crewing at Wilmslow when they have already approved the change?

During the original consultation the modelling was based on the assumption that the firefighters houses would be adjacent to the fire station. This depended on the development of Wilmslow Fire Station into a multi-agency hub, working with Cheshire Constabulary and the North West Ambulance Service. The development of this hub would have released land to enable the construction of housing adjacent to the station for day crewing firefighters.

Ultimately, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the use of the land that was intended to suit all parties within the negotiation. Therefore, the Authority is proposing to continue with the introduction of a Day Crewing duty system at Wilmslow but is looking to achieve this by purchasing housing within 5 minutes of the station. This would mean that the predicted average response time could increase by around 47 seconds. The increase in response time would not be significant and would not impact on achievement of the Authority's response standards but the Authority felt it was still appropriate to inform local residents and seek their views.

Q3 What will the difference be to response times?

The Authority uses sophisticated computer software to model its response times based on historical incident data. It is important to note that this is predictive and actual response times may differ, for example depending on whether crews are

responding to emergencies from the fire station or from a different location out in the local community.

For the current duty system the predicted overall average response time to incidents in Wilmslow is **6 minutes 59 seconds**

For the proposed duty system this increases by 47 seconds to **7 minutes 46 seconds**. There would also be a difference in response times at particular times throughout the week due to a change in the times when firefighters would be on station or providing on-call cover from their homes. The affected periods include weekdays between 07:00-09:00 and some weekend daytimes between 07:00-19:00. The average response time during these hours is expected to be **8 minutes 43 seconds**. This is an increase of around 2.5 minutes over the current predicted average response time.

It's important to note that the fire engine should still continue to achieve the Authority's response standards in Wilmslow, which is to attend life-risk incidents within ten minutes, on at least 80% of occasions.

Q4 How will the housing be paid for?

Under the proposal, the Authority would purchase nine properties near to Wilmslow Fire Station. This would be done using borrowing. The introduction of a day crewing duty system will result in a year-on-year revenue saving over the current duty system, of c. £200k. Given the favourable interest rates currently available to the Authority, it is expected that the savings from changing the duty system would cover the cost of borrowing to purchase the housing.

Q5 Why can you not change Wilmslow to a Wholetime fire station?

Ultimately, the Authority needs to balance its resources against risks and demands. These varying demands are reflected in the different types of duty system used across Cheshire. The table below shows the average demand by duty system.

Average annual mobilisations in 2020 for fire engines crewed by each duty system (includes mobilisations within station area and elsewhere):

Duty System	Operational Demand
Wholetime 24/7	697
Day Crewing / Nucleus	471
On-Call 24/7	175

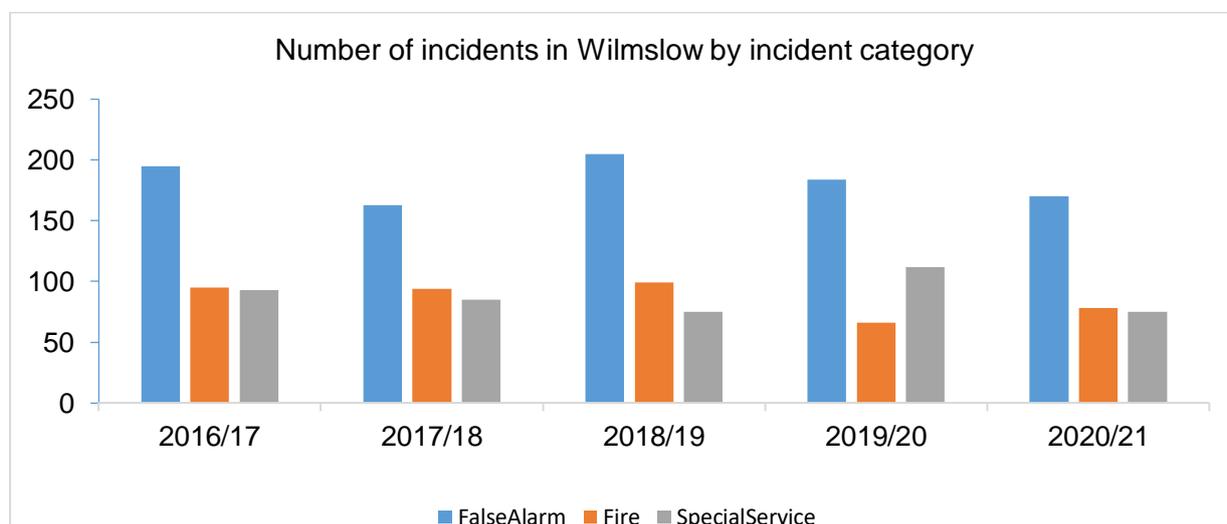
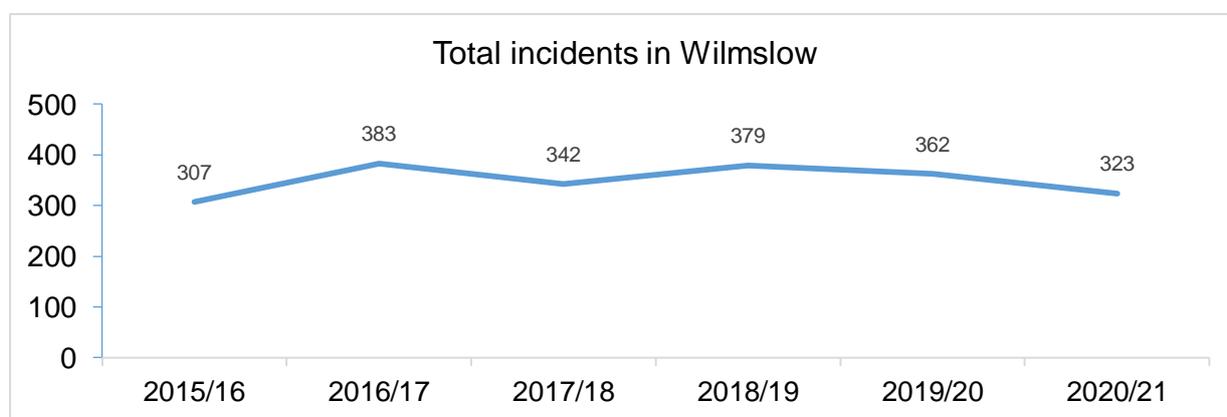
In comparison, the Wilmslow fire engine was mobilised on 425 occasions during 2020 (this includes activity both within and outside of the Wilmslow station area). This places it below average for all duty systems except on-call. Given the demand at Wilmslow, the introduction of a wholetime duty system cannot be justified as this would not be an efficient or effective use of our resources.

Q7 Have the risks in Wilmslow changed?

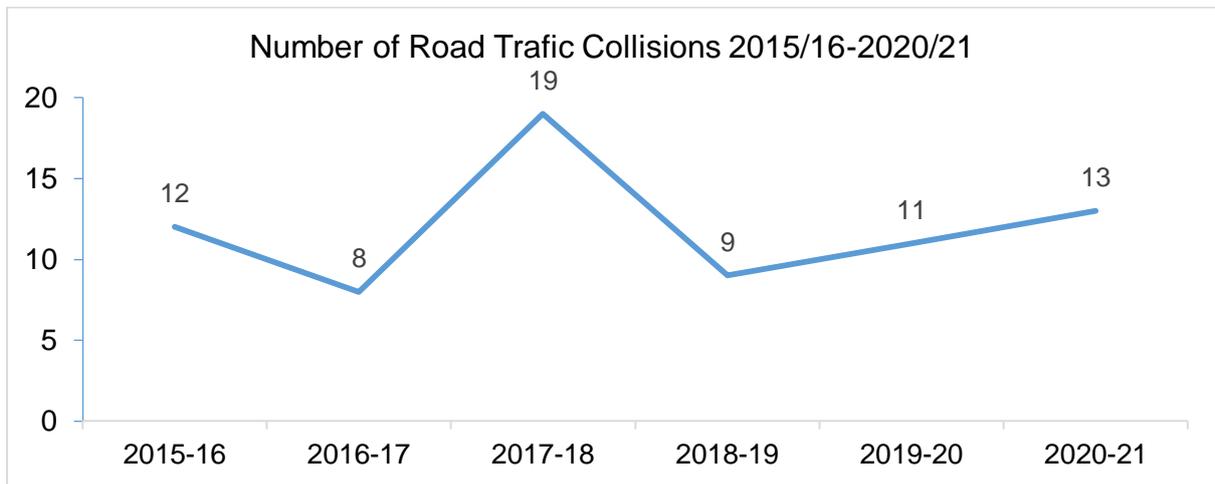
The charts below show the total number of incidents within the Wilmslow area over the last five years. During this period there were an average of 358 incidents per year and the number of incidents has remained fairly consistent year on year.

The most common type of incident is false alarms (average 183 per year). The number of fires (average 86 per year) are broadly consistent, as are special service calls (88 per year). Special service calls are non-fire incidents, such as road traffic collisions (RTCs), rescues of trapped persons, assisting other agencies or flooding.

The chart below does show an increase in special service calls during 2019/2020, which was in part as a result of the widespread flooding across Cheshire East during summer 2019.



The next chart shows the number of Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) in the Wilmslow area attended by firefighters over the past five years. On average firefighters will attend 12 RTCs per year. While this number can fluctuate, apart from a spike in 2017/18 the other years have shown the number of RTCs attended either around or below average.



It can therefore be concluded that the overall risks within Wilmslow have remained fairly consistent over the past five years.

Q8 What about the risk from Manchester Airport?

This was considered during the course of the initial consultation on the IRMP. Response to an airport emergency is provided jointly by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and the airport's own fire service. Wholtime crewing is therefore not essential to providing this response which would continue to be provided under both the existing crewing arrangements and Day Crewing.

Q9 What will happen to the staff at Wilmslow Fire Station?

The new duty system would require 9 full time staff who will receive additional pay to fulfil both the wholtime and on call roles at Wilmslow.

The current on call crew would no longer be required. Following a recruitment freeze there are currently 6 staff providing on-call cover. Some of these are dual-role staff (their primary employment is as a wholtime firefighter in Cheshire or at another fire and rescue service), while others provide cover solely as an on-call firefighter. In addition there are 12 wholtime firefighters at Wilmslow.

The Authority aims to avoid redundancies and will engage with affected staff and trade unions to explore all available options. For example, the staff could work the new duty system; transfer to another station or move to a different role.