

Open Report on behalf of Nick Borrill, Chief Fire Officer

Report to:	Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee
Date:	14 December 2016
Subject:	Fire and Rescue – The retained duty system (RDS): National context and local action

Summary:

The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) RDS National Working Group has recently published a report entitled 'A professional View of the Challenges for Recruitment and Retention in the Fire and Rescue Retained (on call) Sector.' The purpose of the report was to provide the Home Office with a professional and sector led view on the recruitment and retention issues being experienced within the Fire and Rescue Service RDS partially in response to the Knight Review (May 2013) and to the Fire Reform Agenda initiated by the then Home Secretary the Right Honourable Theresa May in January 2016 which, amongst other things, highlighted the value and efficiencies afforded by the RDS.

This paper summarises the content of the CFOA report and goes on to explain how Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue continues to address many of the challenges mentioned within it. It also highlights that local action alone cannot resolve all the issues and that nationally the Home Office (HO) also has a role to play by formulating a national strategy to increase the understanding and value of the RDS whilst removing barriers for employers and prospective recruits.

Actions Required:

The Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider and comment on the report and highlight any recommendations or further actions for consideration.

1. Background

Summary of CFOA RDS National Working Group report entitled 'A professional view of the challenges for recruitment and retention in the fire and rescue Retained (on call) sector.'

The report provides useful background to the RDS and a broad explanation of the role of an RDS fire fighter. It goes on to identify 12 issues that it believes affects recruitment and retention which LFR both recognise and support. These are:

- a) A substantial lack of awareness in the public arena on what an RDS fire fighter is.
- b) Within communities there is still a belief amongst many eligible adults that they could not be a fire fighter and that the role is somehow superhuman and beyond them.
- c) Societal changes: to be available for the RDS you need to be in the vicinity of the fire station and able to respond immediately. Many communities are increasingly mobile and work, live and socialise in different locations and in different ways, this rendering the ability to be in one place, and able to respond for extended periods of time, a more difficult proposition for many.
- d) Employers' increasing reluctance to release staff during working hours alongside a lack of awareness of the role of the RDS.
- e) Increasing value placed on spare or free time, especially by the younger generation, who expect long periods of down time and a desire to be able to socialise frequently, be mobile and travel, often at short notice.
- f) Increasingly, larger scale employment is centralised and often in commercial out of town areas and away from existing fire station locations.
- g) A reduction in call volume has led to decreased earnings and the role has become less attractive due to the reduced exposure to the perceived exciting operational events. CFOA has challenged the common governmental statement that the RDS are cheap and although recognising they do provide excellent value for money also highlights the system now requires significant investment if it is to modernise and thrive.
- h) Training is complex, demanding and time consuming but is an essential component for safe and competent fire fighters.
- i) Within the FRS sector there is often a lack of expertise or experience in addressing the type of recruitment challenges faced in a more commercial environment.
- j) The sector has worked well for many years using the locally employed RDS staff to lead and stimulate recruitment in their areas but may be excluding some sectors of society.
- k) Impact on benefits-in some cases there are perceived and real negative impacts in some people earning additional money from a secondary employer.
- l) Legislation such as the Driver Hours Regulations and Working Time Directives as perceived by primary employers can be barriers for some by taking on secondary employment.

The report goes on to highlight the complexities of managing the system and express the view that there is no single solution or national system that can meet

all local requirements. It recognises the need for the sector to take ownership and share best practice to develop nationally shared local solutions to remove barriers and ensure that a framework is in place to support future models.

2. Local Action

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue (LFR) is heavily reliant on the RDS to maintain an effective and efficient community service. 81% of fire appliances are crewed by personnel operating the RDS and they form over 70% of our employees. We have an RDS presence on all 38 fire stations across the County and 29 of those stations are exclusively crewed by them.

That said the service continues to be faced with ongoing challenges highlighted in the CFOA report. We spend a significant amount of time and resources recruiting and training RDS fire fighters to ensure we can maintain appliance availability but unfortunately there remain stations within the County that continue to struggle with shortages of personnel.

Recognising the ongoing difficulties of RDS recruitment and retention the service moved in 2010 to provide additional resilience within the County by implementing what has become known as the 'Wholetime Spine'. The service, supported by the Authority, took a proactive stance by increasing the number of fire appliances crewed 24/7 by whole time fire fighters from 2 to 9.

The service also initiated a review of the RDS in the autumn of 2014 with the following terms of reference:

Conduct a root and branch analysis of the current processes, practices and policies that are used in Lincolnshire relating to the RDS and to determine if they are fit for purpose to deliver a sustainable and viable FRS for the future.

A project team consisting 3 full time posts met with various stakeholders throughout LFR and with many of the UK fire and rescue services who have conducted recent RDS reviews. Taking best practice and lessons learned the team produced a final report in the spring of 2017 which included 78 recommendations for consideration.

As a result LFR Service Management Board endorsed a work programme in August 2016 which is now being progressed. This programme has 6 work streams which aim to address a number of barriers and challenges highlighted in the CFOA report.

For the benefit of the Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee below is a list of those 6 work streams and an indication of the type of activities the service is undertaking under each.

Work stream 1: Recruitment and selection.

- The service is reviewing both the academic and physical entry requirement to ensure they both meet the requirements of the role but also recognise the

unique nature of the RDS and the restrictions placed by the need to be locally available.

- We are developing a standard recruitment planning tool which will further enable the service to identify and target priority areas.
- We are developing marketing material to raise community awareness of the role and its value and importance. For example, we are exploring a more proactive approach to community awareness by utilising some of the highly effective techniques employed by similar organisations such as the RNLI.
- Remove barriers to recruitment by rationalising the entry process and taking the tests to the applicant rather than the other way around.

Work stream 2: Restructure of the recruitment and training department.

- Increase the size and structure of the recruitment and retention team to ensure it is able to adequately resource targeted recruitment plans and provide support and engagement to stations and personnel.
- Restructure the training department to maximise flexibility so that training can be delivered to meet the needs of the individual and employee where appropriate. We are currently delivering a bespoke training course for employees of Rase Warehousing in Bardney to ensure we have the least impact possible on their business.

Work stream 3: Strategy and Policy.

- A structure of incentives which may be offered to employers should form part of a new RDS primary employer engagement policy. We are currently exploring sponsorship, the provision of training courses and recognition events to support this.
- A simplified promotion process has been introduced to recognise the unique nature of the RDS.
- Rationalise current policy and procedure and introduce a one stop shop for RDS where they can locate all appropriate information.
- Reinvigorate the services exit interview.

Work stream 4: Training

- Develop a blended approach to learning which focusses on practically based training where possible. Based on feedback from personnel we are currently redesigning our training programme to ensure it is as practically based as possible.
- Develop a Learning Management System (LMS) to further facilitate a blended learning approach for the acquisition, development and maintenance of skills for all roles. This will enable RDS personnel to access training material via the internet to maximise flexibility.
- Develop alternative RDS recruits course structure to recognise the unique nature of the RDS (see work stream3 above).
- Where possible align phase 2 and 3 training (development and maintenance) to reduce the burden on development fire fighters.

Work stream 5: Resilience reserve and crewing levels.

- Reintroduce the 6th rider on fire appliances to increase exposure and activity levels and enhance support on the incident ground. This has now been initiated.
- Further develop the resilience reserve to ensure the service provides adequate fire cover at all times.

Work stream 6: Payment system

- Develop a new payment system which maintains all the strengths of the existing whilst also focussing on:
 - The management of contracts
 - Recognising commitment and addressing some of the weaknesses of the current national system.
 - Provide improved flexibility within contracts.
 - Rewarding day time cover.
- Introduce a leave payment system which provides a more stable income stream.
- Simplify the payment system to provide more confidence in the process.
- Consider the procurement of an alternative pay and availability module.

4. Conclusion

As already highlighted the challenges of recruiting and retaining personnel working the RDS are complex. The work LFR is undertaking will address some of those but some, such as the reduction in call numbers and the ever mobile society in which we operate, remain beyond our influence. Those we can influence we will and would ask the committee to continue to support our efforts.

Ways in which the Home Office could consider supporting the development and improvement of the RDS sector include the creation of a nationally led RDS firefighter brand, support for a national marketing campaign and the introduction of centrally led incentives for employers to release personnel. Again, we would ask the committee to note this and support wherever and whenever it can.

5. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

6. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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