

## **The Retained Duty System (RDS) Task and Finish Group**

9 May 2022 – At a meeting of the The Retained Duty System (RDS) Task and Finish Group held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present:

Cllr Albury, Cllr Boram, Cllr Chowdhury, Cllr Milne and Cllr Pendleton

In Attendance: Cllr Duncan Crow

### **Part I**

#### **1. Appointment of Chairman**

1.1 Cllr Kevin Boram was appointed Chairman of the Task and Finish Group (TFG).

1.2 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **2. Terms of Reference**

2.1 The Committee noted the Terms of Reference.

#### **3. The Retained Duty System Discussion**

3.1 The Chairman referred to section 3 of the Terms of Reference and the four areas for the TFG to form conclusions and recommendations. He stated that the TFG were not given an opportunity to consider the detail of all these areas but during an informal pre meeting last week they had agreed to look at five or six suggestions that officers have put forward as achievable.

3.2 Peter Rickard, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), added that the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) did look into many of the areas highlighted by the TFG and that would be the longer-term project. This TFG would look at issues that could be achieved in the shorter term.

3.3 The Committee thanked the officers that took the time to explain their roles and issues around the Retained Duty System (RDS) at the informal pre meeting. That information had enabled the Committee to have an informed discussion today.

3.4 The ACFO also added how proud he was of the RDFs in West Sussex and that all those he had meet had been professional, dedicated individuals. The Chairman agreed with those comments and recognised their valuable role within the service.

3.5 One issue raised in the pre meeting, that the Chairman wanted to highlight today, had been the importance of the relationship between Retained Duty Firefighters (RDFs), WSCC and the RDFs main employers. The Committee were surprised to hear that RDFs did not have the same

rights as others such as the Territorial Army (TA) and that the Fire Service did not have something similar to an Armed Forces Covenant. The Cabinet Member, Cllr Duncan Crow, agreed to take this up via the LGA Fire Group as it was a national issue. Cllr Jack Pendelton stated that as the Armed Forces Champion she was very happy to support this initiative.

3.6 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and Neil Fairhall, Station Manager, with support and input from a number of officers working in various roles across the service, went on to detail the areas of improvement that they would welcome acknowledgment and support from the TFG.

### **Performance Measures**

3.7 Core Measures around availability should be retained. However, in addition a new Service Measure could be introduced to show service availability. The purpose of which would show that all contribute to the service.

3.8 The Committee welcomed and supported this new Service Measure and agreed it would be a good and clear indicator for the public to understand.

### **Flexibility**

3.9 A more flexible training system. Currently the majority of training that RDFs need to undertake is offered on a Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm basis. It was suggested this could be extended to offer evening and weekends. For RDFs this could be easier to manage around other commitments. The committee considered the positive impact that the new training centre would have in respect of flexibility and improved training resources.

3.10 It was noted that RDFs undertake initially two weeks training and then additional days for breathing apparatus, driving and Health & Safety training and this could add up to six weeks during the first two years of service. After that training was ongoing with annual refresher courses of up to five or six days annually. Although RDFs are encouraged to take much of this as unpaid leave from their main jobs, many do not and take it as annual leave. The ACFO stated that the new training facility at Horsham would help to reduce some time due to not having to travel to Gloucester, but it could be reduced further if evening and weekend courses were offered. It was also suggested that some parts of the Health and Safety training could be moved online.

3.11 The Committee questioned what percentage of time could be saved from the current six weeks. Although this was difficult to quantify, Neil Fairhall suggested it could be up to 35 or 40%.

3.12 The Committee welcomed and supported this suggestion for training to be more flexible. They were interested to know if this would involve more cost, for example if external trainers were being asked to run courses on evenings or weekends. The ACFO stated that a new contract

was being looked into as part of the new facility at Horsham. Any cost increases would be reported back to the Committee.

3.13 Discussion around flexibility lead on to other things that are currently only available Monday to Friday for RDFs. The first was Medicals. The ACFO explained this was an external contract and he would have to look further into whether it would be possible to increase this offer and any cost implications associated with this. The ACFO undertook to report back to the TFG on this issue.

3.14 IT Support was also discussed as this was also only available Monday to Friday 8am – 5pm. Neil Fairhall did explain to the Committee that there was a process in place to log IT issues out of hours, but resolutions would not be until the next working day.

### **Utilise F&RS staff to maximise potential.**

3.15 This would allow non-response staff to move across departments and undertake retained duty. It was mentioned that some Business Fire Safety Staff already do this, but it was suggested more staff could work from Fire Stations so to allow them to be on retained duty at that time.

3.16 The Committee supported this initiative in principle. They stressed that it must remain optional, and the workloads of the substantive job must be considered. They agreed that if safety, welfare and performance are key then this could work.

### **Retention**

3.17 There is currently a difference between the pass out parades for Whole Time and Retained Firefighters. It was suggested this be updated to show the equal value of both. It was also suggested these could be amalgamated. In addition, pass out parades for those missed during the Covid 19 pandemic should be arranged.

3.18 The Committee sought the views of officers present as to how they felt about separate or amalgamated pass outs. It was noted that there were differing views and the Committee would welcome wider engagement on this with staff. ACFO stated that an option expressed at the recent CRMP event was to keep the pass out as it was but then have an additional ceremony after the two-year probation period. The ACFO also stated that all the proposals from the TFG will be included in a staff newsletter with the ability to feedback on proposals. The Committee welcomed that.

### **Developing RDFs**

3.19 Allow RDFs to gain skills outside of response, such as Business Fire Safety. It was suggested this could be done on a trial basis of around three or four RDFs. The ACFO confirmed it could be done within existing budgets.

3.20 The Committee asked if this investment was made would staff have to remain with WSCC. ACFO confirmed that anyone undertaking this professional qualification would be required to remain with WSCC for two years after completion of the course or pay the cost back on departure. The Committee supported this.

3.21 In addition a commitment to keeping barriers away from allowing RDFs to move to Whole Time was discussed. The Committee fully supported this and suggested the wording should be to remove any barriers, but it was acknowledged that work had begun on this so keeping barriers away was appropriate.

### **Other issues**

3.22 The Committee also discussed and supported the benefits of by monthly meetings for all RDFs with the ACFO.

3.23 The Committee also discussed contracts for RDFs and how they could become more flexible to allow more people to apply for the roles. The ACFO stated that as part of the wider CRMP work he would like to look at modernising the contracts for RDFs.

3.24 The Committee requested figures of how many RDFs are retained after the two-year probation period. The ACFO undertook to get this figure to the Committee.

3.25 With regard to contracts the ACFO confirmed that initial discussions had taken place with union representatives on this issue. An example provided would be the number of minutes an RDF lives or works from a Fire Station. This could, in some circumstances, be increased from the standard 4 minutes. Also, if someone could only commit to one day a week that could be considered. The ACFO stated he would like to involve and empower the Station Managers to be able to make these decisions on a case-by-case basis.

3.25 Much was discussed about training, maintenance and competence for RDFs and The Committee felt it would benefit their knowledge and understanding to find out more about this area and perhaps arrange a 'find it out' session for members to attend. Monique Smart, Democratic Services Officer agreed to look into this and report back to members.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

4.1 In conclusion the Committee supported the following:

- Introduce a new Service Measure to show service availability. Core Measures around availability be retained.
- A more flexible training system offering weekend and evening training options and possibly more online content if appropriate. Any cost increases would be reported back to the Committee.

- Utilise F&RS staff to maximise potential and allow non-response staff to move across departments with the F&RS and undertake retained duty.
- Look into options to standardise or amalgamate pass out parades. In addition, ensure pass out parades for those missed during the Covid 19 pandemic be arranged.
- Develop RDFs and allow them to gain skills outside of response, such as Business Fire Safety.
- A commitment to keeping barriers away from allowing RDFs to move to Whole Time.
- Recognise the importance of the role of Employers.

#### 4.2 Further Actions from the TFG included:

- The ACFO will investigate if Medicals could be offered outside of normal office hours and report back to the TFG.
- The ACFO would provide the TFG with a figure for how many RDFs are retained after the two-year probation period.
- Monique Smart to look into whether any 'find it out days' could be arranged for Members to give them a better understanding of the training and commitment needed by RDFs.

The meeting ended at 12.35pm

Chairman