

# **SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**



## **Supporting Information for the Retained Policy Development Panel**

### *The role of Retained Duty System Firefighters*

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## Introduction

This document has been prepared to provide an overview regarding the role of Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters, within the context of the Review's Terms of Reference. It also identifies suggested 'areas for exploration' for the Policy Development Panel to discuss with the Expert Witness Group, and other attendees, at its meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

The terms of reference agreed by the PDP for examining the role of RDS firefighters are as follows:

1. To capture and record details of the current role of Retained firefighters in Suffolk
2. To analyse the community safety activities in which Retained firefighters actually engage across the county e.g. number of emergency incidents of various types attended, number of Home Fire Safety Checks completed
3. To analyse the number of information-gathering visits that are carried out by Retained staff, to high-risk premises, under section 7.2(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.
4. To analyse the percentage of time Retained fire appliances are not available to attend emergency incidents – either due to mechanical defects or shortage of riders **(DEFERRED TO 'RECRUITMENT' PDP MEETING)**
5. To examine the extent to which the introduction of three Full Time Equivalent posts has contributed to increasing the number of emergencies attended by Retained fire appliances **(DEFERRED TO 'RECRUITMENT' PDP MEETING)**
6. To examine whether the role of all Retained firefighters should encompass their involvement in proactive community safety activity
7. To examine the expectations on, and workload of, Retained officers
8. To examine whether Retained firefighters would, generally, be able to commit more time to their work for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service
9. To examine whether Retained firefighters should continue to be available to respond to the wide range of emergency incidents that they are currently expected to attend
10. To assess whether the role of Retained firefighters, in selected areas of the county, should be broadened to include availability for co-responding duties, on a voluntary basis
11. To examine the appetite for using selected Retained fire stations as shared community facilities, and to assess their suitability for this purpose
12. To make recommendations associated with necessary changes to the role of Retained firefighters in Suffolk

## Background Information

The traditional role of RDS firefighters involved their responding to emergency incidents. Whilst this role was, and remains, critically important, it was rather narrow in terms of not recognising the benefits associated with proactive community safety activity.

The resolution of a national fire strike in 2003 was based upon increased pay for firefighters being linked to a substantial modernisation programme for the British fire service. A number of aspects of this modernisation programme have had significant implications for RDS staff:

1. A new, statutory duty to promote fire safety – through introduction of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
2. Introduction of the 'firefighter-is-a-firefighter' concept i.e. parity of status and conditions of service between Wholetime and Retained firefighters
3. Replacement of the traditional Rank structure with 7 Roles (Firefighter, Crew Manager, Watch Manager, Station Manager, Group Manager, Area Manager and Brigade Manager), comprising accredited National Occupational Standards, built into Role Maps and linked to relevant Personal Qualities and Attributes.
4. Revised, nationally-agreed arrangements for the selection, training and development of all firefighters - within an Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), linked to the Personal Qualities and Attributes and Role Maps.

In addition, the broader public service reform agenda has recognised the important contribution that the fire and rescue can make in improving community safety and wellbeing in areas of activity beyond its statutory role. For example, the service runs a number of very successful proactive road safety initiatives (*Learn and Live, Too Young to Die and Roadkill*) and is also involved in youth diversion initiatives, such as *Firebreak*.

Essentially, the above changes have led to a position where RDS staff are expected to support all aspects of the expanded role of the fire and rescue service. In principle, this approach is absolutely sound. In practice, however, it does create some real challenges regarding the long-term sustainability of the RDS service in Suffolk, and these will be explored in detail as the PDP review progresses.

## Role of an RDS firefighter

RDS staff in Suffolk work against three of the Role Maps referred to above: Firefighter, Crew Manager and Watch Manager. Each of these Role Maps include a number of National Occupational standards (NOS's), which reflect both the proactive and reactive aspects of the role to which they relate. For example, the Firefighter Role Map includes the following NOS's:

1. FF1 Inform and educate your community to improve awareness of safety matters
2. FF2 Take responsibility for effective performance
3. FF3 Save and preserve endangered life
4. FF4 Resolve operational incidents
5. FF5 Protect the environment from the effects of hazardous materials
6. FF6 Support the effectiveness of operational response
7. FF7 Support the development of colleagues in the workplace
8. FF8 Contribute to safety solutions to minimise risks to your community

## 9. FF9 Drive, manoeuvre and redeploy fire service vehicles

The above Standards are underpinned by the following Personal Qualities and Attributes, which Firefighters are expected to possess in order to demonstrate their suitability for the Role:

1. Understand and respect diversity and adopt a fair and ethical approach to others
2. Be open to change and actively seek to support it
3. Maintain a confident and resilient attitude in highly challenging situations
4. Work effectively with others, both within the fire and rescue service and in the community
5. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing
6. Be committed and able to develop self and others
7. Understand, recall, apply and adapt relevant information in an organised, safe and systematic way
8. Maintain an active awareness of the environment to promote safe and effective working
9. Adopt a conscientious and proactive approach to work to achieve and maintain excellent standards.

The NOS's contained in the Role Maps to which RDS staff work translate into the following key activities i.e. those activities which require RDS staff to have 'contact' time with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service:

- Community Safety - Emergency Response
- Community Safety – Prevention through community education
- Inspection of high-risk premises to gather information for emergency response purposes
- Training
- Equipment maintenance and testing
- Administration – particularly for Crew and Watch Managers

The issue of training for RDS staff will be addressed later in the PDP review process. In terms of the other key activities, the following information is provided for consideration by PDP members:

## **Community Safety - Emergency Response**

Activity levels across RDS fire stations in Suffolk vary widely. In 2007/8, for example (see table overleaf), the number of calls to emergencies ranged from 27 (Orford) to 355 (Newmarket). This range of activity levels illustrates the extent to which the nature of risk varies across the county.

## **Numbers of incidents attended by RDS 07/08**

Station	Incidents	Station	Incidents
Aldeburgh	61	Leiston	79
Bungay	53	Melford	116
Brandon	274	Mildenhall	250
Beccles	127	Nayland	48
Bury (RDS)	242	Needham	131
Clare	42	Normanshurst (RDS)	182
Clifton Rd	304	Newmarket (RDS)	255
Debenham	65	Orford	27
Eye	111	Princes St (RDS)	65
Elmswell	116	Southwold	82
Felixstowe (RDS)	238	Stradbroke	49
Framlingham	58	Saxmundham	92
Hadleigh	154	Stowmarket	260
Holbrook	99	Sudbury	334
Haverhill	253	Woodbridge	212
Headquarters (RDS)	73	Wickhambrook	55
Halesworth	111	Wrentham	61
Ixworth	113		

Whilst certain emergency response specialisms (line rescue and specialist response to chemical incidents, for example) are, either, not undertaken by RDS personnel at all, or are undertaken from selected RDS stations only, all RDS firefighters are expected to be available to respond to, and deal with, a wide range of operational firefighting and rescue incidents. For example:

- Firefighting in houses
- Firefighting in high-rise buildings
- Firefighting on ships
- Firefighting in industrial and commercial buildings
- Fires in motor vehicles
- Aircraft firefighting
- Rescues from crashed cars
- Rescues from crashed large good vehicles
- Rescues from crashed trains
- Rescue from crashed aircraft
- Rescues from confined spaces (sewers, collapsed trenches etc)
- Rescues from collapsed structures
- Rescues from height
- Rescues of persons trapped in machinery (lifts, escalators, industrial plant)
- Rescue from water
- Rescue of large animals in distress

This is despite the fact that, in reality, the likelihood of firefighters from certain parts of the county actually attending certain of these incident types is negligible.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 1: Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect all RDS staff to be available to respond to the current, wide range of operational incidents?***

## **Community Safety – Prevention through community education**

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the Fire Authority in Suffolk to promote fire safety. This work is currently carried out by both Wholetime and RDS firefighters.

Suffolk Fire Authority (Suffolk County Council) have also taken Powers under the Act to extend their road safety role beyond the statutory requirement to respond to road traffic collisions. In this respect, firefighters now take part in a number of proactive safety initiatives. Again, this work is carried out by both Wholetime and Retained personnel.

Primary prevention activities include:

- Home fire safety checks
- Road traffic collision reduction presentations
- Juvenile Fire-Setter Counselling

Whilst the above activities are, both, very important and highly-effective, they do not fit with the 'traditional' role of an RDS firefighter. As a result, there may be a mismatch between why people are motivated to join the Retained service (to respond to emergencies in their communities) and the nature of the work they are expected to do having joined. It is also the case that limited need exists for proactive community safety work in certain parts of the county covered by Retained fire stations.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 2: Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect all RDS staff to support the Service's proactive community safety programme?***

## **Inspection of High-Risk Premises**

It is a requirement under section 7.2(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 for fire authorities to make effective arrangements for obtaining Operational Risk Information needed for the purpose of protecting life and property in the event of fires at particular premises.

SFRS has a high-risk inspection programme, where within a station area it is a requirement for crews to visit premises, update plans and provide information to populate a SFRS high-risk premises database. This information is then available to be provided to crews who subsequently attend fires and other emergencies at these premises.

This work is carried out by RDS staff within their weekly, 2-hour drill period. Depending on the location of the station, inspections are carried out at a rate of approximately one per-quarter. This frequency is constrained, in part, by limited time, rather than limited need to carry out 7.2(d) visits.

Experience from high-profile incidents confirms that it is essential for firefighters to have access to accurate information about buildings and other risks when attending

incidents involving them. Because of the time constraints on RDS staff, however, a question exists as to whether these staff actually need to undertake the visits themselves.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 3: Is it necessary for high-risk premises inspections (7.2(d)) to be included in the work programme of RDS staff?***

## **Equipment maintenance and testing**

In order to ensure the operational readiness of fire engines and equipment used by RDS staff, it is common practice across the Service for them to spend time testing and maintaining such equipment.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 4: Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect RDS staff to engage in the testing and maintenance of fire engines and operational equipment?***

## **Administration – particularly for Crew and Watch Managers**

Due to an increase in the number of systems put in place to support the effective management of RDS staff, the amount of contact time spent by these staff in dealing with administration – particularly when in managerial roles – has increased significantly over time. Whilst those involved receive payment for carrying out administrative work, the time involved impacts on their ability to meet domestic and professional commitments beyond the Retained fire service.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 5: To what extent does the time commitment associated with administration impact on the viability of RDS staff remaining in their role?***

## **Community First Responders (CFR)**

A CFR scheme is made up of groups of volunteers who, within the community in which they live or work, have been trained to provide life-saving, first aid treatment until an emergency ambulance arrives. Such schemes are particularly helpful in rural counties such as Suffolk, where ambulance travel times can be extensive.

Over time, an argument has emerged that Retained firefighters in outlying rural areas across the country should be included in schemes such as CFR. The argument is based upon the fact that RDS staff are equipped to respond on an emergency basis and have many of the generic skills required of CFR responders.

A number of such schemes have been introduced across the UK. However, current legal opinion is that firefighters cannot be contractually bound to take part in these schemes as associated activities do not fit within their Role Map. As a result, at this time, any such scheme in Suffolk would need to be introduced on a voluntary basis.

The Fire Brigades' Union have concerns over the introduction of CFR-type schemes – particularly in connection with the potential for them to negatively impact on the availability of RDS staff to respond to fires and other non-medical emergencies.

Notwithstanding some of the difficulties associated, in considering the role of RDS staff as part of the PDP review it is felt that the potential for using their availability and expertise in this way should be considered.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 6: Should an approach be made to the East of England Ambulance Service, regarding the introduction of a voluntary CFR scheme at selected RDS fire stations across Suffolk?***

## **Community Facilities**

Community safety is a key role for SFRS, educating people to ensure that they take the basic safety steps to reduce the risk of fire in their home or workplace. SFRS work hard to promote fire safety through outreach work and training programmes with schools, community groups, businesses and other organisations. In addition to going out to the community, we want to encourage the community to come to us, to learn more about the fire and rescue service and the work we do.

A community fire station is a fully operational fire station, and also offers a range of community facilities including meeting rooms, which can be hired out by local groups or businesses. This approach extends the role of a fire station to becoming a 'community resource'.

A Community Fire Station allows the Service to become more accessible to the public - raising the profile of our community work, helping in developing partnerships with other agencies and assisting in extending our work with young people. By offering facilities such as meeting rooms and office space, it helps us to reach members of the community that we previously may not have been reaching from within our target groups.

***AREA FOR EXPLORATION 7: Should selected RDS fire stations be established as shared, community facilities?***

## **Areas for exploration**

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 1:** Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect all RDS staff to be available to respond to the current, wide range of operational incidents?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 2:** Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect all RDS staff to support the Service's proactive community safety programme?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 3:** Is it necessary for high-risk premises inspections (7.2(d)) to be included in the work programme of RDS staff?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 4:** Is it necessary, or reasonable, to expect RDS staff to engage in the testing and maintenance of fire engines and operational equipment?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 5:** To what extent does the time commitment associated with administration impact on the viability of RDS staff remaining in their role?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 6:** Should an approach be made to the East of England Ambulance Service, regarding the introduction of a voluntary CFR scheme at selected RDS fire stations across Suffolk?

**AREA FOR EXPLORATION 7:** Should selected RDS fire stations be established as shared, community facilities?

### ***Supporting information***

[Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004](#)

[The Fire Service Role Maps](#)

[Off the run \(Report into the RDS by FBU\)](#)

[Co responders, Working for East Anglian Ambulance Trust](#)

[FBU policy document – co responders](#)

[RFU MOU for co responders](#)

[Article on co responders](#)

[Isle of Wight co responder partnership](#)

[Cheshire co responder partnership](#)