

By: Director, Service Delivery
To: Planning and Performance Committee - 5 July 2012
Subject: VARIABLE CREWING PROJECT
Classification: Unrestricted

FOR INFORMATION

SUMMARY

This paper provides Members with an update on the new variable crewing project that started this year to research, evaluate and recommend new ways to crew fire engines. The aim of the project is to provide a more flexible and cost-effective way of working, whilst improving the Authority's performance to the public of Kent and Medway. The project will review all of the current duty systems and also aid the continued refinement of the on-call duty system through a new staff engagement forum. This forum allows effective two-way conversation on how to drive efficiency and meet the demands of both staff and the communities served by the Authority. The outcomes of this review, and related work on contract variations to support variable crewing, will feature in the Workforce Strategy 2013–15.

CONCLUSION

Members are requested to:

1. Note the contents of this report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

Background

1. Over recent years, Members have been updated on many key projects that have shaped the future requirements of the service and ensured the preparedness of the Authority for the challenging years ahead. The variable crewing project started following the Review of Emergency Response Provision (RERP). The RERP was the backbone of the last Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and this set the number and location of fire stations to meet the challenges and the future risks faced by Kent and Medway. Following the IRMP, the operational capability project (Item C6 on this agenda) started. One of its aims was to research and recommend what fire and rescue appliances should be positioned at which fire stations across Kent and Medway. The role of the variable crewing project is to establish the most efficient and effective way to crew those appliances whilst delivering flexibility and, wherever possible, improved response times
2. During the research stage of the project, members of the project team have contacted and visited a number of other fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), as well as other employers outside the fire sector, to look at their systems of work. This has proved extremely useful and has provided many examples of proven systems that can now be evaluated to see if they can deliver the same improvements for this Authority.
3. Over the past 40 years there has been very little change to the duty systems (whole-time shift and day-crewed) that our full-time firefighters work. The day-crewed duty system still provides housing or a housing allowance in nine parts of the county. This is a style of service provision that has been phased out of many public services over recent years in favour of staff that choose to live and work in the area, rather than the service having to pay staff to relocate to these areas. The watch system on full-time fire stations has served both the staff and the Authority well. However, it can be improved to provide increased flexibility as well as improved cover at key times of the day and night.
4. The balance between daytime and night-time fire cover is a good example of the flexibility required in fire cover. In the most recent IRMP, Members approved the operational resource model of aspiring to have 61 fire engines available during the day and 76 at night. In order to achieve and, most importantly, sustain this level of resourcing, staff need to be flexible to meet the needs of their operational clusters and groups. A practical example of this are those occasions when it would be more efficient and effective to transfer a relief crew to an incident in a vehicle other than a fire engine. This will arise when the incident already has sufficient operational equipment at the scene, but only requires additional firefighters. This effectively differentiates fire engines from people. This has the added benefit of facilitating the

increased availability of fire engines, which would not otherwise have been able to attend other incidents. Providing the working systems that can start to deliver this type of change is the work of the variable crewing project.

5. The project has been divided into four key workstreams which are detailed below:-

Service Delivery Improvement - This workstream will look to develop alternative working arrangements, which will facilitate an increased flexibility for the organisation.

Performance Management and Audit - This work-stream will ensure that the organisation can audit management systems to provide effective scrutiny alongside robust performance management reports. This work will be vital to ensure management controls are in place for the Authority and the individual.

Training and Development - Throughout organisational change the organisation must ensure staff are able to maintain their competency and demonstrate their specialist skills. The on-call duty system has laid the foundation for a new approach to group and cluster-based training. This workstream will ensure that this is maintained, refined and integrated into other duty systems to ensure that the Authority can demonstrate effective training and development systems.

Communication - As with any change project, the most important aspect will be effective communication at all levels within the organisation. This workstream will look to build on the communication methods already in place and also supplement these with dedicated focus groups for staff. Ensuring that all staff understand the reasons for change and the path for change will be critical to the success of the overall project. People are our most valuable asset and we will ensure through this workstream that they are kept informed and involved throughout.

6. The ongoing improvements to the on-call system will also be incorporated into this project as staff realise the benefits of working pre-planned contracted hours to provide cover when the Authority requires it. This system is now being viewed with keen interest and researched by many other FRAs. Needless to say, the Authority continues to ensure that the system is effective in improving resilience and service delivery across the organisation. Continuous engagement with staff and Unions is key to ensuring the benefits of change and colleagues from the Fire Brigades Union are actively involved with this project and will be updated on a regular basis to ensure that any change is understood and in line with the organisation's effective and productive working relationship. As the outcomes of the project materialise regular updates will be brought back to future meetings.
7. The outcomes of this review, and related work on contract variations to support variable crewing, will feature in the Workforce Strategy 2013–15.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8. As the variable crewing project develops options and alternatives for the way in which fire engines and specialist resources are crewed, specific impact assessments will be undertaken. Consultation with affected parties will be undertaken where applicable.

CONCLUSION

9. Members are requested to:
 - 9.1 Note the contents of this report