

Status of Report: Public

Meeting: Combined Fire Authority

Date: 16 June 2021

Subject: On-Call Project Update

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For: Information Only

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) on the outcomes of the On-Call review project, following the update given at its meeting in February 2020.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the CFA notes the outcome of the On-Call Review Project and the impact it has had on the On-Call appliance availability which has increased from 56.7% (2018-19) to 76.9% (2020-21).

Executive Summary

3. The report details the outcomes of the On-Call Review Project which commenced in January 2019 with the purpose of improving the following areas in relation to the On-Call section:
 - Availability;
 - Recruitment;
 - Retention.
4. The review highlighted 30 recommendations to bring about improvement in the above areas
5. Included within the recommendations were several areas of improvement that have been implemented immediately. These included areas such as reduced timescales for training, flexibility in availability to allow a more family friendly On Call contract, flexible use of tactical response vehicles to allow for a response with a reduced crew.

Background

6. The composition of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland means that different crewing systems are used dependent up on the risks. In more rural areas, the use of On-Call staff is the most efficient way of providing operational response.
7. This means that staff are able to respond to their designated station within a given timescale (5-7 mins) if alerted to respond to an emergency incident. When not needed for incidents, staff will continue with their everyday jobs and life.
8. The staff that undertake On-Call duties give a large personal commitment to the service and their community.
9. The State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020 by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Thomas Winsor recognised the tremendous dedication of On-Call firefighters, but stated that the current model needs attention to make sure that it is more sustainable and works well.
10. Locally this commitment is proving to be a strain, due to changes to community demographics, work life balance and life commitments. The result is that there has been a decline in operational availability, as well as numbers of On-Call staff (although this relationship is complex as less staff can potentially provide more availability depending on individual circumstances).
11. In December 2018, the Service commissioned a project to review the challenges facing the On-Call section with the aim of achieving:
 - Improved On-Call availability;
 - Improved recruitment;
 - Improved retention of On-Call staff.
12. The review highlighted many of the challenges facing all UK Fire and Rescue Services with regards the provision of On-Call staff. The project team worked with a wide variety of stakeholders to identify local, regional and national issues along with a series of options of address them.
13. The CFA received a report on progress midway through the project at its meeting on 12 February 2020.
14. In February 2021, the project team presented its findings to the Senior Management Team, along with 30 recommendations, focusing on 5 key areas:
 - Recruitment;
 - Retention;
 - Appliance availability;
 - Learning and Development;
 - Reward and Recognition.

15. From the 30 recommendations; the Senior Management Team have:
 - Approved 18 recommendations;
 - Rejected 6 recommendations;
 - Deferred 6 for further information.
16. Where possible, the Service has already implemented those recommendations that provide a 'quick-win', these have contributed to the increase in On-Call availability from 56.7% (2018-19) to 76.9% (2020-21)
17. Those rejected include the creation of an availability bonus and an increase to the annual retaining fee both of which require changes to the National terms and conditions (Grey Book) which was deemed as unachievable.
18. The approved recommendations can be summarised for each of the key areas below. Further detail showing what has been achieved is attached at the Appendix.

Recruitment

19. Allow our recruitment systems to be open continuously. Provision of early and constant engagement throughout the recruitment process. Supporting recruitment of stations where lost engagement is occurring.
20. Remote delivery of learning and delivery as part of initial skill acquisition. Reducing the number of days required in a more formal setting for Learning and Development.

Retention

21. Enhance provision for On-Call staff to undertake additional duties, such as Risk, Community Safety and Fire Protection at times when peak resource demand exists.
22. Improve the way the Service captures the reasons why our On-Call staff leave.
23. Self-rostering work patterns. To meet station and community needs, where appropriate, individuals commit to a four-week rota of availability, allowing stations to work more flexibly.

Appliance Availability

24. Provision of Tactical Response vehicles at stations where appliance availability is low.

Learning and Development

25. Learning and development delivery model to change from existing 24 months to 10 months, which will allow individuals to be trained quicker and increase appliance availability.

Reward and Recognition

26. Rewards and recognition. The Service will put in place and support a formal recognition event, where employees and family members are formerly recognised for their contributions to the Service and the local community.

Report Implications/Impact

27. Legal (including crime and disorder)

The Combined Fire Authority has a statutory duty to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan that includes the provision of response service to fires and other emergencies. Use of the On-Call duty system plays an important part in exercising this duty, so maximising availability improves our ability to deliver the plan.

28. Financial (including value for money, benefits and efficiencies)

The implementation of the recommendations is likely to impact the On-Call budget. That said, however, improving the retention of On-Call firefighters has the potential to reduce futures costs in areas such as recruitment and training, along with reducing the administration costs elsewhere in the Service.

29. Risk (including corporate and operational, health and safety and any impact on the continuity of service delivery)

We are less likely to meet our response standard of 10-minute average attendance time to life risk incidents if we don't improve On-Call availability.

30. Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders (including the Equality Impact Assessment)

On-Call staff have been involved within the review since the start and will be engaged with as the Service considers the implementation of the recommendations.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out into the implications of any change if necessary.

31. Environmental

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

32. Impact upon Our Plan Objective

The recommendations support the Services purpose of Safer People, Safer Places along with the response strategy of supplying the appropriate resources and attend incidents to meet the needs of our communities.

Background Papers

Report to the Combined Fire Authority 12 February 2020 – On-Call Review
Project Update

<https://leics-fire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/on-call-review-project.pdf>

Appendix

On Call Project Review Approved Recommendations

Officers to Contact

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