
Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

Retained Duty System Task and Finish Group

Report by the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

Summary

The Task and Finish Group (TFG) was made up of members of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee and its purpose was to scrutinise policies/issues concerning retained firefighters.

Members of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee were invited to volunteer to serve on the TFG in the first instance, membership of which should be cross-party and comprise no more than seven. Group leaders were consulted before the final membership was agreed which was Councillors Boram, Pendleton, Albury, Milne and Chowdhury.

The Committee agreed that the TFG should meet informally in the first instance so that members could learn about the background and wider issues with the retained duty system and in order to gather evidence to aid the formal scrutiny session. That meeting took place virtually on 5 May. The TFG then meet formally in public on 9 May.

This report summarises the discussion that took place at both meetings and summarises the recommendations of the TFG.

A report will be included in the agenda for the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee in July and following that any recommendations directed to the Cabinet Member Community Support, Fire and Rescue.

Recommendations

See section 3.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to consider the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, listed in section 3, and whether they should be directed to the Cabinet Member Community Support, Fire and Rescue.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Group met informally, on 5 April 2022. Councillors Boram, Pendleton and Milne attended. Councillors Albury and Chowdhury were unable to attend but the session was recorded and sent to them immediately after the meeting for information. Kevin Boram was appointed as the Chairman of the TFG.
- 1.2 The Group then meet formally, in public, on 9 April. All Members of the TFG were in attendance.

2 Discussion

- 2.1 Members heard evidence from Peter Rickard, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and Neil Fairhall, Station Manager, and a number of their team including current Retained Duty System (RDS) colleagues.
- 2.2 The following was discussed:
- The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the current West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSRS) RDS structure;
 - Review the current performance measures;
 - Review the current recruitment, induction and retention procedures for RDS
 - Consider the relationship between a flexible and resilient RDS model and the WSFRS emergency response standards
- 2.3 In particular the ACFO and his team raised the following areas for the TFG to consider:
- Core Measures around availability should be retained. However, in addition to this a new Service Measure could be introduced to show service availability. The purpose of which would show that all contribute to the service.
 - A more flexible training system. Currently the majority of training that RDS colleagues need to undertake is offered on a Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm basis. It is suggested this could be extended to offer evening and weekends. For RDFs this could be easier to manage around other commitments.
 - Utilise WSFRS staff to maximise potential. This would allow non-response staff to move across departments with the WSFRS 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.
 - Retention. There is currently a difference between the pass out parades for Whole Time and Retained Firefighters. It is suggested this be updated to show the 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.
 - Developing RDS colleagues and allow them to gain skills outside of response, such as Business Fire Safety. It was suggested this could be done on a trial basis of around 3 or 4 RDFs. It was noted that budget would be required for this.
 - A commitment to keeping barriers away from allowing RDS staff to move to Whole Time.
- 2.4 In addition to the above the ACFO explained that he had started to have a by-monthly virtual meetings with RDS staff and he would like to continue this going forward.
- 2.5 Lastly the ACFO stated that as part of the wider Community Risk management Plan work he would like to look at modernising the contracts for RDS staff.

3 Recommendations and Observations

- 3.1 The TFG 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 WSFRS staff to maximise potential and allow non-response staff to move across departments with the WSFRS 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 RDS staff and allow them to gain skills outside of response, such as Business Fire Safety.
- A commitment to keeping barriers away from allowing RDS staff to move to Whole Time.
- Recognise the importance of the role of Employers

4 Further Work

4.1 It was agreed that no further meetings of the TFG were required.

4.2 The following additional actions were agreed:

- 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 RDS staff 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 RDS staff.

5 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

5.1 It was noted that the TFG could not look into all the detail of all the areas in the terms of reference. It agreed to look at five or six suggestions that officers put forward as achievable. The Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) does look into many of the areas highlighted by the TFG and that would be the longer-term project.

6 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 6.1 Officers provided background information during the informal TFG and assisted Members with responses and information to all queries.
- 6.2 It was noted that the proposals would be included in a staff newsletter to allow staff to feedback any comments.

7 Finance

- 7.1 The cost of the TFG was met from existing service budgets.
- 7.2 Some recommendations may result in additional costs such as offering training outside of additional hours. Any such additional costs would be highlighted with

TFG and discussed with the Cabinet Member Community Support, Fire and Rescue.

Cllr Kevin Boram

Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

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Background papers

None