

## IRMP 2 – Fire Control

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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### 1 Purpose of Report

This report is provided to formally recognise the conclusion of the twelve month trial of Self-Rostering in Fire Control and provides data, commentary and conclusions on the performance of the trial.

### 2 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of the report;

### 3 Background

In late 2014, Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority (SWFRA) considered proposals for inclusion in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2015 – 2020. Within these was a proposal to consider changes to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Control function, which aimed to improve efficiency within this important function by up to approximately £300k per annum.

The IRMP 2 Fire Control Project was therefore developed by Officers and consists of three phases. Whilst the three phases are being run in tandem, they are distinct elements of work, consisting of:

1. **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;
2. **Phase 2** – using the capacity available in Fire Control to undertake additional relevant internal work and processes; and
3. **Phase 3** – to explore options for taking on additional work through contracts with relevant external organisations.

This report provides an overview of the twelve month trial of a Self-Rostering duty system, which was implemented under Phase 1 of the overall project. It also provides a summary of the progress made to date with the other two phases of the IRMP 2 project. The report also offers a number of conclusions drawn from analysis of the process and the data obtained during the 12 month trial of the Self-Rostering duty system, both qualitative and quantitative.

## **4 Implementation**

During 2017, the Service adopted a trial of a Self-Rostering duty system within Fire Control as an alternative to the '2-2-4' system that had traditionally been worked. It should be noted that the purpose of the change in the shift system was not to reduce costs in this area, but to attempt to improve the resilience of the function, which would then be used to support the other two Phases of the project.

This new system was designed through regular engagement between Fire Control staff and their chosen representative body (the Fire Brigades Union - FBU), management and Human Resources officers. Project Champions amongst the staff were identified and, through regular meetings, the business rules around how Self-Rostering could work were defined and agreed. An online internal forum was also created to support this development stage as well as to aid ongoing communications between staff and management.

It should be noted that, during this development stage, concerns were raised by Fire Control staff about the fact that the Self-Rostering system had not been their preferred choice during the IRMP consultation process, carried out during 2014. However, management believed that this system was the one most likely to deliver improved resilience with such small numbers of staff involved (16 staff in total to provide 3 people on duty 24/7/365). To overcome some of the concerns raised by staff (especially around the issue of being able to plan ahead for periods where they would be able to take leave), the Self-Rostering system was developed in a way that accommodated leave arrangements similar to the previous '2-2-4' system.

Recognising the need to support our staff during such a significant change programme, an external consultant was engaged to carry out a team building programme with staff. This comprised all staff being offered the opportunity to undertake self-awareness questionnaires, get involved in team sessions and individual meetings to discuss their feedback on the project.

The new shift system went live on 1 January 2017 and was then subject to quarterly reviews, which focussed on the key performance indicators which had been agreed by the FBU and management.

## 5 Significant challenges during 2017

During the first 3 months of the trial, the Service experienced significant challenges due to high levels of sickness. This resulted in the Service having to utilise its existing contingency arrangements on four occasions during the first quarter of the year. This involves the fire control function being delivered by Hereford & Worcester (H&W) Fire and Rescue Service Control Room. The emergency response performance of the Service was maintained during these periods, demonstrating that the contingency arrangements are effective. However, other non-essential work activities were curtailed whilst contingency arrangements were in place. Due to improving sickness levels through the rest of the year, these fall-back arrangements were only required on one other occasion during the remaining 9 months of the trial.

Much of the sickness experienced during this period was as a result of ongoing long-term issues, carried over from the previous year. However, this resulted in the remaining staff having to be even more flexible in the shifts they were expected to provide, including in some cases staff being prepared to move their leave periods. The effort that staff put into maintaining the fire control function during this period was commendable. However, inevitably, concerns were raised by these staff about the impact this was having on their ability to manage a suitable work/life balance.

On 18 April 2017, the FBU registered a dispute with the Service, mainly focussed on the Service considering requests from a number of non-FBU members of staff who wished to represent themselves at the ongoing negotiation meetings, but also including other issues resulting from the challenges facing the project as a whole.

Recognising the need to overcome the impact being felt from the sickness levels, National Occupational Support Service (NOSS) counselling and support sessions were offered to all fire control staff through Occupational Health. These were attended by the majority of staff on either a group or individual basis. Additionally, individual Stress Risk Audits were carried out with staff within the Fire Control team.

Whilst the main issues contained in the FBU dispute were quickly remedied, based on the feedback they received from a survey they conducted with their members, the FBU moved to a position of not supporting the continuation of the Self-Rostering trial, instead stating that it was non-compliant with the National Grey Book Conditions of Service and therefore needed to go to the National Joint Council's Technical Advisory Panel for consideration. The FBU believed that the only workable alternative solution was the Flexible-Rostering System, as was being implemented across the Service's Wholetime stations.

## 6 Consultation

During the second quarter of the trial, the Service undertook its own consultation with all Fire Control staff. The results from the consultation were considered by the Service Management Team (SMT), as part of the quarterly monitoring process. SMT members considered the feedback to be disappointing, especially as staff had been operating the new system for more than 7 months and there was evidence that, with sickness levels then reducing, the performance of the system was improving and impacts on staff were reducing.

However, as a consequence of the feedback it received, SMT agreed to put a proposal to the Fire Authority that would see the Self-rostering trial continue for the remainder of the year and then a new 12 month trial of the Flexible-Rostering system would be undertaken. This would provide evidence about the benefits and impacts of both systems, and enable a comparison between them and the old '2-2-4' system. The Fire Authority gave outline approval for this proposal at their October meeting and final approval for the new trial at their December 2017 meeting.

The Self-Rostering trial was therefore able to run for the whole year, providing information for comparison into the future. The Flexible-Rostering trial then began on 1 January 2018.

## 7 Progress made across the three phases of IRMP 2

***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.***

The twelve month trial performance data is summarised in Appendix A to this report. It demonstrates performance against a number of key performance indicators (KPI), including a comparison against previous year's Quarter 4 (2016) data. The KPI data clearly demonstrates that, although the beginning of 2017 saw significant issues brought about by high sickness levels, the direction of travel proved to be far more positive towards the end of the one year trial.

***Phase 2 – Using the capacity available in Fire Control to undertake additional relevant internal work and processes.***

Fire Control staff were initially unable to undertake any additional work in 2017, due to the difficulties experienced with a number of shifts operated with less than three staff (optimum levels). This meant that shifts were covered with a minimum of two operators and the capacity to undertake additional work, in conjunction with business as usual activities, was greatly reduced.

However, a programme of work packages has subsequently been developed and, through dialogue with the Operations Planning Manager and the Fire Control Manager, staff are now engaged on a range of work activities that contribute to the Operations Department's objectives. This work currently includes reviewing of operational Brigade Orders, as well as data transfer of risk information in support of a project which will introduce a new Risk Management system across the whole Service.

### **Phase 3 – To explore options to in-source additional work through contracts with relevant external organisations.**

An opportunity presented itself for Phase 3 work to start earlier than had been initially anticipated, due to Telford and Wrekin Council (T&WC) approaching the Service to support their “out of hours” telephone answering service. The agreement was reached between the two organisations in late 2016 and commenced in early 2017. The arrangements have been in place for over twelve months and have been adopted as business as usual for staff who are now well versed in answering and dealing with calls of this type. This has resulted in Fire Control taking more than 700 calls for assistance, from members of the public, on behalf of T&WC.

The feedback on this agreement, from all stakeholders, has been positive. No members of the public have felt the need to comment on the service since the changeover, which demonstrates the service received has not diminished in quality. The consensus amongst Shropshire Fire Control staff is the handling of T&WC ‘Out of hours’ calls has now become business as usual. Fire Control staff have been positive about the introduction of this new workstream and have been very constructive with their comments, mainly focusing on improving ways of working. Similarly, T&WC staff have been positive throughout and are very happy with the professional service received. Overall, the service transfer was planned and implemented successfully and has delivered the desired outcomes.

The Service is currently in discussion with Shropshire Council Adult Social Care team about similar arrangements for their “Out of hours” calls.

## **8 Issues experienced during the trial**

From feedback provided through the consultation questionnaires and individual stress risk audits, the Service has a good understanding of some of the issues that may have impacted on the implementation of the Self-Rostering trial. Two of the most notable issues are discussed below.

### **Work/Life balance**

A primary reason quoted by most staff, and the FBU, for why they wished to discontinue with the trial was their inability to take appropriate rest and recovery between shifts.

The Service believes that this was not necessarily caused by the Self-Rostering system itself. As outlined previously, the FBU and staff (in the form of “Champions”) were integral to the creation of the business rules for how Self-Rostering would work during the trial. As part of this, staff wished to retain ‘protected periods of leave’; including 4 rota days each side of 4 holiday days. This was expressed as a ‘red-line’ for staff during the development phase, but unfortunately it appears to have resulted in reducing the flexibility available to staff to choose when they do and do not work – something that does not appear to have been present in other examples where self-rostering has been implemented<sup>1</sup>.

This was exacerbated for some staff who experienced difficulties in fitting in their initial shift picks for each quarter, especially if they were low down on the defined “pick order” for that quarter. Management believe that this played a large part in staff feeling they were unable to achieve a good work/life balance; with staff having periods when they were away from work for prolonged periods, then resulting in periods when they were ‘always at work’, in order to fit in their contracted number of shifts.

Combined with the impact from having low numbers of staff available to cover the shifts (due to the high sickness levels) this resulted in staff feeling increased levels of stress. The support provided by the Service to overcome this was discussed in previous sections.

It should be noted that the introduction of the Self-Rostering system did not affect the number of shifts that staff were required to work and the start and finish times remained the same as they were under the ‘2-2-4’ system.

Additionally, hours were strictly limited to contractual requirements, as with the old system. And to support flexibility, part shifts could be worked if desired, to accommodate individual and Service needs.

### **Management issues**

There were also a number of management issues identified through the trial. The old ‘2-2-4’ four watch system provided individuals with regular and consistent contact with the same Crew and Watch Managers. During the 2017 trial, contact with managers was maintained, but the Self-Rostering system meant that this functional role was not always performed by the same person from one shift to the next. This lack of regular contact with a consistent manager, responsible for all aspects of a particular individual's performance is likely to have contributed to some of the difficulties in managing staff through this significant change programme. Proposals to overcome this were being explored during the third quarter of the trial, but the decision to limit this to a 12 month trial prevented the most appropriate solution from then being implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://journals.rcni.com/nursing-standard/developing-a-successful-selfrostering-shift-system-ns2003.07.17.42.40.c3413>

## 9 Results from the 12 month Self-rostering trial

In the analysis of the fifteen months (including the last quarter of 2016 prior to the start of the Self-Rostering trial) the data shows that there was improvement across 9 of the 11 key performance indicators (see Appendix A). Notable areas include the reduction in days lost to sickness and an increase in the number of occasions when the Control room operated at optimum staffing levels (3 staff).

In examining the data over a three year period (2015 to 2017), a number of interesting points are apparent (see Appendix B).

At first glance, sickness levels appear to have increased in 2017 in comparison to the two previous years. Staff and the FBU would argue that this is in direct response to the introduction of Self-Rostering. However, more detailed analysis indicates that the sickness levels in Quarter 1 of 2017 far exceed those of any quarters in the previous two years or for the remainder of 2017. This is a significant reason for the overall total for 2017 being higher than the previous two years.

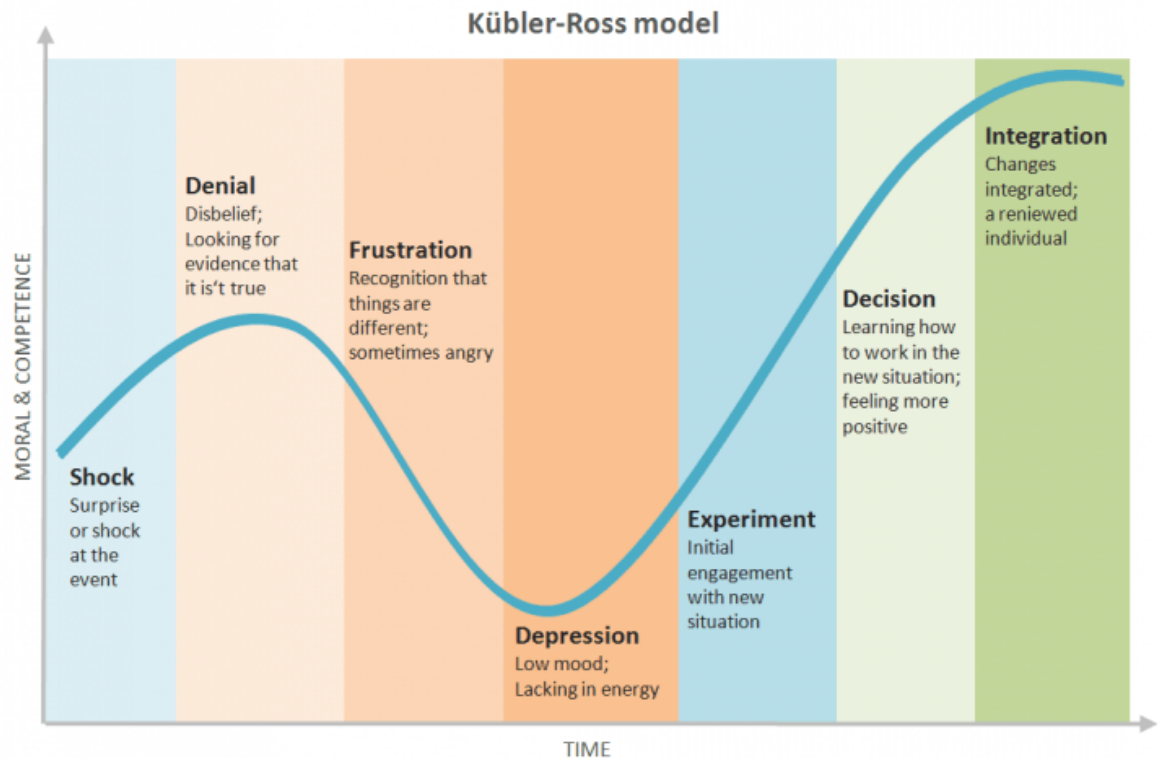
However, 2017 is the only year in the three that are analysed which indicates a definitive downward trend in sickness absence. The year started with 105 absences in the first quarter, but reduced each quarter to a fourth quarter total of only 43 absences. This is less than half the level experienced in the last quarters of 2015 and 2016.

The increased resilience achieved by the Self-Rostering system, as evidenced by these figures, is a significant and welcome improvement over the old '2-2-4' system. The quarter 4 months of each year (late Autumn/early Winter), can often prove operationally challenging, with flooding and snow, chimney fires and the festive period placing great strains on the Service's ability to respond to incidents. A more resilient Fire Control staffing model through this period allows the Service to ensure the highest level of mobilising and resourcing of incidents.

The analysis of the number of staff on duty during the 2017 trial also raises some interesting statistics. There is a definitive trend of increased instances of staffing falling below optimum (3) to 2 and sometimes 1 member of staff. This is as a direct consequence of two factors.

- Increased sickness levels meaning that there were insufficient staff available to cover.
- The Service experienced a number of staff retirements, a secondment out of Fire Control and one staff member leaving in 2017. Recruitment was problematic, as was maintaining an appropriate number of supervisory staff.

Despite this, the Service was only required to utilise fall back arrangements with H&WFRS on five occasions through the whole trial. Again this evidences that the Self-Rostering system has the ability to deliver resilience in this important function, even during extraordinary times.



The figure above presents the Kubler-Ross curve, which is often used to explain the phases that an individual can go through when they are part of a significant change programme. Having considered the results from the Self-Rostering trial, it could be argued that:

- During the first quarter of the trial, many Fire Control staff were in the throes of the first half of the Kubler-Ross curve; but
- By the third quarter of the trial, a good number may have started on their way back up the latter half of the curve; and
- By the last quarter a number of staff had begun to emerge from the process and were edging towards integration.

However, such conclusions would be difficult to draw, as they do not take into account the fact that Fire Control staff knew, during the last quarter, that the Self-Rostering trial could possibly come to an end in December and that a different, more preferred, system might be available to them.

There is little doubt however, that if the Self-Rostering system was to be taken forward as the long term system within Fire Control, then significant effort would have to be applied to overcoming the issues identified in this report.

## **10 The Flexible-Rostering trial 2018**

At their meeting in December, Members were asked to decide on which of the following two options these wished the Service to progress through 2018;

**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 was originally planned.

**Or**

**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 the resilience, efficiency and effectiveness of Shropshire's Fire Control function.

Members agreed to progress with Option 2 and the new Flexible-Rostering trial therefore started on 1 January 2018.

## **11 Collaboration**

As part of the work to implement the self-rostering trial, a number of visits to other Fire and Rescue Services took place in 2016. The fall back arrangements that the Service has in place with H&WFRS have also been tested, implemented and strengthened as a result of the implementation of the Self-Rostering trial.

## **12 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

The aim for the Fire Control Project continues to be to improve efficiency within this important function by up to approximately £300k per annum, by 2020. With uncertainty as to whether this level of savings can be achieved through the life of this project, these efficiencies have not yet been included in the Service's future revenue budget.

## **13 Legal Comment**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **14 Initial Impact Assessment**

This report contains merely statements of fact / historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

## **15 Equality Impact Assessment**

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

## **16 Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

Performance data summary for self-rostering 2017

### **Appendix B**

Summary of three year performance data 2015 – 2017

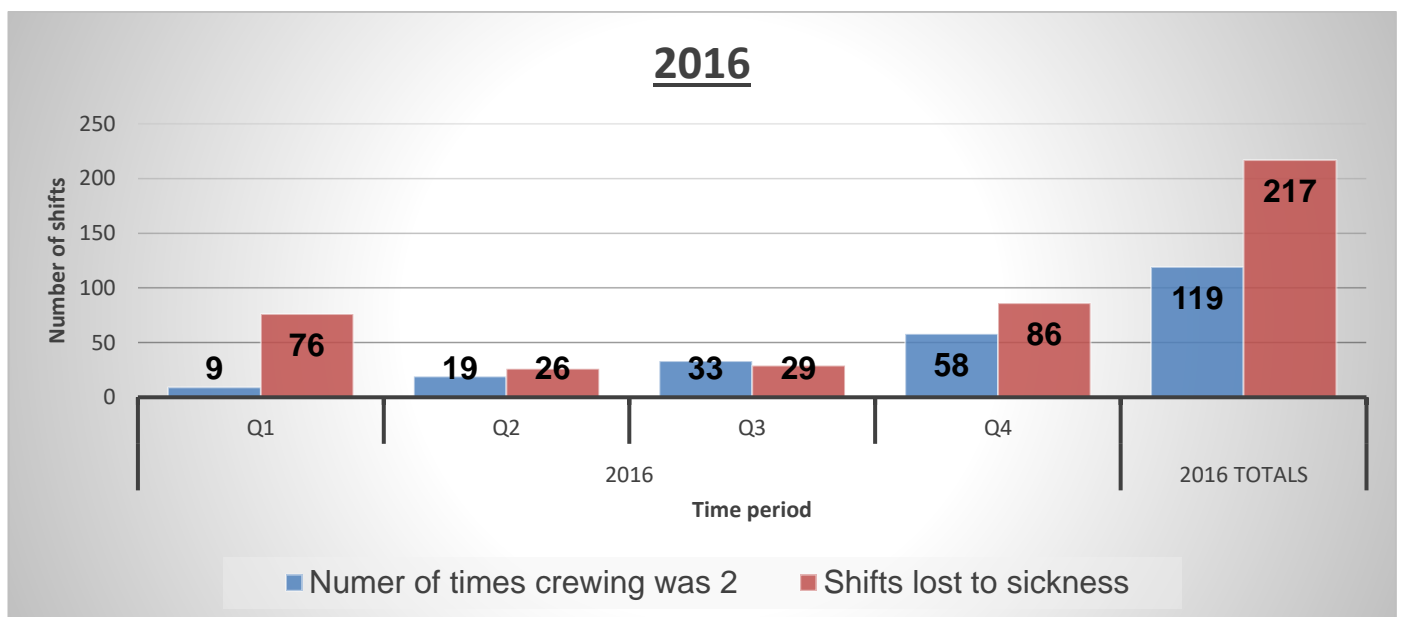
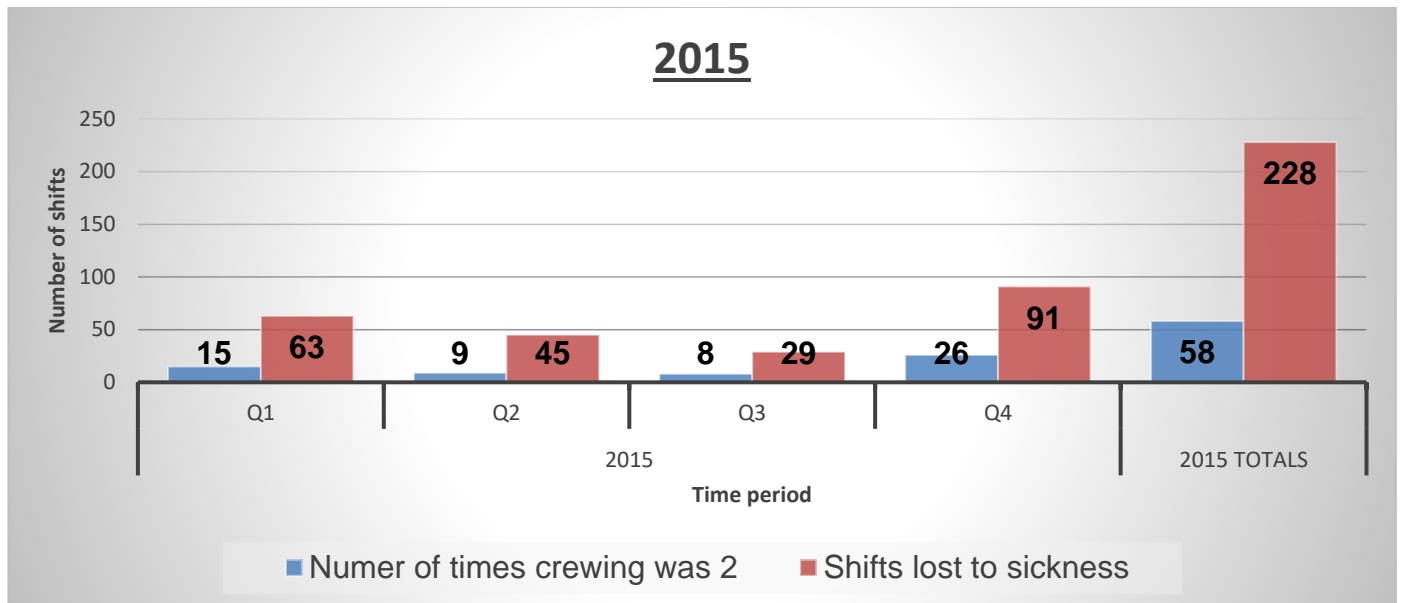
## **17 Background Papers**

There are no background papers associated with this report.

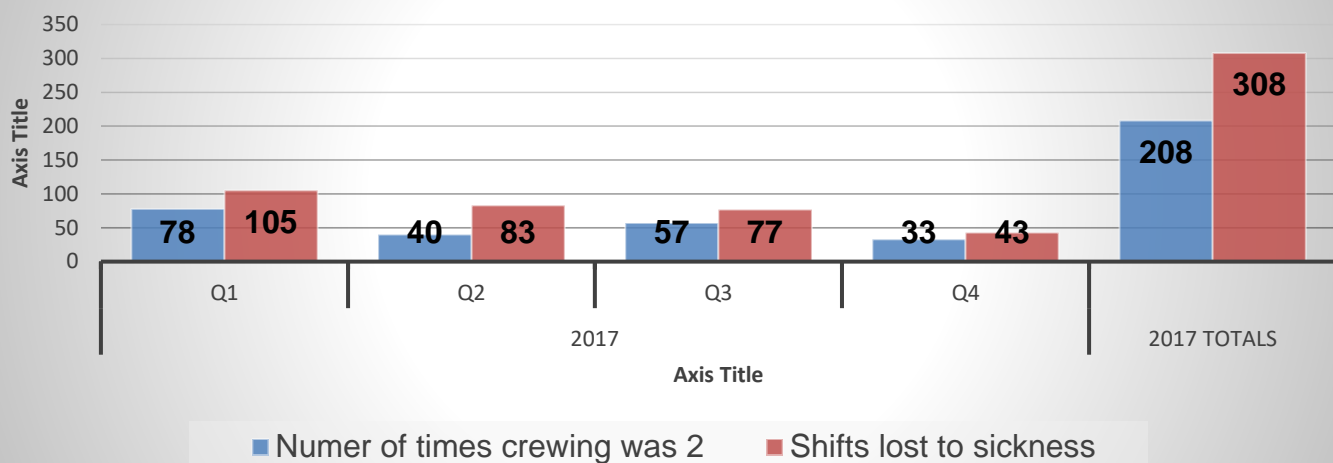
### Performance data summary for self-rostering 2017

Performance Indicator	Occasions during Q4 2016	Occasions during Q1 2017	Occasions during Q2 2017	Occasions during Q3 2017	Occasions during Q4 2017	Change between fourth quarters (+/-)
The total number of initial shift selections of 32 shifts (or pro rata)	N/A	17/17	18/18	18/18	18/18	+
The total number of Bank Hours worked	N/A	700	870	900	986	N/A
The total number of Bank Hours remaining at the end of each quarter	N/A	229	306	479	308	-
The total number of days lost to sickness absence (D/N)	86	105	83	77	43	+
The total number of shifts operated with four staff	9	2	2	0	0	+
The total number of shifts operated with three staff	117	93	140	125	150	+
The total number of shifts operated with two staff	58	78	40	57	33	+
Occasions when only one member of staff was available for duty	0	6	0	0	0	+
Occasions when no members of staff were available for duty	0	0	0	0	0	+
Occasions where no Mobilising Officer was available	1	2	1	1	0	+
Occasions that Emergency Operations were transferred to HWFRS	0	4	0	1	0	+

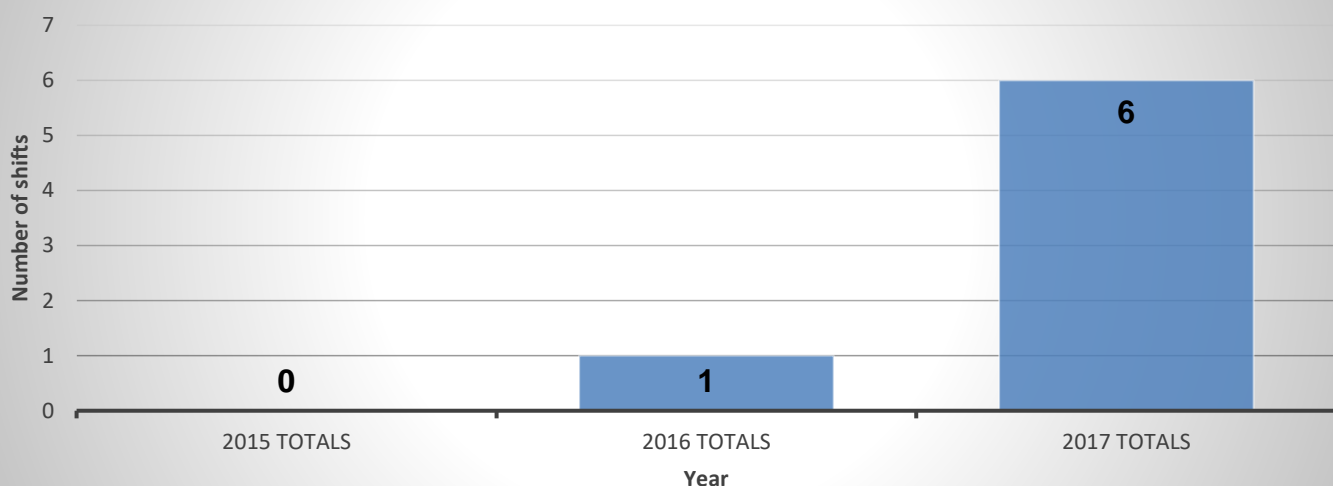
## Summary of performance over the three year period 2015 to 2017



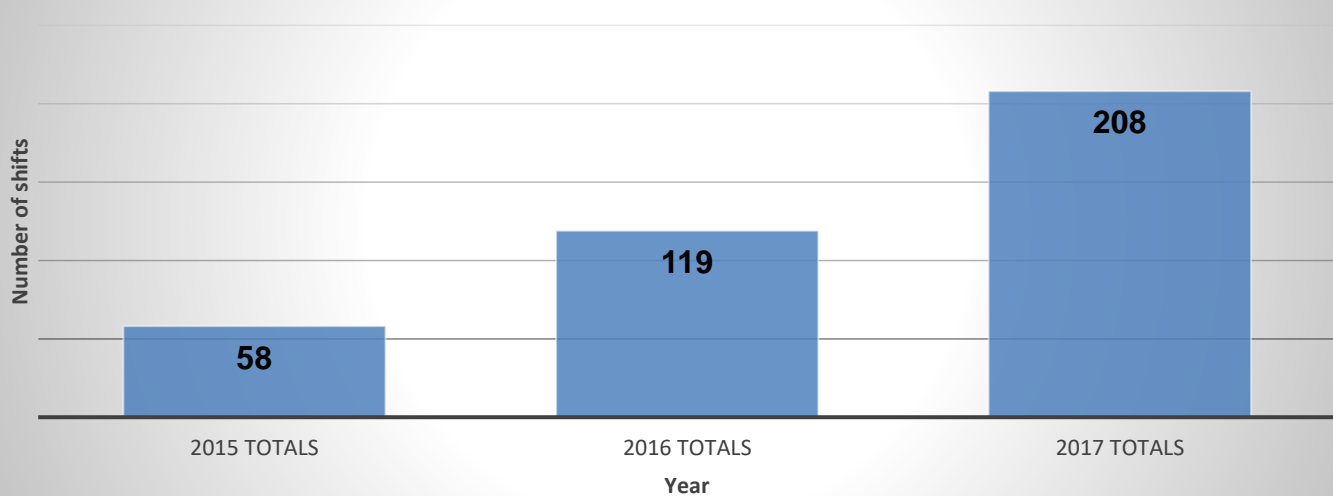
## 2017



## Number of times Crewing was 1



## Numer of times crewing was 2



## Shifts lost due to sickness

