

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FRIDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2017 at 10:00AM

DAY CREWED PLUS FIRE STATIONS

Report of the Director of Community Protection and Chief Fire Officer

Author: Darryl Keen, Director of Community Protection and Chief Fire Officer

Executive Member: Terry Hone, Community Safety and Waste Management

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) as to current performance of Day Crew Plus (DCP) stations operated by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS):
- Current benchmarks, standards, and delivery of service in line with key strategies and objectives.
 - Costs and returns, comparison with projections set out in initial feasibility reports.
 - Perception and acceptance by personnel.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Day Crewing Plus system is an alternative method of staffing fire stations. It is more efficient in its use of staff as it requires half the amount of crew for a single appliance station than are needed for a traditional whole-time shift crewing model (28 down to 14). However, it also compromises resilience to achieve this efficiency. It is based upon a 24-hour self-rostering crewing system composed of positive and standby hours. The benefits of DCP include:
- The ability to crew the fire appliance with 5 personnel at all times
 - Significant contribution towards achieving efficiency savings.
 - More efficient Duty System that does not negatively impact upon operational response standards or appliance availability

The disadvantages include:

- Less resilient crewing as staff are rostered for longer periods of duty but cannot remain at incidents any longer or be used as many times in each 24-hour period as Whole Time resources
- As there is no collective agreement for the use of this system it currently relies on staff volunteering to work this pattern, however there are financial benefits to doing so and, to date, sufficient staff have been willing to do so
- An increase in call volumes, as may result from wider adoption of co-responding, may make this crewing pattern less viable

2.2 HFRS has operated DCP systems at Potters Bar since 2012, Rickmansworth since 2013, and Baldock & Letchworth since 2015. The initial feasibility report outlined an initial investment of £350,000 per station to provide additional separate sleeping quarters (based on a Travelodge style design) with projected revenue savings of £300,000 per annum, per station, through efficiencies in staff costs.

2.3 Actual total revenue savings are on average £377,000 per station per annum. This equates to £1,131,000 overall across the three sites, plus an additional £4,510 in costs avoided in the non-use of pre-arranged overtime to cover staffing deficiencies. This indicates that the initial investment at each site was recuperated within just over 1 year of operation.

2.4 Stations were identified and chosen by their levels of activity compared to other sites. Those that were shown to have a low level of activity were considered for the change to the Day Crewing Plus model.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That the Committee are asked to note the positive benefits achieved through the introduction of the Day Crewing Plus (DCP) system in Hertfordshire at the three established sites.

3.2 That the Committee also note the effect introduction of additional DCP crewing systems may have on Service resilience for significant incidents.

4. Background – Performance in relation to current HFRS standards

4.1 Attendance times

4.1.1 DCP stations achieved below average results on attendance targets in comparison to other crewing systems between 2013/14 – 2015/16. However, 21 out of the 30 (70%) failed

attendances were for incidents beyond their normal response area (station ground).

- 4.1.2 As low activity stations the statistics are only partially representative. There is some evidence of correlation between low incident numbers and lower performance as a single incident can have a disproportionate impact on the overall result. DCP stations consistently receive lower incident numbers and this in itself is what makes this more efficient system viable.

4.2 **Other activities supporting HFRS' strategic objectives**

- 4.2.1. Prevention and Protection: DCP stations perform well despite their reduced establishment and deliver a high and consistent level of prevention and protection activities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the extended working day and working patterns coupled with a smaller work force facilitates improved consistency and continuity in the engagement with communities and local businesses.

5. **Costs and returns**

5.1. **Capital costs**

- 5.1.1. The building costs for Rickmansworth, Potters Bar and Baldock exceeded the initial projection of £1,050,000 (£350,000/station) with an actual total overspend of £61,393.

- 5.1.2. An additional £41,000 was spent on refurbishments at the three existing fire station buildings, which was not included in initial estimates, bringing the total overspend to £102,393. However, given the savings projections it was felt important that we presented staff with a high quality product that they ready to 'buy-in' to. This has proven to be a sensible investment and has resulted in considerable station pride being demonstrated by staff.

- 5.1.3. The total initial outlay for the three sites came to £1,152,393.

5.2. **Revenue savings**

- 5.2.1. The initial feasibility reports suggested salary savings of £300,000 per annum per station possible. This has been surpassed at all stations by, on average, £55,000.
- 5.2.2. An additional £17,000 saving per station is being achieved through reductions in transport, supplies and service costs.
- 5.2.3. DCP stations have seen a drop in short-term sickness by 52%. It has been calculated that this saves approximately £216.36 for every shift previously lost. This represents a further saving of £5,000 per annum per station.

5.3. Overall financial performance

5.3.1. Total revenue savings are on average £377,000 per station per annum. A total of £1,131,000 overall, plus an additional £4,510 in costs avoided. This indicates that the initial investment was recuperated within just over 1 year of operation.

6. Perception and acceptance by crews

6.1 Research

6.1.1 As the introduction of DCP was a new crewing and staffing model for both HFRS and the individuals who had volunteered and had been selected to work the system, it was identified that a piece of research was required to capture the thoughts, issues and challenges of the staff at the three sites.

6.1.2 This research consisted of three focus groups and three interviews.

6.1.3 DCP staff were generally positive about the crewing system. As volunteers, they understand that they have the opportunity of transferring back to traditional duty system stations.

6.2 Key challenges

6.2.1 Long-hours on station exacerbate fatigue. Recuperation time is not always possible due to risk critical work, emergency response and response standards.

6.2.2 Living together for long periods without a break can increase stress and team-members must get along. This is already considered informally during the recruitment process. Only volunteers are considered.

6.2.3 The 'family friendly' aspect of DCP is largely unrealistic. Very few families use the living quarters although they are available for use.

6.3 Flexible self-rostering

6.3.1 Work/Life Balance: staff were very positive about self-rostering as conducive to a healthy work/life balance.

6.3.2 Workforce:

- Arranging training and ensuring staff are up-to-date is challenging. Frequent duplication is necessary.
- Builds cohesion and team-work through mixed teams.

7. Risks to the sustainability of DCP: Working Time Regulations

- 7.1 The Working Time Regulations (WTR) determine the maximum weekly working time, patterns of work and holidays, plus the daily and weekly rest periods. They also cover the health and working hours of night workers. The Regulations apply to both part-time and full-time workers, including the majority of agency workers and freelancers, although certain categories of workers are excluded.
- 7.2 Those staff working the DCP system are required to work additional hours beyond those identified in the Regulations (48hrs) and as such are required to opt out of the regulations. These staff receive additional pensionable salary to work the additional hours.
- 7.3 Fire and Rescue Services are not exempt from the Regulations. However, there are some exemptions from the Regulations that apply to Fire and Rescue Services as civil protection services.
- 7.4 In addition, guidance from the HSE indicates any collective agreement between the workforce and the FRS under the WTR does not relieve the FRS of their duties to ensure that the working hours of firefighters do not adversely affect their health and safety. To date HFRS has not been able to achieve a local collective agreement and manage the employees on an individual basis.
- 7.5 HSE guidance goes on to state that Fire and Rescue Services need to consider whether their working arrangements are likely to cause fatigue. If they are, they will need to put systems into place to assess and manage the risks, take action to eliminate and reduce the risk and monitor their working time arrangements.
- 7.6 HFRS current work routine, rest, recuperation arrangements and working arrangements for DCP staff take account of manage the items identified by the HSE.
- 7.7 Following consultation with staff the risk of fire officers opting back in to the WTR or of litigation due to non-compliance appears to be low.

8. Feasibility of expanding DCP in the future

- 8.1. Property and capital development is not within the scope of this report.
- 8.2. Activity levels may rise in the near future due to a diversification of response activities (co-responding, prevention) and continued housing developments. Expanding DCP, which is more efficient but less resilient than some other shift patterns, may not be beneficial in light of these trends, which will inevitably affect the efficiencies and increased productivity so far observed.
- 8.3 During periods of high activity and also prolonged incidents, operational resilience of HFRS can be affected by the number of DCP stations. This is due to a shift change not occurring during a 24hr

period at these locations. This impact on resilience needs to be recognised when considering potential additional DCP stations.

- 8.4. The current staffing at DCP does not reflect the age and gender disparities contained within the current workforce and this may pose risks to sustainability and skills transfer in the future. In addition the extended shifts (24hr) and prolonged time spent at station may not be viewed as particularly family friendly and may discourage female staff from joining the DCP system.. Expanding DCP, whilst failing to attract a balanced workforce, risks reversing the progress already made to increase diversity within HFRS.
- 8.5. Arranging training on self-rostering systems is challenging, even though DCP stations have priority. Additional DCP stations could make this unmanageable.