

Notes of the meeting of the **Fire and Rescue Service – Retained Duty System** held on 17 November 2008 at 4.30 pm at Eye Fire Station.

Present: Councillors John Field, Charles Michell, Jane Midwood (Chairman), Keith Patience, Colin Spence and Anne Whybrow

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Roger Bellham

2. **INTRODUCTION OF EXPERT WITNESS GROUP TO COUNCILLORS**

Introductions took place between the Expert Witness Group and Councillors.

3. **REVISION TO TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Andy Fry advised the Panel that Items 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) and 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) of the Terms of Reference had been deferred to the 'recruitment' PDP meeting.

4. **THE ROLE OF THE FIREFIGHTER – TO RECEIVE FORMAL EVIDENCE FROM SUFFOK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE OFFICER**

The Panel received formal evidence from Suffolk fire and Rescue Service Officers. It was advised of positive changes from the National Fire Dispute and the long term challenges facing the Retained Fire and Rescue Service.

5. **CHAired DISCUSSION ON ROLE OF RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS**

Area for Exploration 1

Important point: It was suggested by Councillor Spence that details of the generic emergency response role for all Retained firefighters should be developed. Beyond this generic role, additional elements associated with emergency response could be prioritised according to an analysis of the incident types firefighters were most likely to attend, depending the on risk profile of their local area.

OUTCOME: Yes, it is necessary to expect all RDS staff to be available to respond to the current, wide range of operational incidents. In terms of reasonableness, the emphasis of the emergency response role should be tailored to the risk profile of the area in which firefighters operate.

Area for Exploration 2

OUTCOME: Yes it is necessary to expect all RDS staff to support the Service's proactive community safety programme. In terms of reasonableness, the nature and extent of the contribution should vary, depending on the needs of the local community, and the availability of individual RDS staff, respectively

Area for Exploration 3

OUTCOME: Yes it is necessary for high-risk premises inspections to be included in the work programme of RDS staff. The focus of these 'inspections' should, however, be on general familiarisation. Detailed risk information associated with such premises should be captured by fulltime staff employed for this purpose. Once captured, the detailed information must be made available for the use of RDS staff, in the event of their attending emergencies at the premises in question.

Area for Exploration 4

Important point: It is essential for operational equipment to function correctly if required in an emergency situation. Attendees therefore felt that it was equally important for RDS staff to be involved in, and take responsibility for, the testing and routine maintenance of such equipment.

Important point: The Expert Witness Group felt strongly that for firefighters' to 'know their kit' they need to be regularly handling it. Their involvement in the testing and maintenance of the equipment is very important in this regard.

OUTCOME: Yes, it is necessary and reasonable to expect RDS staff to engage in the testing and maintenance of fire engines and operational equipment.

Area for Exploration 5

Important point: Serious concern was expressed by all members of the Expert Witness Group, in relation to the impact that administration was having on the viability of RDS managers continuing in their role

Important point: PDP report to recommend that the Service invests in providing Retained Officers-in-Charge with the facility to remotely access the Suffolk County Council IT infrastructure.

Important point: PDP report to recommend that discussions take place to determine whether the agreement between SFRS and the FBU, in

connection with the Union Learning Fund, could be used as a vehicle for improving basic IT skills amongst RDS staff.

Important point: ADO Moseley advised the PDP that he was aware of two managers from the RDS service who had recently resigned their positions, as a result of being unable to meet the administrative demands placed upon them.

Important point: An Expert Witness stated that the Admin Support recently provided to his District Manager had been very helpful in reducing the administrative burden he faced.

Important point: PDP report to include a recommendation for the Service to increase the level of administrative support provided to managers in the RDS service.

OUTCOME: The time commitment associated with administration is significantly impacting on the viability of RDS staff – particularly managers – remaining in their role.

Area for Exploration 6

Important point: Concern was expressed that achieving and maintaining the skills necessary for RDS staff to participate in such schemes would require additional time commitment.

Important point: PDP members were concerned at the potential for appliance availability to be adversely affected as a result of RDS staff taking part in such schemes.

Important point: PDP members and Expert Witnesses were comfortable with RDS staff taking part in such schemes, as volunteers within their local communities but not through formal schemes introduced by SFRS.

OUTCOME: No, an approach should not 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

Important point: The Expert Witness group suggested that 'opening' fire stations up to communities would help in promoting safety issues and also, potentially, recruitment into the service.

Important point: The Expert Witness group pointed out that co-locating partners at fire stations could attract inward investment in the Service's property portfolio. DCFO Fry confirmed that there was already evidence of this taking place at Framlingham.

Important point: Where shared facilities are introduced at fire stations, the shared facility use must be regarded as secondary to that of an operational fire station

Important point: For health and safety reasons and to ensure the effective operational functioning of such stations, 'hard' separation would need to be

put in place between operational areas of the buildings and any community facilities.

OUTCOME: Yes, selected RDS fire stations should be established as shared, community facilities.

7. **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING**

As above.

8. **QUESTIONNAIRE ON ROLE OF RETAINED FIREFIGHTER**

Ian Bowell advised that the questionnaire would be sent out for wider consultation and the information acquired would feed back into the Panel.

The Panel agreed that the questionnaire be circulated to Panel members for approval and once agreed sent out electronically to fire stations.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm.