
Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

1 March 2024

Retained Duty System Task and Finish Group Progress Update

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

The Task and Finish Group (TFG) comprised of individuals from the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee. Its primary objective was to examine policies and concerns related to retained firefighters.

The initial virtual meeting occurred on the 5th of May 2023, while the TFG subsequently convened publicly on the 9th of May 2023. This report offers a concise overview of the advancements made since these meetings, assuring committee members that West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) is diligently tackling the challenges associated with the Retained Duty System (RDS) and has continued work to address the recommendations presented by the Task and Finish Group.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to consider the report recognising the advancements achieved in response to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, as outlined below.

Key lines of enquiry include:

- 1) Whether the committee is assured of the advancements outlined below.
- 2) To consider the proposal to formally close the Task and Finish Group and ensure that further monitoring is undertaken through the six monthly Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and the regular quarterly Performance Assurance Framework (PAF) reports to the committee.
- 3) To assess whether there is a need for further additional future reporting on the subject, following the completion of the project to address CRMP commitment 3.5.
- 4) Identification of any specific areas for action or response by the relevant Cabinet Member.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

1 Background and context

- 1.1 West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is dedicated to fulfilling its CRMP 3.5, which involves the creation and execution of an operational response model aimed at optimising the availability of retained resources.

- 1.2 This crucial initiative is scheduled to commence in the early stages of the upcoming year 2024. To lay a solid foundation for this endeavour, an academic research paper has already been generated by the Area Manager for Service Delivery. This research paper offers valuable insights and recommendations, pinpointing four distinct areas that will serve as focal points for the upcoming project.
- 1.3 These areas were identified through RDS focus groups and the distribution of surveys to RDS staff members. Ensuring staff input and expertise has been pivotal in shaping the strategic direction of this project.
- 1.4 The Service is also taking proactive steps to incorporate the Task and Finish Group's recommendations into the overarching project mandate. The recommendations of this group are considered instrumental in achieving the goals set in CRMP commitment 3.5. To maintain transparency and accountability, regular progress updates will be a fundamental aspect of this initiative. These updates will be reported on a quarterly basis through the CRMP report.

2 Progress Update

- 2.1 These actions have been progressed and a summary of the progress to date is outlined below against the TFG's [recommendations](#):

3 New Service Measure

- 3.1 Core Measures around availability remain. However, in addition to this the service will continue to monitor more closely with its new service measures. The new service measure will be ready for quarter one 2024/5 and will show a combined picture of whole time and retained availability. This measure will ensure that all contribute to the services availability performance.

4 A more flexible training approach

- 4.1 Having moved into Horsham Training Centre we now have weekend courses planned to support RDS colleagues to ensure a more inclusive approach.
- 4.2 The introduction of our three day Operational Licence is now a more flexible model of delivering training to all our staff. Its flexibility enables RDS staff to complete the entire course or split it up into three separate days. Up to eight weekend courses a year will be facilitated to allow RDS staff to have weekend days dedicated to training as an option to complete this mandatory training.
- 4.3 All our training instructors will now complete up to eight evening commitments a year to support RDS training. In addition to this, several webinars are facilitated over evenings supporting RDS staff outside of their full time employment, this includes our leadership and culture development seminars.

5 Utilise WSFRS staff to maximise availability.

- 5.1 In addition to those staff already identified in Business Fire Safety that contribute to retained availability, the service now has more non response staff from other departments including Health and Safety, Prevention and Fleet.

6 Pass out Parades.

- 6.1 Our RDS Pass Out Parades continue to be conducted, but they have been revamped to closely resemble our Wholetime Pass Out Parades. These ceremonies now include the participation of the families of new recruits who gather at the training centre. During this special occasion, one of our senior officers is there to warmly welcome and engage with these firefighters and their families.
- 6.2 The highlight of the event is when the recruits are presented with certificates from a senior leader, symbolising their successful completion of training, and extends a heartfelt welcome to the WSFRS family. The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire & Rescue is a regular attendee to our pass outs as it not only celebrates the work undertaken, but the future engagement with the County Council in keeping residents safe.
- 6.3 Families and staff are welcomed and there are refreshments provided following the Pass Out parade, fostering a sense of togetherness and celebration. The entire event is documented and shared on various social media platforms. This enables the recruits to share their personal stories and motivations for joining WSFRS as On Call/RDS firefighters, allowing them to connect with a wider audience and potentially inspire others.
- 6.4 Ongoing planning efforts are directed towards compensating for Pass Out Parades that were regrettably missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our training team is diligently reviewing the best approaches to ensure that those who missed their special day have an opportunity to be recognised and celebrated in a manner deserved.

7 Develop RDS staff and allow them to gain skills outside of response.

- 7.1 The service has achieved considerable success in the development of our RDS colleagues, enabling them to acquire skills that go beyond their primary response roles.
- 7.2 This initiative extends to RDS staff members who have received training to become proficient trainers in various domains outside their standard RDS responsibilities. For instance, some RDS personnel have undergone specialised training to become facilitators in areas such as breathing apparatus operation, road traffic collision, and instructing others in tackling compartment fires in our new facilities located at Horsham.
- 7.3 These individuals now play an essential role in delivering training sessions, ensuring that our team remains well prepared and equipped to handle these critical scenarios.
- 7.4 Other opportunities have seen RDS staff become engaged in associate trainer programs. These programs encompass diverse areas of expertise, including Immediate Emergency Care, Breathing Apparatus Trainer. Also, more RDS staff members are actively working towards achieving their Business Fire Safety qualifications and are carrying out roles including wellbeing and diversity champions along with attending and becoming members of our Shadow Board which is an integral part of our Governance arrangements.
- 7.5 This concerted effort to empower our RDS colleagues with versatile skills and knowledge not only enhances the overall preparedness of our firefighting team

but also reflects our commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery.

8 Removing barriers from allowing RDS staff to move to Wholetime.

- 8.1 The service is successfully overcoming any obstacles that were hindering the transition of RDS staff to whole time positions. By effectively utilising our migration pools. At the time of writing this report we have been able to appoint 21 individuals from a migration pool of 29 into whole time posts.
- 8.2 Our commitment to maintaining seamless service delivery has led us to establish an additional 11 fixed term contracts, ensuring that there is consistent coverage for the wholetime positions within our service, prioritising opportunities to RDS staff.

9 Recognise the importance of the role of Employers.

- 9.1 The service now conducts an annual "Employer of the Year" award, and in the year 2023, this prestigious accolade was proudly presented to Seal Bay in Selsey.
- 9.2 The local press and social media platforms documented the occasion when one of our new appreciation plaques was presented to the Director of Seal Bay.
- 9.3 This plaque signifies the company's exceptional dedication to supporting its staff in their role as retained firefighters, allowing them to leave their primary job and respond to emergencies. In line with this commitment, we are set to present additional appreciation plaques every quarter, recognising the continuous efforts of businesses in this regard.
- 9.4 We are rigorously crafting a robust framework to define the criteria for awarding these plaques. This structured approach ensures that the acknowledgment process is fair, transparent, and reflective of the outstanding contributions made by these businesses to their communities.

10 Proposal details

- 10.1 For the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee to consider the report and the key lines of enquiry as highlighted above.

Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 10.2 None

Consultation, engagement, and advice

- 10.3 None

11 Finance

- 11.1 Whilst there are no financial impacts attributed to this report, the wider CRMP project will consider and address any financial implications.

12 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (In place or planned)
Impact of current financial climate	Careful budget planning, also review of performance and budget matters through the PRR report considered at scrutiny and Cabinet.

13 Policy alignment and compliance

13.1 There are no social value, crime and disorder, equality duty, human rights, public health, Climate Change, or legal implications arising from this report.

Contact Officer: Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Chief Fire Officer

14 Appendices

None

15 Background papers:

None