

SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



Supporting Information for the Retained Policy Development Panel

The Recruitment and availability of Retained Duty System Firefighters

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Introduction

This document has been prepared to provide an overview regarding the recruitment 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 15th December 2008.

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

1. Examine the mechanism for setting establishment levels at Retained fire stations
2. 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
3. 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
4. To examine the current approach to recruiting Retained firefighters in Suffolk
5. To identify and examine areas of the county in which recruitment of retained firefighters has been particularly difficult
6. To explore issues that may impact on the Service's ability to recruit into the Retained service in the future e.g. demographic change
7. To identify national good practice for recruiting into the Retained service e.g. targeted recruitment initiatives, incentive schemes etc
8. To consider the CLG report: *The Retained Duty System: A survey of local employers*, in order to identify mechanisms for encouraging local employers to release staff to undertake firefighting duties
9. To make recommendations intended to improve arrangements for recruitment into the Retained service

Staffing levels for Retained Fire Stations

Emergency cover provision is based on the historic principle that all fire appliances and stations are available to respond to incidents 24 hours per day, 7 days a week no matter how many or how few calls a station receives. SFRS operate on the principle that all appliances at Retained stations must respond to any incident within 5 minutes of receiving a call. It is also a requirement – although not absolute (see next section) – for firefighting appliances to be crewed by a minimum of four staff.

In order to meet the above requirements, Retained fire station establishment levels (number of staff employed to work at a station) are, nominally, set at 11 for single appliance stations and 21 for multi-appliance stations. This approach provides for an overall Retained establishment of 444 personnel, and associated budgets (pay, training, provision of uniform and fire kit etc) are built on this basis.

There are, however, a number of difficulties associated with this approach:

1. Historical assumption that all staff will provide full cover.

The establishment benchmarks were set on against the principle that all RDS firefighters were able to provide full cover i.e. 168 hours per week. In reality a significant proportion of retained staff can not provide full cover. They provide what is termed '¾'cover, which is being available for only part of the 168 hours. The proportion of Retained staff providing ¾ cover is currently 44%, and rising.

2. Full cover requirement has reduced from 168 to 120 hours per week.

An outcome of the 2004 pay agreement was that the definition of "Full Cover" in terms of hours was reduced from 168 to 120 hours per week. Over time as traditional full cover personnel have left the service, this 48 hour gap has necessitate additional recruitment of RDS firefighters in order to maintain appliance availability.

As a result of the above factors more people have been employed in an attempt to keep appliances on the run. The number of Retained staff currently employed is 462.

Despite the Service being 'over-established' against an agreed figure of 444 staff, almost all retained stations experience periods when appliances are not available to respond to emergencies, due to a shortage of staff ('Crew Deficient').

Analysis of the problems is difficult because of way the current availability system works. Individual; firefighters have to physically go to the station and change their availability and report any changes to Fire Control that result in the appliance being short crewed. These arrangements are both ineffective and inefficient for both the service and individual as;

- It does not allow Retained staff to update their availability in 'real-time'.
- Retained staff have to physically travel to stations, in order to update their availability.
- Lack of a permanent means with which to capture and analyse data associated with the actual time Retained staff are available to attend emergencies.

A range of technical solutions are now available to overcome these problems through, for example, the use of mobile phone and Internet technology

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 1: Should the Service introduce an electronic availability system, to enable RDS staff to remotely update their status in 'real-time'; and to provide detailed management information regarding the availability of individual personnel?

Although detailed analysis is not possible at present, it is clear that, currently, there is not a sufficiently strong correlation between the nominal establishment levels set for RDS stations and the availability of fire appliances to respond to emergencies i.e. even where stations are over-established, they are not achieving 100% availability. This suggests the need for a more sophisticated approach in setting establishment levels for RDS stations.

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 2: Should establishment levels be set more flexibly – within budget ‘control totals’ – to reflect the risk profile of station areas and the amount of cover that available staff can provide?

Arrangements for Addressing Shortages of Crew

In order to mitigate the impact of current arrangements of not achieving 100% availability, we have these arrangements in place to improve availability.

Crewing with Three Firefighters

Where an appliance only has a crew of 3 Fire Control will only grant permission for this appliance to mobilise to risks within its own turnout area (this will be backed up by the next nearest pump with a full crew). In addition, a flexi duty officer will also be mobilised. In the case of RTC's all members of the short crew must be trained hydraulic rescue equipment operators.

En-route to an incident and upon arrival, the crew commander of the short crew should be considering in their risk assessment, what other appliances are attending, their anticipated time of arrival, and what tasks can be carried out safely.

The wearing of breathing apparatus (BA) or committing into a premises affected by smoke or fire is **NOT ALLOWED** due to requirements placed on these types of incidents by legislation.

It is anticipated that crews of 3 will carry out passive activities and other information gathering tasks, rather than aggressive fire fighting tactics or rescues.

It is reasonably foreseeable that at life critical incidents, human instinct to save a life, moral and peer pressure will place an enormous amount of responsibility on the officer in charge to act, causing them and the crew to act outside a safe system of work.

Within the accident and near-miss database there were not any incidents on the 81 occasions that crews of 3 were mobilised, where a crew of three was a contributing factor to either a near miss or accident.

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 3: Should the Service cease the practice of mobilising front-line pumping appliances with less than four crew?

Use of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Posts

The FTE system, which has been in place for 3 years, it was instigated to support the RDS in areas where staffing levels at certain times of the day was compromising the availability of fire appliances and hence fire cover in the county. This additional resource is predominantly provided by whole-time firefighters, working additional hours, providing cover on ‘as-required’ basis, with some RDS firefighters also providing cover at another station to that of their home station when their availability and cover permits.

Financial provision for the FTE system equates, in financial terms, to the costs of 3 firefighter posts (£100K pa). A maximum of three FTE's are available for use five days per week (9-5pm, not including weekends).

Stations requiring FTE's must be crew deficient i.e. have less than 4 RDS staff available to respond. They must inform control of the times that they will be crew deficient and book an FTE through Fire Enquiries either via e mail or telephone during normal working hours. Only one FTE can be sent to a station to maintain a crew

Despite the use of FTE's appliances are off-the run for significant period of time. Calls into question whether arrangements are effective or provide value for money.

A study regarding frequency of supply of FTE's to station, compared to the number of times actually used in support of a fire call has been carried out. In the 8 month period the study has revealed that FTE's were used on 207 occasions. In return 21 fire calls were attended, this equates to a 10% return or an average of 1 call attended every 10 days. In comparison the quietest wholtime station on average would expect to attend 1 fire call per day, rising to the busiest of 4 calls per day.

A detailed breakdown of all fire calls that were supported by FTE's and appliance availability is included in Appendix A, B and C.

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 4: Should the financial resources currently being used to support FTE arrangements be used more flexibly to support improvements in RDS appliance availability and, potentially, other, proactive community safety activity?

Operational Demand

There is a wide variance between RDS stations on the number of calls that each station attends.

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		

All operational incidents are treated with the same importance, however the most serious call are to those where a life or lives are threatened by fire or by being trapped in a vehicle or by other means i.e. collapsed building.

Number of life/property threatening incidents 07/08 attended by SFRS

RTC's	Dwelling fires	Structural fires
162	412	727

The number of calls attended by each of our 35 stations varies depending on their location, with major centres of population generating the most calls. These are covered by wholetime staff with RDS support. The larger volumes of calls being attended by purely RDS staff are found to be in our small market towns, such as Mildenhall, Stowmarket and Sudbury. The lowest volume of calls are in our most rural areas e.g. Orford, which are at times the hardest stations to keep available 24/7.

Number of life/property threatening incidents attended by rural and market town RDS locations

Location	RTC's	Dwelling fires	Structural fires
Nayland	1	4	3
Orford	0	2	2
Stowmarket	7	8	4
Mildenhall	6	5	5

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 5: Should the Service continue to invest equal effort in attempting to achieve 100% availability on all RDS stations, or should resources be assigned on the basis of risk?

Recruitment

As identified at the previous PDP meeting there is a will and requirement for RDS firefighters to attend the full range of operational incidents and carry out the full role of a firefighter as detailed in the National Occupational Standards.

In order to fulfil the service requirements it is vital that SFRS ensures that the right numbers of skilled people are in the right place at the right time.

There are a number of barriers that restrict recruitment of RDS firefighters. These restrictions in some cases are individual's perception of the role of a firefighter, or that portrayed through the media.

Barriers

- Failing to attract suitable people to apply
- Applying but not meeting the standards applied to the recruitment process
- Primary employers not being prepared to release RDS
- The perception that it couldn't be a career for them
- The commitment required to become a firefighter
- The balance of home and primary employment with that of an RDS firefighter

These barriers can be overcome, thus releasing a far wider pool of potential people that could become an RDS firefighter.

Solutions

- Selected recruiting of key groups of people e.g. people working from home in remote rural areas
- Working with people for example, trying to equip them with the skills to pass the current or future selection tests
- Identification of business with the potential to supply people with potential for RDS firefighters
- Providing detailed information via face to face meetings and targeted recruitment campaigns

The current recruitment process of RDS firefighter is managed by the individual stations and relevant district manager, with recruitment taking place on a demand basis. This disjointed approach gives potential for inequality, duplication and increased costs.

Central recruitment for RDS work started 6 months ago, to review and re-engineer the processes for RDS recruitment; this covers both SFRS responsibility and that of CSD (service that provides HR transactional services to SFRS).

The aim of this process review is to improve consistency of standards applied to recruitment and remove duplication of work carried out across the County. Another aim of the work was to improve recruitment in terms of attraction strategies, and targeting recruitment of under represented groups. Work already completed includes re-design of the recruitment web pages, standardisation of advertising and job and person profiles.

The National Firefighter Selection (NFS) process tests whether people have the potential (once they have been developed) to work as firefighters across all duty systems. The Assessment Development Centre (ADC) processes test the potential of people to work in a wide range of managerial roles. Both processes involve participants taking part in a variety of role related and job simulation exercises whilst being observed by a team of trained assessors. Interviews, psychometric tests and written exercises are also used. These processes are objective and accurate and assess an individual's potential to perform safely and effectively in any particular role. NFS and ADCs help to ensure that recruitment and progression is relevant to the role, open and fair and reflects the fire & rescue service core values as expressed in the National Framework.

Recruitment of RDS and WDS firefighters (same 'role', according to the House of Lords judgement) must also be similarly undertaken application of the National Firefighters Selection Tests (NFST) for WDS personnel is robust and rigidly enforced. There is no similar test for RDS staff in SFRS, but the National Framework Document directs that the NFST must be applied across all duty systems. Such application has been trialled in a neighbouring FRS with only a 5% (of those who succeeded in the RDS selection test) subsequently passing the NFST. If the NFST in its current format is considered relevant, failure to introduce the NFST across all duties systems fundamentally introduces dual standards of selection for one supposedly equal role.

Most fire stations across the county have a full complement of RDS staff: however, availability of staff and therefore appliances can be limited, particularly during the day, as many RDS firefighters do not work in the area in which they live. This shortfall may be partially addressed by focusing on the recruitment of (specifically) day cover firefighters.

To increase establishment thus would undoubtedly improve appliance availability but would have implications in terms of recruitment, training, retention, salary costs and provision of PPE.

Area for exploration 6; To ensure consistency of approach, efficiency and to utilise the expertise of the human resource specialists, should SFRS move towards central recruitment function in order to challenge and overcome the real and perceived barriers to RDS recruitment?

Government Survey of Local Employers

A study, carried out by Central Government focused on the primary employment of RDS firefighters. While that generated a great deal of information about their employment patterns, it did not reveal much about the primary employers themselves, on whose support the Fire and Rescue Service is so reliant, in terms of the factors that motivate them to release their employees for RDS duties and the benefits they consider they gain from employing RDS firefighters. This survey was designed to fill that information gap.

Based on over 1,000 interviews, the results from this survey of current and former employers of RDS firefighters, and employers who have never employed or released RDS firefighters have proved very enlightening and challenge some preconceived ideas. In general there appear to be no insurmountable barriers to releasing staff for the Retained Duty System. Most current and former employers were enthusiastic when they released their first employee for RDS duties and largely happy with the experience. The survey revealed that generally there is very limited contact between employers and the Fire and Rescue Service and/or their local fire station

The main points can be summarised as;

- Contractually, almost all of them treat RDS firefighters in the same way as other staff.
- Ability to cover absences and maintain productivity is an issue
- RDS firefighters that are no longer employed are because of changes in the circumstances of the individual rather than as a result of a change of policy on the part of the organisation
- The majority of current and former employers would consider requests from staff for release for RDS duties in the future.
- Services should canvass local employers in the vicinity of fire stations
- Better communication between FRS and the employer would be welcomed by employers

Employers would like recognition or a show of gratitude from the Service for their support.

SFRS has mixed success in recruiting RDS staff, due largely to the largely rural nature of the county and changing social/work demographics. Recruitment campaigns lack coordination as local action tends to focus in one geographical area, when campaigns could more usefully and easily be generic. National best practise has identified that a Retained Liaison Officer provides;

- Support for RDS staff undertaking NFST
- Joined up/coordinated county wide recruitment campaigns
- Increased awareness of the RDS firefighter role within communities

- Can assess the likely impact of policy or decisions taken that directly affect the RDS service

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AREA FOR EXPLORATION 7; To Engage with members of the community and employers in promoting a career in the fire service, would a dedicated RDS support officer provide the support mechanisms for RDS and strengthen the links between RDS and SFRS and their primary employer, thus providing greater resilience?

Areas for Exploration

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 1: Should the Service introduce an electronic availability system, to enable RDS staff to remotely update their status in 'real-time'; and to provide detailed management information regarding the availability of individual personnel?

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 2: Should establishment levels be set more flexibly – within budget 'control totals' – to reflect the risk profile of station areas and the amount of cover that available staff can provide?

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 3: Should the Service cease the practice of mobilising front-line pumping appliances with less than four crew?

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 4: Should the financial resources currently being used to support FTE arrangements be used more flexibly to support improvements in RDS appliance availability and, potentially, other, proactive community safety activity?

AREA FOR EXPLORATION 5: Should the Service continue to invest equal effort in attempting to achieve 100% availability on all RDS stations, or should resources be assigned on the basis of risk?

Area for exploration 6; To ensure consistency of approach, efficiency and to utilise the expertise of the human resource specialists, should SFRS move towards central recruitment function in order to challenge and overcome the real and perceived barriers to RDS recruitment?

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Retained Crew Deficient Report

Actual Performance Vs Previous Year and Target

2007/08

Station	Actual Time Crew Deficient (Hours)	Previous Year Performance	Trend Against Previous Year (Improving/deteriorating)	Target Performance	Target Achieved/not achieved
Aldeburgh	135.83	96.41	Deteriorating	244.00	Achieved
Bungay	108.79	53.25	Deteriorating	10.00	Not Achieved
Brandon	127.92	133.49	Improving	204.00	Achieved
Beccles	6.22	8.59	Improving	13.00	Achieved
Bury St Edmunds	117.65	19.59	Deteriorating	39.00	Not Achieved
Clare	74.76	109.16	Improving	152.00	Achieved
Clifton Road	43.74	14.25	Deteriorating	16.00	Not Achieved
Debenham	294.48	378.21	Improving	336.00	Achieved
Eye	165.14	450.91	Improving	245.00	Achieved
Elmswell	2.00	0.00	Deteriorating	6.00	Achieved
Felixstowe	0.00	22.35	Improving	12.00	Achieved
Framlingham	287.95	157.13	Deteriorating	374.00	Achieved
Hadleigh	251.64	247.54	Deteriorating	178.00	Not Achieved
Holbrook	36.51	127.02	Improving	137.00	Achieved
Haverhill	0.00	1.53	Improving	0.00	Achieved
Colchester Road	77.05	131.89	Improving	45.00	Not Achieved
Halesworth	24.04	328.82	Improving	247.00	Achieved
Ixworth	161.92	122.60	Deteriorating	82.00	Not Achieved
Leiston	0.00	0.00	Improving	33.00	Achieved
Long Melford	38.38	7.88	Deteriorating	44.00	Achieved
Mildenhall	11.78	31.67	Improving	10.00	Not Achieved
Nayland	455.90	339.56	Deteriorating	152.00	Not Achieved
Needham Market	110.69	10.32	Deteriorating	9.00	Not Achieved
Normanshurst	11.00	0.00	Deteriorating	51.00	Achieved
Newmarket	24.00	62.56	Improving	10.00	Not Achieved
Orford	255.26	461.43	Improving	72.00	Not Achieved
Princes St.	90.13	123.86	Improving	54.00	Not Achieved
Southwold	17.32	10.51	Deteriorating	5.00	Not Achieved
Stradbroke	12.77	153.09	Improving	133.00	Achieved
Saxmundham	450.36	329.11	Deteriorating	326.00	Not Achieved
Stowmarket	31.75	37.01	Improving	11.00	Not Achieved
Sudbury	70.28	65.97	Deteriorating	31.00	Not Achieved
Woodbridge	33.26	39.50	Improving	27.00	Not Achieved
Wickhambrook	223.59	450.21	Improving	370.00	Achieved
Wrentham	326.42	435.91	Improving	260.00	Not Achieved

Retained Crew Off The Run Report Actual Performance Vs Previous Year and Target

2007/08

Station	Actual Time Crew Deficient (Hours)	Previous Year Performance	Trend Against Previous Year (Improving/deteriorating)	Target Performance	Target Achieved/not achieved
Aldeburgh	61.26	57.34	Deteriorating	108.00	Achieved
Bungay	165.25	66.45	Deteriorating	9.00	Not Achieved
Brandon	153.36	65.16	Deteriorating	55.00	Not Achieved
Beccles	186.89	147.30	Deteriorating	28.00	Not Achieved
Bury St Edmunds	81.82	0.00	Deteriorating	61.00	Not Achieved
Clare	92.42	60.74	Deteriorating	106.00	Achieved
Clifton Road	113.80	27.15	Deteriorating	11.00	Not Achieved
Debenham	124.00	121.88	Deteriorating	124.00	Achieved
Eye	60.76	396.28	Improving	119.00	Achieved
Elmswell	19.50	0.00	Deteriorating	0.00	Not Achieved
Felixstowe	3.59	5.59	Improving	10.00	Achieved
Framlingham	493.45	209.91	Deteriorating	266.00	Not Achieved
Hadleigh	117.79	104.65	Deteriorating	49.00	Not Achieved
Holbrook	36.55	59.11	Improving	17.00	Not Achieved
Haverhill	19.46	1.09	Deteriorating	0.00	Not Achieved
Colchester Road	90.17	150.63	Improving	89.00	Not quite Achieved
Halesworth	108.86	219.16	Improving	101.00	Not quite Achieved
Ixworth	316.70	72.14	Deteriorating	29.00	Not Achieved
Leiston	3.17	0.00	Deteriorating	17.00	Achieved
Long Melford	36.27	11.59	Deteriorating	17.00	Not Achieved
Mildenhall	6.88	7.59	Improving	2.00	Not Achieved
Nayland	1042.08	1243.69	Deteriorating	798.00	Not Achieved
Needham Market	6.00	0.00	Deteriorating	0.00	Not Achieved
Normanshurst	15.33	0.00	Deteriorating	12.00	Not Achieved
Newmarket	97.53	58.44	Deteriorating	41.00	Not Achieved
Orford	96.35	289.22	Improving	32.00	Not Achieved
Princes Street	152.32	80.59	Deteriorating	69.00	Not Achieved
Southwold	9.58	30.25	Improving	10.00	Achieved
Stradbroke	21.28	101.54	Improving	119.00	Achieved
Saxmundham	952.74	377.66	Deteriorating	363.00	Not Achieved
Stowmarket	19.37	50.59	Improving	5.00	Not Achieved
Sudbury	407.01	79.98	Deteriorating	76.00	Not Achieved
Woodbridge	108.50	26.56	Deteriorating	0.00	Not Achieved
Wickhambrook	125.88	234.10	Improving	225.00	Achieved
Wrentham	511.00	621.26	Improving	195.00	Not Achieved

Number of times that stations were supplied FTE, compared to the number of occasions a fire call was received and an FTE was used to support the attending appliance

Station	Number of days covered using FTE	Number of Fire Calls whilst FTE cover in use	% of occasions FTE supplied and used to cover fire calls
02 - Woodbridge	7	3	42%
04 - Holbrook	0	0	0%
05 - Framlingham	21	1	5%
07 - Orford	4	2	50%
08 - Aldeburgh	55	8	15%
09 - Leiston	0	0	0%
10 - Saxmundham	2	0	0%
11 - Wrentham	20	0	0%
12 - Southwold	0	0	0%
13 - Halesworth	8	1	12%
14 - Bungay	9	0	0%
15 - Beccles	0	0	0%
17 - Clifton Road	3	0	0%
18 - Stradbroke	7	0	0%
19 - Eye	4	0	0%
20 - Debenham	0	0	0%
21 - Needham Market	0	0	0%
22 - Stowmarket	0	0	0%
23 - Hadleigh	0	0	0%
24 - Nayland	29	2	8%
25 - Sudbury	0	0	0%
26 - Melford	3	0	0%
27 - Clare	0	0	0%
29 - Wickhambrook	1	0	0%
31 - Elmswell	0	0	0%
32 - Ixworth	34	4	12%
33 - Brandon	0	0	0%
34 - Mildenhall	0	0	0%
Total	207	21	10%

