

Integrated Risk Management Plan Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report updates members on the three Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) projects, currently being implemented, and asks for approval from the Authority for a modification to the current Fire Control Project.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the progress being made with the three IRMP Projects; and
- b) Consider and give direction on preferred option for progressing IRMP 2, as detailed in section 5 of the report.

3 Background

In accordance with the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), contained within the Service Plan 2015-20¹, the Service currently has three significant IRMP projects running through this year. IRMP 1 and 2 aim to increase efficiency in the way that the Service uses its resources to staff Wholetime fire engines and its Fire Control function. Both projects are aiming to deliver improved efficiencies by 2020.

IRMP 3 relates to the redevelopment of the fire station and training complex at the Telford Central site in Stafford Park, Telford.

This report summarises the progress being made with these projects.

¹ <https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/service-plan-201520>

4 IRMP 1 - Wholetime duty system

The IRMP 1 Project involves making changes to the wholetime duty system, which was in place up until December 2016, with the aim of improving the efficiency of the previous duty system and meeting the IRMP target of a reduction in costs by up to £400k per annum by 2020.

Following consultation with staff and very constructive negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), a new duty system was developed that consists of:

- A 4 Watch Flexible Rostering duty system
- Locally managed rostering
- On a shift for shift basis
- With start and finish times of 0830-1830 and 1830-0830

The pilot of this new system was started on 1 January 2017 and, at their meeting on 26 April 2017, members were informed that the new system was running very effectively, with 100% availability of the wholetime fire engines being maintained and approximately £100k of savings already having been achieved, in comparison to the same period the previous year.

The pilot has continued to run just as effectively, since April, with 100% availability of the fire engines continuing to be maintained and current predictions being that at least £350k of savings are likely to be accrued during this pilot year; well on track to achieve the targeted efficiency savings by 2020.

Although more complex than the previous '2-2-4' shift system, that had been in place for many decades, the Service has been able to ensure it maintains 100% availability thanks to the efforts of the watch and station management, the introduction of a new IT based shift rostering system and, in no small way, to the willingness of our staff to adopt these new ways of working.

A full report on the project will be brought to the Fire Authority at the end of the initial 12 month pilot.

5 IRMP 2 – Fire Control Project

The Fire Control Project consists of three phases, which together are aiming to improve the efficiency of this important front-line function by 50%; the equivalent of approximately £300k per annum. Whilst the three phases are being run in tandem, they are distinct elements of work, consisting of:

- Phase 1 - changing the previous duty system operated in Fire Control (the traditional '2-2-4' system), to a system that improves on the resilience of such a small team;
- Phase 2 – using the capacity available in Fire Control to undertake additional relevant internal work and processes; and

- Phase 3 – to explore options for taking on additional work through contracts with relevant external organisations.

Progress with each of these phases of the project are detailed below, with simpler updates relating to Phases 2 and 3 covered first.

Progress to date with Phases 2 and 3

Although appropriate Phase 2 work-streams have been identified for inclusion into Fire Control, due to the high levels of sickness absence during much of the year, it has not been possible to make significant progress on their actual implementation. It is hoped that now that the levels of unplanned absence have reduced, then further progress will be possible over the coming months.

In relation to Phase 3 work-streams, Fire Control have been taking all of the out-of-hours calls for Telford and Wrekin Council, since December 2016. All indications are that this contracted arrangement is running very effectively for both organisations. This first year of operation is providing an opportunity for the Service to explore how this type of work could be further progressed with other organisations into the future.

Progress with Phase 1

In approving the new duty system to be piloted in Fire Control, at their meeting in May 2016 Fire Authority members noted that, whilst the Service is keen to ensure that any change to the current duty system is consistent with the needs and desires of those staff that have to work it, it is also conscious that the objective set by the Fire Authority (to improve the efficiency of Fire Control by approximately 50%) is a significant challenge. To achieve this, and thereby demonstrate the clear benefit of the Service holding onto its own Fire Control function (when many other Services are combining theirs with others), would require a fundamental change to the way that the function currently operates.

A significant challenge to doing this was how to develop a way of working that mitigates against the very high levels of absence, experienced in Fire Control, and that improves the ability of our staff to maintain a resilient function. This requires maximum flexibility and the ability for staff to take responsibility for ensuring numbers do not fall below acceptable levels.

At that time the Fire Authority agreed that, to obtain greatest efficiency out of such a relatively small number of staff (17), they need to operate as a single team; constantly improving what they do by learning from each other and sharing best practice.

Therefore, whilst it was not the preferred choice of Fire Control staff, the duty system used for the pilot consists of:

- A Self-Rostering duty system
- Locally managed rostering

- Keeping the existing start and finish times of 0800-1800 and 1800- 0800
- Annualised hours

Similar to the whole-time duty changes, the pilot went live on 1 January 2017. The first 3-4 months of the pilot experienced significant challenges due to levels of sickness in control that went even beyond their existing, very high, baseline. This placed a high demand for flexibility on the remaining staff – many of whom rose to the challenge and managed to mitigate the effects of the high level of absence to the point that there were only four occasions (when less than two staff were available) when the Service had to fall-back to Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's (H&WFRS) Control Room. This did, however, have the effect of testing and proving that the contingency arrangements in place with H&WFRS work well.

On 18 April 2017, the FBU registered a dispute with the Service, regarding the negotiating rights of non-union members and other concerns regarding the Fire Control project itself. Whilst the main issues covered by the dispute were quickly settled, either in full or conditionally (dependent on the planned changes to the management structure being able to be implemented), concerns about the strength of feeling their members had about the new system remained. To demonstrate this, the FBU stated that consultation they had carried out with Fire Control staff (including non-FBU members) indicated the following “consistent and unequivocal” feedback:

- Need for a more structured pattern;
- Self-rostering results in excessive hours being worked in some periods followed by fallow periods;
- An absence of natural rotation;
- All of which is not good for work/life balance.

Based on the feedback they had received, the FBU changed their position, in relation to the pilot, and now state that the Self Rostering system is non-compliant with the National Grey Book Conditions of Service and therefore needs to go to the National Joint Council's Technical Advisory Panel for consideration. They believe that the only workable alternative solution is a Flexible Rostering System (as per the Wholetime Duty System pilot).

As part of the second quarterly review, the Service undertook its own consultation with staff, with the results indicating very strongly that Fire Control staff feel that:

- They do not feel that the Service has listened to their concerns through the development and implementation of the pilot
- They would prefer to have greater notification of when they will be on duty than they currently get
- That they have not personally benefited from the flexibility that Self Rostering offers them
- Neither them personally, or the Team as a whole, as benefited from working as part of a single, larger team

- That the Self Rostering System needs changes to be made to numerous elements of the system; and that
- The challenges involved in getting the system to work effectively are not achievable.

The results from the consultation were considered by the Service Management Team (SMT), as part of the quarterly monitoring process. They considered the feedback to be disappointing, especially as staff had been operating the new system for more than 7 months, and therefore starting to get used to the change, and also because it contrasted significantly with the quantifiable performance of the new duty system, which had seen significant improvement during the second quarter review (see table 1 below).

It was also frustrating to officers because many of the “restrictive” elements of the new system had been hangovers from the previous system that had been retained at the staff’s insistence and new practices that were borne of an inability to co-operate. This frustration is intensified by the knowledge other services have been able to adopt more effective and efficient working patterns in their control rooms and even a neighbouring FRS have been able to successfully implement a self-rostering system in their control room, with full staff engagement and acceptance from the FBU that it is “Grey-book Compliant”.

Officers continue to believe that Self Rostering is likely to be the most resilient option available, for such a small number of staff. However, having taken into consideration the feedback from staff, the improving results from the new system and the latest position with the FBU dispute, SMT were minded to consider suggesting to the Fire Authority that a 12 month trial of a Flexible Rostering System should be considered, with the results then informing on the right shift system to be permanently introduced into the future.

Performance Indicator	Last quarter of 2016 (previous '2/2/4' system)	1 st quarter 2017 (Self Rostering)	2nd quarter 2017 (Self Rostering)	Comments
Total number of shifts lost to sickness absence (% of required shifts)	86 (16%)	105 (20%)	83 (15%)	Significant improvement on 1 st quarter results and slight improvement on previous shift system.
Total number of shifts operated with the optimum number of staff (3)	117 (67%)	93 (53%)	140 (78%)	Significant improvement on 1 st quarter results and previous shift system.
The total number of shifts operated with 2 staff	58	78	40	Significant improvement on 1 st quarter results and previous shift system.
The number of occasions when only 1 member of staff was available for duty	0	6	0	Significant improvement on 1 st quarter results and the same as previous shift system.
The number of occasions where no Mobilising Officer was available	1	2	1	Improvement on 1 st quarter results and the same as previous shift system.
The number of occasions that Emergency Operations were transferred to Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service	0	4	0	Significant improvement on 1 st quarter results and the same as previous shift system.

Table 1 - Quarterly performance monitoring of Fire Control Project

However, SMT would only agree to put such a suggestion to the Fire Authority if management could be assured that the following two conditions could be met, prior to the planned Strategy and Planning Members Working Group (StraP) meeting in September:

1. That Fire Control staff could demonstrate that such a system has the ability to provide greater flexibility and resilience than the previous 2-2-4 system; and
2. That satisfactory progress and agreement could be made, prior to the StraP meeting, on the operating principles of a Flexible Rostering model, suitable for Fire Control.

StraP met on 20 September and officers were able to give an assurance to Members that these two conditions had been met. Whilst a lot of discussion, negotiation and formal agreement with the FBU still needs to be completed, the progress made prior to that meeting indicates that Fire Control staff and the FBU are prepared to put the effort needed into making sure a Flexible Rostering trial is likely to be possible and practically beneficial to the Service.

StraP Members therefore agreed that the following two options should be put to the Fire Authority, with their recommendation being that the Fire Authority gives outline approval, for Option 2.

The Fire Authority is asked to consider the following two options.

EITHER:

1. **Option 1** – That the 12 month Self Rostering Pilot is continued, with a view to endorsing a permanent switch to the Self-Rostering system following a successful 12 month review, as is currently planned.

OR

2. **Option 2** – That the 12 month Self Rostering Pilot continues until it concludes at the end of December and then a new 12 month trial of a Flexible Rostering Duty System should be undertaken.

AND

In conjunction with either option, the Service should continue to actively explore collaborative opportunities to improve resilience, efficiency and effectiveness in SFRS's control and mobilisation function.

If the Fire Authority chooses Option 1, then the FBU dispute will continue and the Service may have to consider permanent compulsory change of contracts, across to the Self Rostering system, through a dismiss and re-engage process.

If the Fire Authority gives outline approval for Option 2, then it should also stipulate that:

- i. Officers must progress negotiations with the FBU in order to reach a formal agreement on the details of a possible Flexible Rostering trial and then report back to the December Fire Authority meeting, on whether adequate progress has been made to enable the trial to go ahead from 1 January 2018;
- ii. The Fire Authority will only give final approval for the trial to go ahead following their deliberations at the December meeting; and
- iii. If approval for the trial is not able to be given in December, then the Service will progress with the current plan of concluding the Self Rostering pilot with a view to its full implementation during 2018.

Officers and Fire Control staff are currently doing the necessary work to ensure that either option can be progressed past the end of the current 12 month pilot.

Following implementation of either option 1 or option 2, and further investigations into collaborative options, officers will report to the FRA with options and recommendations on how mobilisation and control function for Shropshire FRS should be provided. The outcome of which may need to be included in the next iteration of the IRMP.

6 IRMP 3 Telford Central site re-development

On 14 June 2017, following the decision by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner as to which Police functions he would like to be included in the development, Members gave their approval for the significant programme of works required to progress with the re-development of the Service's Telford Central site, in Stafford Park, Telford.

Members noted the significant collaboration opportunities being planned into this programme and also noted that the cost of the work could amount to as much as £12m; although this would not become clear until discussions about cost apportionment have been concluded with West Mercia Police and fully costed tenders have been received from prospective contractors, which will not be for another several months yet.

Officers explained that the next steps in this programme are as follows:

1. Programme Mandate and Brief to be developed;
2. Programme Team to be put in place;
3. Procuring the Project Design and Management Services;
4. Requirements Specification developed, following consultation with all relevant stakeholders;
5. Full outcome specification completed, ready for tender;
6. Tender process for Design and Build of the overall project;
7. The preferred contractor is approved by the Fire Authority;
8. Preparation for building works to start, including the movement of functions as required to support continued service delivery;
9. Staged Building works, including relevant Programme Milestones and Gateways;
10. Programme completion;
11. Programme review.

Officers can report that the Programme Mandate and Brief have been developed, in accordance with the approval given by the Fire Authority, and that a Programme Team has started to be pulled together. The Service is in the process of procuring the professional Project Design and Management Services, required to support this significant project, and work has already started on refining the requirements specification, in readiness for the professional support being able to progress this to completion.

Discussions around possible cost apportionment for the development are still to be conducted. The Service is continuing to plan against the assumption that the project will be completed by April 2020.

7 Financial Implications

The IRMP works alongside the Fire Authority's Medium Term Corporate Plan to put the Service in a position where it can achieve a balanced budget in 2020.

In relation to the Telford Central project, Members will be aware of the levels of reserves currently held by the Authority and one of the reasons for holding such reserves is to fund major projects. The extent to which this project can be funded by reserves was explained in the June 2017 Fire Authority report dealing with this project², which demonstrated that the reserves available were likely to make up a substantial amount of any funding required.

But these balances will not cover the entire project and therefore other options will require consideration by the Authority. Some of these options will involve increases in the revenue budget and the Authority should compare the additional cost to the taxpayer with the value to be gained from improved facilities at Telford, when making their determination on which option to take. Any final funding decisions will be made after the tendering process is complete, and the actual cost of the project is clear.

8 Legal Comment

The Fire Authority has a duty to make adequate provision for providing an effective and efficient fire and rescue service for the Wrekin and Shropshire area.

Through the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan officers have identified and assessed all foreseeable fire and rescue risks that could affect its community and as a result have identified the further steps and resources required to address such risks, including them in the Service Plan 2015-20.

In relation to IRMP 1 and 2, the Authority is required to consider the normal contractual principle that variations to current terms and conditions of employment may only be made with agreement (either individually or collectively) or under a right of variation already contained within the terms of employment or relevant collective agreement.

The Authority should note the provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which entitle employees with at least two years' service to claim unfair or constructive unfair dismissal in circumstances where there has been an unlawful variation of a substantive term of employment without sufficient justification and reasonable procedure.

² <https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/14-telford-central-project-jun-2017.pdf>

The Authority is also required to consider the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, which prohibit unjustified 'provisions, criteria or practices' that indirectly discriminate against workers with protected characteristics. Furthermore, the Authority is required to consider the provisions of the Working Time Regulations 1998 in respect working hours and rest times, insofar as the provisions are not excluded or modified for the group of workers in question.

The refurbishment of Telford Central Fire Station will assist in the implementation of the steps identified in the Fire Authority's IRMP Plan and beyond. As the project develops, the Authority will have to draw up formal tender documents and run a compliant procurement process for design, construction and other associated services.

In addition, the Programme Team should consider at the earliest possible stage requirements for securing both development control (planning) approval and building regulation approval from Telford & Wrekin Council.

9 Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has been completed.

10 Equality Impact Assessment

An e-EQIA has been completed.

11 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

12 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.