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To

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Date

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Our ref

Your ref

Dear Colleagues

### **Crewing with Fewer than Four**

We understand there is a level of concern from front line staff about this project which is understandable.

I therefore want to take the opportunity to write to you and explain why we are doing it and at the same time try to allay any fears you may have.

You will also see a link to the Crewing with fewer than four Intranet page for this project which includes the new Service Order and a video explaining more of the detail.

Intranet page link –

<http://intranet.kent.fire-uk.org/opsservices/Pages/Crewing-With-Fewer-Than-Four.aspx>

We are doing this project because sadly we have had incidents when there was a life we could have saved if we had sent a crew of three who were available nearby. Also, every year we are reminded at the Awards Ceremony of members of the public who act without the benefit of your skills and experience and risk their lives to go into their neighbour's properties to help save life. We want to ensure we prevent this whenever possible and send trained professionals.

As part of this project we have been talking to many people and we will continue to do so in order to refine and develop how we deliver the service.

As you would expect, we are engaging with the FBU locally and at their request slowed down implementation to ensure that they are involved in looking at all the issues and implications. Whilst many people have expressed their support for the project there seems to be three main areas which are being raised and so I wanted to give clarity and assurance about those concerns.

#### **1) It's a back door way to reduce crewing numbers...**

The guarantee I can give you is that it is NOT our intention to move to minimum crewing of three as the norm. That said its important to us that we are honest with each other so I cannot guarantee this for evermore as I hope you would appreciate future financial settlements may get even harder.

Where we can crew to four we will and where on call can match to four we will. It is only when we have three available with the right skills that we will use them. In a nutshell, this is about 'making use of three' rather than 'positively crewing to three' and will be by exception. We believe that not to send trained fire professionals when we know someone might die, be injured or to prevent the early spread of fire would be a huge failure of what we are here to do. If the public were aware that we hadn't sent crews when we could, with whatever number, I doubt we would keep the reputation we currently enjoy.

## **2) Increased moral pressure on crews**

Let's start with an obvious statement – every life is of equal value and we don't ask that you sacrifice yours to save someone else. The difficulty for us all is getting a balance between heroic acts and being so risk averse that we do nothing.

We also appreciate that on occasions crews will be under moral pressure to act but in truth that can be the case now when crews arrive from different locations at different times. But our job is to start to bring normality to an otherwise chaotic scene and it shouldn't be underestimated what benefit you can add before the full PDA is in attendance. A timely make-up, identification of hydrants, covering jets, stopping the neighbour going inside or even just providing that invaluable reassurance that help has arrived.

In our discussions with the FBU it has become apparent that they would be more comfortable if we were to introduce Restricted Operating Practices (ROPs) e.g. such as prohibiting the use of breathing apparatus at building fires. But we feel that could add to the moral pressure of the officer in charge. We favour an approach where we train and allow all incident commanders to make their decisions based on good guidance to the set of circumstances they face rather than being hampered by prohibitive prescription. Setting a procedure which outlines what to do in every situation is impossible given the range of scenarios that could be faced. In fact we have so much evidence across the country that very set procedures either prevent you doing something which would save life but then put you outside procedures or they mean that we sit and watch whilst someone gets hurt (e.g. Walpole Lake).

Any HSE/legal investigation will set out to find how people acted in an incident and whether they did so in compliance with policies and procedures. Being outside detailed procedures is therefore potentially difficult as everyone starts having to defend what could be very sensible decisions taken in the heat of the moment and they can feel attacked as part of that process. I repeat again that you can't have a procedure for every situation so you can see why we want you to act within reasonable guidelines but without the nonsense of considering whether you are crossing detailed lines when in fact you are facing a crisis.

We trust you to take difficult decisions every day and you know as well as we do that there are endless exceptions to the norm which is why so much of the training now is about risk assessment and decision making and reliance on your intellect and professionalism. We are already increasing our training on Operational Discretion which relates to those rare or exceptional circumstances where to strictly follow an operational procedure would be a barrier to resolving the incident, or where there is no procedure that adequately deals with the novelty of the event. It is not, however, a free pass to disregard agreed guidance and any decision to apply Operational Discretion should be the minimum necessary and only until the objective is achieved.

You will hear more about this over the coming weeks and months but it is important to realise this issue applies to all incidents regardless of the number of crew in attendance.

That said we completely accept that there may be limitations to what you can do at the scene and in those circumstances we will support incident commanders fully knowing they have done what they could but have then stepped away from endangering themselves or crew. We know you face pressure when you attend incidents but what we ask is that you do what you can sensibly and wait for back up if it's clear that you can do no more. Whatever press or other comments we get we will back you up.

I also attach my letter from October 2013 to back up our statement of support to you.

<< File: Command Policy Statement letter v4 with legal opinion.docx >>

### **3) How can three crew members perform all of the necessary tasks?**

We recognise the concerns about crews being over run when they first arrive especially if they want to commit BA teams. But just as the first crews arriving at a make pumps 20 do not try to deal with the entire incident neither do we expect a crew of three. Prioritising achievable tasks with the resources available until back up arrives should always be the approach. It is only natural to assume worst case scenario with a crew of three being first to arrive but there will be occasions when a crew of three are sent as the second appliance to provide a quicker back up to those first on the scene and many have said this is preferable to waiting longer for the next nearest crew of four or more.

We have already been looking at alternative and modern approaches to firefighting tactics such as the cold cutting systems (cobra) and fog spike which allow an offensive attack from the outside. Greater provision of compressed air foam systems on more appliances and increased use of positive pressure ventilation will all help to make us more effective.

Electronic pump controls and Rapid Deployment procedures under the National Operational Guidance for Breathing Apparatus will help reduce the burden in the early stages of an incident. We also plan to trial the use of portable San J Airwave radios so that incident commanders can send important messages from anywhere at the scene.

### **Summary**

We know the longer serving members will make comparisons to the old 'Super-nummery' policy but regardless of whether you supported or opposed it we should all take time to reflect how far we have come since those days. These include the introduction of the Incident Command System, new firefighting tactics and equipment, greater opportunity to fight offensively from outside, investment in technology, telemetry on BA sets, improved databases to identify who is riding at three so support is dispatched immediately, the introduction of tactical advisors and the best levels of protection through modern structural firefighting PPE.

I would like to finish by highlighting some important points

- We are here for the public
- We will not compromise firefighter safety but many of the issues are as pertinent to a crew of four, five and six
- We will support you Going Forward

We are taking our time to get this right and will work with stations who volunteer to trial working with fewer than four. We will be doing a lot of initial training and then getting feedback on what else would help. We urge you to get involved, discuss this amongst fellow professionals and let us know your views (both positive and negative).

We will be sharing the finer detail with you soon but in the meantime we would be happy to come and talk to you about your concerns so get in touch by contacting the project team headed by GM Steve Appleton at STC

Regards

Ann Millington  
Chief Executive