

FBU Response to IRMP Action Plans 20:20

Introduction

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Shropshire has for many years fully engaged with the Service in the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process. We have produced several documents in response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) IRMP proposals. Having hopefully helped to adjust some of the earlier changes proposed at the beginning of the 20:20 IRMP period (4 RDS station, WDS pump, outsourcing Emergency Fire Control), this document will outline our position in relation to IRMP 1 and IRMP 2. Both of which entail shift system changes to the Wholetime Duty System (WDS) and in the Emergency Fire Control Room. Of course the real interaction with the brigade will be post consultation when, as a Trade Union we will be negotiating on behalf of our members how these proposal will progress.

A curtailed consultation period of eight weeks for such a major change has caused us logistical difficulties in producing this document. There has been some minor leeway but future consultations of this magnitude will need a more reasonable consultation period. Having said that, the brigade has been very open and transparent in the construction of these proposals, allowing us access to information and updating us with progress. This has been very helpful and exemplifies good working relations and cooperation between the Trade Union, managers, Fire Authority and staff.

We have covered the theory of IRMP and the construction of IRMP action plans in previous responses and there is no need to repeat that here. This is because SFRS has demonstrated good and improving methodology over the years. In the case of IRMP 1 and 2, SFRS has carried out much research, included champion working groups who have influenced the direction of the plans and produced documents which give a fairly balanced reflection of each option within the SWOT analysis.

The consultation questionnaire has the usual questions designed to confine responses within certain parameters. However, the questions have included text boxes which gives personnel the opportunity to give fuller responses, which was encouraged during the presentations and subsequently by us during our meetings with members. It is important that staff feel able to fully express their opinions to proposals which may have a profound effect on their whole life.

The projects to develop the action plans IRMP 1 and IRMP 2 were commission by the Fire Authority with the directive of removing £400k from the WDS budget and £300k from the Emergency Fire Control budget. IRMP 1 also directed the project to consider the best use of RDS staff whilst IRMP 2 was required to "maintain its current watching brief on all partner collaboration opportunities and those that may arise in the future."

It is important to state at the outset, that SFRS having removed large swathes of personnel and hence capacity during Public Value, is already operating below minimum standards. Special appliances are already unavailable for immediate response, RDS availability is a real concern (especially during normal working hours) and other departments such as Training

and Fire Safety are struggling to meet workloads. Removing further posts, regardless of shift pattern efficiencies, will impact on service delivery.

We will also undertake a broader view of the political scene and review of the UKFRS over preceding years. Our last document, ***Initial Response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020*** concentrated on the initial 20:20 evaluation and previous to that our ***Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012*** went into detail to describe the investment and minimum standards SFRS needs to provide, in all service delivery areas. So it is now timely with sufficient change to revisit the wider picture now.

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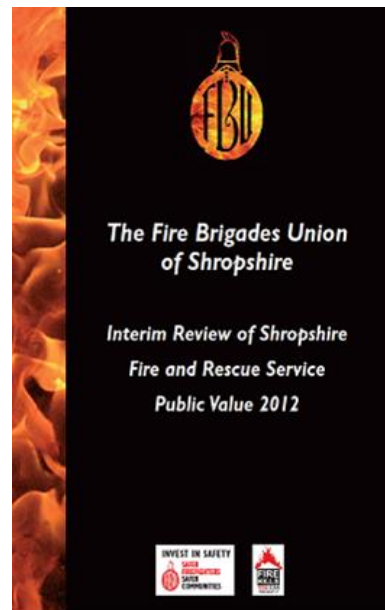
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Executive Summary

The UKFRS has undergone a period of unprecedented and savage cut backs which look to continue for the foreseeable future. Since 2010, 7000 fewer Firefighters and 40 fewer fire stations mean that the operational response to incidents (intervention) has been harmed both in capacity and in response times.

The rate of decline of incident numbers has slowed dramatically and plateaued in Shropshire for three years. With an increasing frequency of large scale incidents (flooding, wildfires, large businesses), an uncertain future (national security) and the prospect of added responsibilities (emergency medical response, widening prevention agenda), now is not only the time to halt these devastating cuts, but to invest in an efficient and productive emergency service fit for the future.



The UKFRS has been under constant and rapid change under successive political agendas, with most fire services presently under the control of a Fire Authority or Fire Board directly accountable to the local population. There is no justification nor enhancement for the UKFRS to be taken over by PCCs. Accountability, expertise and blurring of focus will be detrimental to the UKFRS.

Although intrinsically linked to the PCC takeover, moving to the Home Office is in itself a benign development. A centralising effect to national direction may be of benefit to FRS in terms of policy and performance. Any positive effect this may have is dwarfed by the cloud of hostile PCC takeovers.

Cuts enforced on SFRS, delivered through Public Value have been severe. The Fire Authority has tried to offset this with the precept to protect revenue. The effectiveness of Public Value has resulted in an unpredicted financial reserve where cuts were implemented on an increasingly fast timetable. This gives an opportunity to invest those reserves for a future framework for SFRS, but there is still the need for SFRS to protect its revenue and should persist with a precept of 1.99%.

When looking at the future demand for SFRS, IRMP3 and the reconstruction of Telford's site is fundamental. This is likely to usurp a large proportion of the reserves, but is necessary and hugely beneficial. Opportunities to collaborate with partners, enhance training facilities, establish upper levels of Incident Command and the training thereof will represent a positive and essential leap forward.

In retrospect, the wisdom of maintaining an Emergency Fire Control Room in Shropshire is increasingly justified. A highly complex function which has suffered in many other brigades with mergers and new technology leading to high profile fiascos. This has been averted in

Shropshire. Investment to incorporate the Emergency Fire Control function into the Operations function will further enhance SFRS's entire service delivery.

Staffing levels are a concern in both Emergency Fire Control and on the WDS. Already below minimum in the Emergency Fire Control Room, recruitment of RDS Firefighters (Control) is necessary to provide resilience and headroom to enable changes to staffing. All shift change options for WDS fail to take account of staffing for the entire service and necessary in-built resilience. A resilience of +1 needs to be factored into the minimum staffing levels and cognisance needs to be given to the entire staffing of the brigade where shortfalls (sickness, temporary positions, projects, maternity/paternity, jury service, meetings, training exercises, national incidents response) are all provided from the WDS. If the WDS is to stand alone, then so must the rest of the service. This will require increasing operational establishments in all other departments to support the WDS.

The driver to alter the shift systems has changed from financial necessity to a focus on efficiency and productivity. There are still plenty of areas where better organisation and planning can improve efficiency and productivity. Unprogrammed training courses and events are an example of this and need to be addressed before implementation of shift change.

However, one suggestion in the documents regarding training and efficiency, which is not progressive, is to carry out training whilst on duty. This compromises the effectiveness of the training and means that fire engines are not immediately available as demanded by the parameters of these projects.

Resilience pools beyond that already designed into the shift system for WDS must be regarded as the last resort when all other reasonable alternatives have been exhausted. Any system that depends on zero hour contracts will not receive our support and cannot be condoned. However, any resilience pool will need to be cognisant of the requirement of resilience across the entire brigade and negotiated with the FBU.

The basic principle adopted by the brigade of 12 hour shifts will be fiercely resisted by staff. The argument for 12 hour shifts has not been made. Fairness, productivity and HSE fatigue factors do not cut a convincing argument and these are countered in detail in this document. The basic principle desired by the brigade of rostering shifts off and on is not dependent on the length of shift. To achieve this basic principle will undoubtedly require the brigade to move away from 12 hour shifts.

Short notice recall to duty for rostering on days will need to be negotiated for any system to work effectively. There will need to be an incentive in one form or another.

The new Flexible Shift Exchange System should be allowed and encouraged to develop and expand to ascertain whether the aims of the shift change options can be achieved without making any further change. This will mean delaying the implementation of shift change, but will not remove it as an option for future use should the Flexible Shift Exchange System not deliver to the required extent.

Of the five shift options, three will be strongly opposed by staff. Three eights, 5 watch system and DCP are all unattractive shift systems. The future existence of DCP is grossly uncertain

and would be foolhardy to consider at this juncture. Self-Rostering would represent a completely new concept and therefore some trepidation, but “Optimum Crewing” (Self-Rostering in reverse) would deliver the majority of the project’s objectives with less upheaval from the present 2-2-3 system.

Despite recording here our position on each of the options and various other issues, this only represents the start of the process. There are still many variables within the options and other issues to be resolved and they will require SFRS and the FBU to work closely together to see them through to conclusion.

Background: National Picture

Our previous two responses have not included a commentary on the national picture, concentrating instead on the IRMP process as a whole and specifically Shropshire. Our ***Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012***, gave our comprehensive and evidenced view of what an efficient and fully funded FRS should look like in Shropshire.

Therefore, it is timely to record some observations of the continually changing landscape and how this affects the UKFRS here. Cuts to the UKFRS are plain to see and appear to be unabated but there are also further changes afoot which will need to be added into any future considerations. The foundations or structure of the UKFRS is changing at an uncontrollable pace both nationally and locally. There have been countless mergers, partial mergers and outsourcing without any overarching strategy. Legislative encouragement for PCCs to mount hostile takeovers of FRS and government responsibility moving back to the Home Office after a decade of DCLG where decentralisation has pervaded represents considerable change and therefore instability.

Since the start of Public Value, which coincided with the Coalition Government's term, all



frontline public services have continued to suffer drastic cuts, despite David Cameron's assertion at Carlisle Fire Station on the eve of the 2010 election that this would not be the case. Interestingly, Cameron has recently written to his constituent Local Authority complaining about the cuts!

In terms of the fire service, 7000 firefighter posts have been cut, 40 fire stations have closed and there are fewer fire engines protecting the public since 2010. Average response time to incidents have increased as has the lag time between the first and second fire engine. This is critical in emergency situations where the chances of survival diminish with every passing moment. This is also compounded in instances of fire, by the proliferation of the incident to a more hazardous scenario upon arrival, threatening Firefighter safety. The escalation of incidents prior to the arrival of the fire service also has a marked

effect on the ability of the crews to prevent damage to businesses or homes and therefore has a very real financial consequence. Cuts to FRS budgets are exponentially counterproductive.

SFRS has evidenced how its emergency intervention is a net provider to Shropshire with its calculation of the value of lives saved, which is regularly reported at Fire Authority meetings. Although these are theoretical calculations, they are based on sound industry assumptions and therefore are a relevant indicator. The figures show that during 2014/15, SFRS rescues and emergency intervention alone equated to a £61,537,500 saving (9. Details of Lives Saved

and Those Protected from Harm, CFA 16th December 2015), more than three times the budget for the entire service.

It surely makes financial sense to invest, rather than cut, in services that provide any net benefit. This starkly contrasts with government policy on flood defences, where every £1 of invest must return £8 in benefit. Following the widespread devastation across the north of England and Scotland in the floods on December 2015 and January 2016, this policy seems absurd. The avoidable disruption to and loss of business through lack of investment in flood defences completely undermines the chancellor's rhetoric about a "Northern Powerhouse."

Of course, the motivation for building of a "Northern Powerhouse" is driven more by political incentive rather than altruistic economic regeneration of regions with declining industry. The economy itself still struggles in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, but appears to have temporarily buoyed resulting in a reprieve for some in the last autumn budget. Ironically, tax receipts from migrant workers have contributed disproportionately to the economic upturn amidst media vilification of migrants.



Despite this minor upturn of fortune, the financial outlook for the majority of workers is still bleak. In real terms, wages in the UK are still 9.2% lower than they were in 2008 [Source: *Annual Survey of hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics. (CPI adjusted. All real values are reported are in April 2015 prices, using April CPI: All Items Index values.)*] And Oxfam's study shows that global economic inequality is widening. The wealthiest 1% own as much as the rest of the planet. In 2010, the 388 wealthiest people owned as much as half the planet, now that scale of wealth is shared by only 62 people. (P7, i, 18th January 2016)

This economically bleak outlook is shared in the fire service where, as with all public sector workers, wages have been restrained, pensions attacked and redundancies threatened. Many brigades are in confrontation with their workforce in implementing cuts. Cumbria, Merseyside, Essex, Leicestershire, West Midlands, Hereford and Worcester and Gloucestershire are in the higher profile of the cuts, but all brigades are suffering.

With new lines of work being considered at NJC level, most notably Emergency Medical Response, and more frequent occurrences of large scale incidents like the flooding seen in December 15 and January 16, the UKFRS should be looking to halt the programme of cuts. Indeed, in research carried out for the National Audit Office's report "Financial Sustainability of Fire and Rescue Services," many FRS raised concerns that further cuts could render their service untenable. This is further expressed by CFA's President Paul Hancock when referring to the cuts, "Fire Services have been making efficiencies in both non-frontline and frontline services. This includes reducing the number of senior managers, changing shift patterns and

collaboration with other services such as health and police. However, there is a fast approaching limit to what can be achieved without a more direct and visible impact on local, and by extension national, resilience.” (P4 Fire Times, Vol 18/1 January 2016).

Cuts to FRS budgets are systematic of cuts to all public sector services and many refer to the sustained falling number of emergency incidents as justification, which is a very tunnel-visioned approach. IRMP is a risk based approach to providing fire and rescue service delivery of **all** its functions, for the present risk and any foreseeable risk. In terms of only the intervention response, emergency calls have plateaued for the last three years, perhaps indicating that the fruition of prevention and protection activities has reached their limit. Of course, these activities need to be maintained to avoid diminution of their effect, but other factors may also impact.

An increasing and aging population and expansion of FRS work (flooding, emergency medical response, proliferation of the prevention agenda etc.) would suggest that investment in the future of FRSs is needed rather than the huge cuts seen on a local level. An increasing frequency of regional and national intervention response due to larger incidents and an increased level of threat following the attacks in Paris are just some areas that need greater investment. Firefighters are somehow expected to assist in the evacuation of the public from the warm zone whilst wearing Hi-Viz PPE, when figures of the establishment are known to be prime targets for terrorists, would suggest that more thought needs to be invoked. The recent removal of national assets to deal with mass decontamination, due to the cost of replacing consumables, gives an indication of the priorities at a national level. In an uncertain future, whether terrorist or natural disaster, plans needs to be made to lessen the effects of risk, now and in the future.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC)

The government’s legislative push for PCCs to carry out hostile takeovers of FRSs is a flawed and inappropriate political fudge. Wide ranging statements to encourage greater cooperation between emergency services often go on to imply that the Police and FRSs provide the same/similar services, are deliberately misleading. Fire and rescue work is perhaps a better bedfellow with the ambulance service where saving life is the ultimate priority. Police priorities are centred on law enforcement, which is not a helpful association in order to maintain fire service neutrality. There has been no consideration from the government in their initiative for PCCs to run FRS, of what the long term impact of delivery of fire safety education messages. It is because the fire service is not intrinsically linked to law enforcement that it has real engagement with the public with stunning results in prevention outcomes.

“The current proposals will neither deliver economic, efficient or effective emergency services nor optimise public safety. They are a triumph of hope over experience and deserve to be sent back to the drawing board if not consigned to the dustbin of history.” Pete Murphy, P8 FIRE magazine, January 2016). Pete Murphy also compares the success of merging Scottish FRSs to the abject failure of the Police in Scotland to make similar progress.

Worryingly, the idea of PCCs given powers to establish new schools is the latest suggestion from the Home Office (Local Government News 5th Feb). Once the coup d’etat of Education is

complete, the Home Office may look to take over Defence and the Foreign Office; why stop there?

In effect, under PCC rule FRSs will become the minor partner, subservient to the priorities and whims of the Police. A PCC will not be held to account for any fire service decision, because the focus of their performance will be centred on what the Police has/hasn't achieved.

The government's rationale for greater accountability is laughably juxtaposed to its jingoistic suppression of Trade Union democracy. PCCs were elected with less than 17% turnout, who then appoint their deputy, is clearly nowhere near as democratic as an elected Fire Authority let alone a Trade Union. It is widely recognised that committee decisions are generally superior to autonomous dictate. That this legislation can run simultaneous to the Trade Union Bill is incongruous. The draconian restrictions placed on the most democratic of institutions, the Trade Union movement, is reprehensible.

Home Office

The decision to relocate responsibility to the Home Office is clearly related to PCCs, but does bring in extra dimensions. The two most obvious differences for the UKFRS that moving away from DCLG will bring, surround the focus on community safety initiatives and the decentralising/localism agenda.

As part of DCLG, the fire service's engagement in community safety has proliferated. Liaison between departments concerning social care has advanced exponentially to the point that NJC workstreams are exploring the expansion of fire safety activities to include health agenda work. The Home Office and particularly the Police do not have the same track record in this area.

The clue for the other difference is in the title. "Communities" and "Local Government" suggest devolvement and decentralisation marrying to the "localism" agenda which is evident (if not slightly out of control) with the differing focus and direction between FRSs. The Home Office in many ways is opposite to this and may impose a stronger lead and guidance. Whether this represents a positive outcome will be matter of debate and dependant on viewpoint, but national standards and national coordination should be of benefit to the UKFRS.

Background: Shropshire Picture

Public services in Shropshire have suffered the same swingeing cuts that have been experienced in the rest of the UK. SFRS has managed its cuts under the “Public Value” scheme, to which we have published two responses and this document is our second response under the “20:20” version of IRMP. It is important to remember the context of the cuts proposed in this latest round of IRMP where up to 16 Firefighter posts are being threatened.

Since 2011, Public Value has removed 8 non-uniformed posts, 20 RDS Firefighter posts, 20 WDS Firefighter posts, 5 Watch Manager posts, 4 Station Manager posts, 2 Group Manager posts and a Brigade Manager post. These cuts in personnel numbers has decreased capacity and hence service delivery. Availability of RDS fire engines is decreasing, special appliances are not available and attendance times are increasing. The brigade has become overly dependent on overtime and the Group Support Team to plug gaps in frontline staffing, whilst temporary post, project work and the organisational structure require permanent solutions.



Another issue that requires a permanent solution, which is not included in the IRMP 1 document is the second Rescue Pump at Telford. IRMP 1 persists to misrepresent the location of WDS fire engines, claiming that there is a Rescue Pump at Tweedale when both fire engines are located at Telford. One fire engine goes to stand-by at Tweedale between 21.00 and 07.00, a legacy from a Public Value **pilot** and should now come under proper review in conjunction with IRMP1. This is discussed below.

Falling numbers of incidents does not justify longer response times for those affected by fire, RTC or other incident. The work of Firefighters in prevention and protection has contributed to the decreased demand in intervention services. In Shropshire the long term number of calls has been declining, but the last three years of figures shown in the document prove that this has now plateaued to a minimum. SFRS’s emergency response is already reasonably modest in comparison to most other FRs. With further work streams being explored and increased likelihood of natural disaster it is important that SFRS does not see fit to shrink its emergency provision. This is also discussed further below, but a pragmatic consideration to finances must be given first.

Reserves and Precept

The position of SFRS’s financial reserves has been noted in previous responses. That this amount is large and growing is not uncommon amongst cash strapped local authority bodies. The circumstances resulting in SFRS’s growing reserves, as with other authorities, are that predicted diminishing financial resources necessarily create an action plan to adjust to that diminishing future. Once that action plan is in place, spending tends to drop quicker than

anticipated, leaving an underspend. The longer the programme of cuts, the more years of underspend exasperate the situation.

Whilst not condoning the underspend, nor the size of the reserve, it has brought an opportunity for SFRS to plan for the future. It will provide funds for investment in the service and a contingency to enable transition, fulfilled largely as part of IRMP 3. This means that the size of the reserve should not influence decisions regarding the precept, as once the reserve has been invested – it has gone. As previously recommended by us, the Fire Authority need to maintain the precept at a high level (currently 1.99%) to secure future income. In doing so, gaining greater independence from the central grant, will mean that SFRS's future can be determined by the Fire Authority.

This is not empire building, its survival. Future sustainability of the fire service has been brought into question by the National Audit Office report, and many other services are facing up to the turmoil of drastic cuts, redundancy, closing fire stations etc., it would be extremely risky to fall behind in income growth when there is still so much uncertainty.

Recommendation- The Fire Authority should maintain a precept of 1.99% for the foreseeable future.

Emergency Response

Over the period of Public Value and previous to that, cuts to SFRS's intervention provision has resulted in 5 fire engines immediately available and 22 mostly available on a delayed turnout in a large rural county. Similar cuts to other counties mean that there is little in the way of effective regional back-up.

The availability of aerial appliances and the rescue tender is now extremely limited, where they were once readily available and the boat is also dependent on complex variables. These are lifesaving appliances that should be staffed so that the public of Shropshire receive the service they expect.

It would be wrong to consider further cuts or changes without revisiting in the first principles of what the emergency provision should look like. The FBU's position is that these appliances should be staffed for immediate response. But, at the very least, investment back into the service to provide better availability of special appliances should be within the objectives of these proposals

Recommendation- Consider reinvesting cuts back into the service for the greater availability of special appliances.

Staffing Levels

In previous responses to IRMP we have argued the distinction between efficiency and cuts. Government and managers often refer to becoming leaner or "trimming the fat," but in many instances there is a cut to service or cull. Proposals to close RDS stations or remove WDS fire engines would clearly be a cull. Removing or diminishing the service is a cut not an efficiency. The same is true of our members' terms and conditions. Changing the WDS below the minimum provision laid out in the Grey Book is not a fat trimming exercise, it is a cull.

The document justifies the search for an “Integrated Crewing Model” referring to “the inefficiencies of the existing shift pattern and its inability to meet organisational needs.” But goes on to demand that “a duty system should be resilient enough to accommodate predictable absences,” which is what the current system and ridership factor is designed to do. That there are still staffing troughs exemplifies the difficulty in managing staffing levels in practice rather than in theory. This is why the cuts to staffing numbers outlined in each option will not provide enough staff for those shift systems to be sustainable.

Recommendation- Calculations of watch strength need to be re-examined. The low levels of staffing described for each of the options will not sustain the crewing levels necessary

Efficiency Examples

Not enough has been done to counter the fluctuations in staffing and this should attract some focus rather than drastically changing the WDS system. What can be achieved is shown by the reorganisation of modular courses and leave in 2011. Previously courses were accounted for though an averaging throughout the year and divided across each shift. This meant that a balance of 2 for every shift was used to account for courses. That a minimum of eight are need to make a BA course (the smallest number of people. Other courses have more) effective inevitably will lead to greater fluctuations of staffing numbers.

In 2011 modular course were removed from this calculation and programmed away from recognised holiday periods, resulting in a redistribution of the leave entitlement. This has greatly assisted in levelling out staffing demand through the year and should be used as an example to find similar efficiencies. There are still too many unprogrammed training courses and other activities which could be better planned to assist the staffing numbers, rather than hinder.

Recommendation- Further investigation should be given to planning of courses and other demands placed on staffing to investigate whether these could be arranged or planned for differently.

WDS- a Brigade Staffing Pool

Although the theoretical tenets underpinning each of the options are sound, the assumptions upon which they are based are not. Some of the overtime spend is used to cover deficiencies caused by vacancy. This is not only that all posts are not filled, it is that the WDS is used to provide personnel to the rest of the service.

There are 6 lines of temporary promotion involving 17 people. Any temporary vacancy or extra capacity, sometimes a project (Line Safety Review) or training (ALP refreshers), needed within the brigade is inevitably back-filled from the WDS. Some of the longer term temporary posts have existed in various guises for too long. In the case of the Watch Manager in the Operations department, this has been temporary in excess of ten years.

In order for any new WDS system to work, this draw from amongst its number will have to cease. Otherwise the ridership factor would need to be increased to cover all absence form the entire brigade.

Recommendation- Substantiate temporary posts to permanent and consider accounting for absence/vacancy from elsewhere in the brigade.

20:20 IRMP

IRMP 3 Reconstruction of Telford

Due to the early cuts made under Public Value, SFRS has accumulated a considerable amount of reserves (see above), much of which needs to be reinvested into the service. Reinvestment into the Telford site under IRMP 3 would seem to be the most appropriate priority.

IRMP 3 will be an ongoing project with endless possibilities. The vision should consider large scale reconstruction of the site to incorporate training facilities that reflect the need of a modern FRS, relocation of related functions such as the Operations department and operational planning and various opportunities to invite related industries, which has been explored.

The site is large and therefore provides great potential. The design of the fire station building is inefficient and has a poor layout. The appliance room is at one end of the building, whilst the BA servicing room and the drying room are at the other, with various offices etc. in between.

Lessons from the disruption caused by the building project at Shrewsbury need to be considered along with the added difficulty of fewer alternatives at Telford. Functions on the Shrewsbury were more able to be relocated with Fire Safety moving to Hafran House and workshops moving to Sundorne. Finding an alternative to the training facilities at Telford will be difficult and any relocation of the fire station is dependent on availability of suitable locations that will not compromise the operational response. Therefore, it is likely that both functions will need to remain on site during the reconstruction. Fortunately, the site is probably big enough to accommodate this.

Construction of a new fire station above the current appliance bay and single storey part of the building would then enable demolition of the current fire station. This would then provide the freedom of a blank canvas to construct a bespoke building to meet the identified needs of the service.

Once this is done, the opportunities to redevelop the Training department and training facilities are endless.

Recommendation- The design and reconstruction of the Telford site is a unique opportunity that requires careful consideration and planning. Funding to support this development will need to be extensive.

IRMP 2 Emergency Fire Control

In our **Initial Response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020** we described the Emergency Fire Control as a hub of the brigade thus;

Centre of all operations

A huge range of other tasks, centre of operations, logistical hub or "out of scope" work are all terms used to describe the importance of our Emergency Fire Control Room away from the handling of emergency incidents.

Statistical information, management information systems, staffing levels, appliance availability, officer availability, accident reporting, defect reporting, sickness reporting, out of hours calls, risk information updates, are to name but a few of the tasks undertaken by Control that assist with the coordination of the whole brigade.

After 12 years of uncertainty with the failure of Regional Control Centres (RCC), threatened amalgamation and seeing other brigade's merge, cut or outsource their Emergency Fire Control, it is to great credit that Shropshire's Firefighters in Control have continued with enthusiasm and dedication to provide a top class service.

As well as the threats above, and being understaffed (see below), a new Command and Control system has been introduced which has not been without difficulty. Deficiencies and errors in many brigades have been made high profile issues in much of the media (esp. South Yorkshire and Essex). In Shropshire, our staff have worked hard over a considerable period to iron out issues with Shropshire's new system without ado. Some issues still exist and are being managed by Firefighters (Control). It is a matter of some urgency that these issues be properly resolved to enable phase 2 of the project to progress unhampered.

During the initial 20:20 consultation, our members in Emergency Fire Control, grasped their destiny by convincing the Fire Authority, not just how important an Emergency Fire Control is to its brigade, or how much "out of scope" work is already embedded, but also how Emergency Fire Control can further integrate into the service. Giving support to the Operations department in risk intelligence, procedures and other matters is probably the most realistic although there are other options to be explored also.

The main reason for both IRMP 1 and 2 is to gain efficiency, to increase productivity. The diversification of Emergency Fire Control is the epitome of what these projects are trying to achieve.

We have previously covered the staffing situation in Emergency Fire Control and is reiterated in the 20:20 IRMP section of this document. But, whilst exploring efficiencies in staffing models, it is important to remember that the Emergency Fire Control Room establishment has been below the proper levels for decades. There were only 30 occasions out of 730 in the last year when staffing was above minimum. There were however, 56 occasions when it fell below minimum.

Minimums and Resilience

Each of the proposals look to reduce the numbers on duty to an absolute minimum. In theory and in isolation to the rest of the brigade, this would be a starting assumption of what was required from the shift system design. However, in practice the reality is very different. Any system must have some built in resilience (staffing +1), but also account must be taken of all the other demands placed on the duty system before deciding the minimum establishment level.

The FBU has always highlighted that staffing above the minimum is a better provision of intervention service, particularly in regard to Firefighter safety, but is also a better provision

of productivity. The service needs to consider the consequences of permanently staffing at a minimum in terms of productivity.

For clarification, we disagree with the terminology of “optimum” crewing for the reasons stated above. Whichever option the brigade decides to pursue for its staff, the intention is to provide minimum staffing levels at all times. Of course, having more people is a better provision and so “optimum” crewing is somewhat of a misnomer. However, provided the minimum levels of staffing in the Emergency Fire Control Room and on fire engines is maintained, then there is little benefit in discussing semantics.

The advantage of staffing at minimum+1, is the flexibility for other activities to be undertaken. Meetings, medicals, fitness assessments, short audits, driver training and some training courses are all undertaken during shifts utilising the +1. By crewing at minimum, these activities will not take place or will be far less efficient. Meetings such as OiC meeting, station team meetings, return to work interviews and IPDRs risk interruption or non-attendance. Medicals will need to be programmed in off duty incurring the cost of extra hours at an enhanced rate. It is likely that the new fitness assessments will be maximal tests which may require staff to be off the run for recovery purposes.

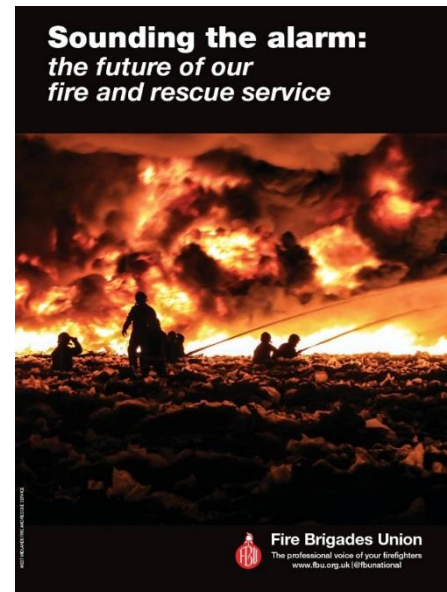
Watches already use any extra personnel to increase productivity and short audits are a good example of this. Often the extra person is despatched to carry out a short audit. Riding at minimum crewing will mean that this needs the attendance of the whole crew on the fire engine.

Since the special appliances have been removed from immediate availability, issues surrounding driver competence and under use of these vehicles have started to emerge. This will be further exasperated by minimum crewing. Due to these vehicles being very different to normal fire engines (size, weight, rear wheel steer, towed) recent recommendations following accidents have included more driver familiarisation. This can be achieved when staffing at +1, but would be impossible at minimum staffing.

Several training courses/workshops are undertaken on duty because they are ½ days. For example the standardisation of assessors has been moved to an on-duty workshop, by moving to minimum crewing this would have to be re-established as an off-duty course at considerable extra cost to the organisation. Similar arrangements would need to be made for ALP training and driver refreshers amongst others.

Nottinghamshire FRS have introduced a staffing system which operates at minimum crewing similar to the optimum crewing model. In practice, and no doubt because of the myriad of issue listed above, the overtime budget increased by in excess of £350k.

Recommendation- Resilience staffing maintained at +1



Tweedale

As mentioned in “Background-Shropshire picture,” the issue of staffing of the second Telford fire engine and it standing-by at Tweedale overnight is an omission from IRMP 1. Creating a duty system which does not consider all the demands asked of it, will not be fit for purpose. The FBU supported the Fire Authority’s recognition of the deficiency of fire cover in the south of Telford and was pleased when one appliance from Telford was relocated there.

This arrangement did come under review but did not find a resolution to the interim arrangement that continues to exist today. Although we doubt that the theoretical efficiency can be practically achieved from IRMP 1, surely if the magnitude of those efficiencies are inherent, then the second fire engine should return to Tweedale and the staffing for such a move reinstated.

Recommendation- Efficiencies realised through the change to shift pattern should be reinvested to the WDS fire engines to enable sufficient staffing for the reinstatement of a fire engine at Tweedale.

Ridership factor, Planned Shortfall

The methodology used to calculate the number of shifts, absences and therefore establishment levels has been done differently by the Brigade. The Brigade has considered the number of absences applied to available shifts to work out the minimum establishment. The correct method is to use the historical data of absences to create the correct ridership factor. This ridership factor is then applied to the minimum staffing to create the establishment level.

In our document “Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012,” we identified a much higher absence rate than is reported in IRMP 1. IRMP 1 use a three year average dating back to 2012/2013 and supplies a figure of 45 absences from duty, per person per year. For various reasons that rate in 2012 was 55 giving a ridership factor of 1.43, which we pointed out in 2012 correlated to a pre-planned shortfall. We did however recognise at that time that the absence figures were unusually high, but also pointed out that, particularly with a shrinking workforce, these spikes can easier re-occur. Because the event has demonstrably happened, SFRS must take it into account when planning for the future.

That the absence rate has reduced since 2012 does not justify the risk of a low establishment level. With an aging workforce (where only maintenance of competence has reduced the training burden), new recruitment, a more inflexible shift system and changes to maternity/paternity law are risks that will affect the present low absence rate. We expect absence figures to increase and account needs to be taken of that fact when determining the establishment.

Recommendation- The number of cuts to establishment levels in each option is too high. The options are primarily designed to even out fluctuations in staffing and reduce the overtime bill. Cuts to the establishment levels on each of the options cannot be afforded, because it will prove counter productive.

Having established that a duty system should be designed to be self-sufficient, the first step SFRS needs to factor in is a +1 to the minimum staffing level. Other benefits to this are outlined above, but even after taking this into account, the document is correct to explore other resilience options such as specialist day duty staff. This only aids to raise another question though. At present, personnel from the WDS are used to plug gaps in other departments to cover projects and other absences. This vacancy management at present has 17 people through 5/6 lines of management displaced from their substantive posts.

Therefore a facility to use Training Instructors or Fire Safety staff to create resilience to the WDS, although an innovative notion, is fundamentally flawed. Public Value has already stripped these departments to below their minimum functioning levels. To suggest that there is capacity for support from these departments, when the traffic has been in the opposite direction for years, is misleading. To enable such support from other departments to exist, the capacity in each of those departments needs to be dramatically increased. This may even require converting some of the Green Book posts in Fire Safety back to Grey Book posts.

If the establishment were increased in Operations, Training and Fire Safety to a suitable level to provide capacity for release to the WDS system, there would be benefits to the service in competency maintenance and experience cross pollination.

Recommendation- Increasing the establishment levels in Training, Operations and Fire Safety departments will first be necessary to remove the burden from the WDS of supplying staff to other departments. Once the capacity is increased enough, only then can staff from other departments be used to support the WDS.

Resilience Pools

The document also ventures into speculation of a resilience pool of staff. This is something that we would only consider once we were satisfied that the WDS part of the Integrated Crewing model were made to be theoretically (but realistically) self-sufficient. An effective resilience pool already exists, where the use of Firefighters in the Group Support Team are used to plug deficiencies within the RDS, although of course, this is not their primary function.

An expansion of this team or consideration of any other resilience pool would have to operate on a brigade wide basis, both in terms of cover and in terms of the personnel used to provide that cover. It is after all supposed to be an integrated crewing model.

An integrated Crewing model should take account of all component parts of the service to ensure that firstly each part is able to work independently, and only then in back up to each other. It should not be a case of one system being robbed to pay another system. All parts of the service need proper staffing levels ideally as we outlined in ***Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012***. Therefore any resilience pool would need demonstrably to be an ultimate back up, after all else has failed.

Some brigades have introduced resilience pools using zero hours contracts (ZHC), which of course we must be principally opposed to, based on the poor employment structure of such contracts. There are concerns we would need to address with any ZHC (contracts, protection, injury), but in effect ZHCs are already in operation within the brigade in the form of Associate

Trainers and so provided they are (as above) a last resort, then we will need to negotiate around what these contracts entail and how personnel are used.

However, it must be stressed that the operation of any resilience pool will need to be fully negotiated with the FBU, unlike the debacle to create a covert strike pool.

Recommendation- The Integrated Crewing Model must be designed to consider the entire service. But each constituent part must be designed to be independently sustainable, before providing resilience/back up to other parts of the service. The nature and operation of any resilience pool will need to be fully negotiated with the FBU.

Resilience Pool Control

Organisational resilience in the Emergency Fire Control Room is a slightly different story due to the numbers and specialist role of Firefighters in Emergency Fire Control. However the solution here is much simpler; the brigade needs to employ more people.

In our ***Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012***, we used empirical evidence to prove that staffing in the Emergency Fire Control Room was established as a pre-planned shortfall. This is proven in IRMP 2 through the overtime budget, staffing deficiency numbers and the sickness rate. This pre-planned shortfall reveals a financial windfall for the brigade of 4 posts. According to IRMP 2 this is the equivalent of £140 pa for previous decades.

The current figures used for optimum crewing in the document recognises that the brigade is 56 shifts short from minimum. Because of this the overtime burden for each individual is more than double that for personnel on the WDS which in turn creates more fatigue, stress and therefore sickness, resulting in more absence.

The solution for the Emergency Fire Control room has already been instigated in terms of more staff and this is the RDS Control Firefighters. It was recognised early in the project that the number required to make the RDS pool operate effectively is 6-8 personnel. That numbers have dropped to 2 may indicate one of the root causes of the staffing deficiency.

Recommendation: recruit more RDS Firefighters to the Emergency Fire Control Room.

Flexible Shift Exchange System

During the initial briefings to watches of the project, a suggestion from staff was raised to be able to exchange shifts across watches to mutual benefit. A shift exchange system has always existed and has operated where individuals could mutually exchange shifts provided that skill sets were not compromised. This suggestion from staff was to extend these shift exchanges to vacant positions where staffing deficiencies existed.

Designing a process to support this took some time, but was necessary to ensure accessibility and fairness, and the system is now up and running with some success. With anything new, take up was steady at the start, but as more people realise the benefit of this system, participation has grown.

Effectively, this system is starting to provide the efficiency in the shift system that the project is tasked to find. That it is voluntary, managed locally, irons out fluctuations in staffing demand and should eliminate a large proportion of the overtime budget, suggests that this system needs to persevere and develop.

With further management of shift information, availability and shift exchange requests, this system has the potential to develop to the extent that the efficiencies sought are realised without changing the shift system. Whilst the timescales for change of shift system are not urgent, the brigade should seriously investigate embedding this system first.

Recommendation- Develop the Flexible Shift Exchange System and encourage further its use with greater numbers of personnel. Delay introduction of shift changes until this system has been fully appraised.

Shift Change Issues

The primary purpose of the Integrated Crewing Model is to provide an efficient staffing model by eliminating fluctuations, gaining more control over absences and reducing overtime.

However, before looking at each of the options in any depth, the two most important factors which pervade the document need to be addressed. These factors are 12 hour shifts and short notice recall to duty (in-built resilience)

12 Hour Shifts

In three of the options the document requires 12 hour shifts to be imposed. The document uses three flawed justifications for this premise. These are fairness and flexibility to exchange night and day shifts without an imbalance of hours, the smokescreen of productivity and the HSE risk factor rating.

Fairness and Equality between Shifts

In theory, twelve hour shifts would be necessary if a shift system was being devised from scratch and if the work activity for both shifts were similar. But of course neither of these are the case. The present 9/15, 10/14 shift splits and work routines have been designed to fulfil a demand for which it is still fit for purpose.

That shifts are considered as a shift regardless of whether day or night, or 9/10 or 14/15 hours is well established in the brigade. Training courses are exchanged for shifts whether they fall on night or days, leave and bank holidays are booked in shift integers, shift exchanges between personnel are on a shift for shift basis and the latest Flexible Shift Exchange System procedure (explained above) produced by the brigade for personnel to volunteer shifts into vacant positions has written within its guiding principles that “a shift is a shift.”

Although there is a difference in the number of hours between the day and night shift in terms of family friendly policies a day shift is not the same as a night shift. There is no appetite within our membership to change the well-established practice of “a shift is a shift” and therefore this is not a valid reason to do so.

Productivity (or the art of Sophistry)

The prevailing and growing misconception within the UKFRS that longer day shifts increase productivity is clear fallacy based on contrived assumptions. With a 24 hour service where the number of personnel on duty is constant there can be no increase of productivity solely related to the length of shift. A crew carrying out training or prevention activities at 19.00/20.00/21.00 hours will make no difference if their shift happens to be a day shift or a night shift; the output is the same. In the Emergency Fire Control Room, where the activities are less variable, this makes even less difference.

The only impact that shift length has on productivity is the impact or inconvenience of when the changeover of shift occurs, the rest is work routines (which is a different issue).

The EQIA identified that 12 hour shifts with start and finish times of 6s, 9s and 10s are considerably more difficult for family friendly reasons than 7s and 8s and so are likely to meet considerable resistance and impact on SFRS's staff profile and recruitment.

A changeover of shift at 19.00 or 20.00 hours fall in the middle of RDS training times. As WDS watches collaborate with RDS stations for training and brigade exercises are often held during the evening, a changeover at these times would definitely have a detrimental impact on productivity. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the most productive time to change shift in the evening is at 18.00.

Of course there is also plenty of WDS staff that also have RDS contracts who will be affected in two ways by 12 hour shifts. It is less likely that WDS/RDS personnel will be willing to provide as much operational cover as they presently do with 12 hour shifts and attendance at drill night will be halved.

Morning start times are less easy to substantiate. There is a limit to clients' availability outside normal working hours. Fire safety education in schools, the appropriate person to facilitate a fire protection visit mean that there is a limit to earlier start times than the present 09.00. However, it is difficult to argue that a slightly earlier start time wouldn't assist with this type of activity, but this should not be exaggerated.

HSE Fatigue Risk Factors

In fairness to the documents, it does point out that the HSE tool does not take into account the designated stand down time between midnight and 07.00. Research into circadian rhythms, fatigue and shift length are widespread and largely recognise that sleep deprivation, particularly sleep disturbance, are detrimental to health. However, this must be taken in perspective. The UKFRS is an emergency service which expects immediate response at all times. This applies to all duty systems and officers.

Once account is taken of the need for immediate response, the current shift system where two consecutive longer night duties (with stand down time), compress the risk over a shorter time (allowing recovery), makes perfect sense. The other options in both documents all suffer from not being able to accommodate immediate response and in many ways may be a more disruptive and tiring cycle than the current system. Therefore, little heed needs to be taken of the tool, but real world application to the genuine environment and systems will be more informative on this matter.

In comparison to the present start and finish times, lengthening the day shift will not be family friendly. It is not a case of any advantage/disadvantage taken from one shift (night) is gained on another shift (day), it is because the day shifts are as close to normal working times that make the present system as family friendly as possible.

By working shifts that need to provide constant cover, nights and weekends are a basic requirement and hence by definition cannot be family friendly. But by compressing the majority of unfamily friendly hours into the night shift, gets them done and finished and less damaging to family life. 12 hour shifts will just extend the misery over a much longer period.

Recommendation- Remove the 12 hour proposal from each option. Seek a collective agreement with the FBU on maintaining the present start and finish times.

Short Notice Recall to Duty

With each of the proposals, there is a drive to even out across the year those times where there is better provision of staff against when there is a deficiency. This was dealt with earlier in the document, but the consequence of designing the shift system with less staff to force this levelling out, is the lack of resilience to deal with deficiencies of staff.

At present, shortfalls in staffing are supported by a voluntary “structured overtime” system, which was introduced as a result of cuts brought from the IRMP in 2006. The Fire Authority’s promise at that time was that staffing on the WDS would never fall below minimum. Overtime in Emergency Fire Control has been accepted for much longer and of course has disguised a pre-planned shortfall.

Of course with this system where overtime is used to overcome deficiencies works because it is attractive to staff. Working extra hours at an enhanced rate will always find plenty of volunteers. In each of the options (with the exception of DCP), the expectancy is that once individuals owe the brigade shifts of work, those will be used to plug the deficiency, rather than using overtime.

In the normal planning of staffing levels, this is probably quite manageable on a local level. It is evident that although structured overtime remains as an ultimate option, should all else fail, the brigade is expecting that short notice availability will somehow be provided within the design of the shift system. But where there is a requirement for short notice availability to cover shifts, without the incentive of enhanced pay, will prove more troublesome. In effect the brigade will need to negotiate with us, the mechanism of how this will work.

The FBU supports that any shift system should be designed to be self-sufficient and as such greater consideration needs to be given to recognising the difference between long term planning of shifts and the need for short notice cover. There is no doubt that there will need to be an incentive.

Of course any such incentive could be financial and we would be willing to discuss any such options. But this would be contradictory to the aims of IRMP 1 and IRMP 2, so we are also willing to negotiate around other possibilities which we have discussed with our membership. These possibilities include a “leave” incentive or an “enhanced payback rate” incentive. It would be presumptuous to outline any further details here, but we do expect to pursue dialogue with the brigade on this matter.

Recommendation- Negotiate with the FBU to introduce an incentive mechanism for staff who make themselves available for short notice recall to duty.

Training

Both documents wish to initiate exploration of training courses being delivered whilst on duty. This would be a major change requiring careful consideration. Training courses have been delivered on duty before, but this was in different times. Substantial reasons justified

the need to be detached from duty to undertake such training and so on-duty training was largely ended.

Firstly, for an emergency service, training and competency are vitally important for the safety of personnel and the safety of the public and any compromise represents an undoubtable risk. That risk converts vicariously to corporate risk and should not be underestimated. There are plenty of examples of this in accident investigation where firefighters have lost their lives. Common to each of these accident reports, whether carried out by the FBU, the FRS, HSE or other body, training and competence feature heavily as a failing. Why would any organisation jeopardise the safety of their personnel or the public, its own reputation and its financial resources trying to cut corners where it clearly shouldn't?

The Fire Authority has instructed the project to deliver a crewing model that provides five fire engines on immediate response. Regardless of the damaging impact on the quality of training due to disturbance, crews undertaking training cannot be immediately available. Particularly the arduous nature of BA training would mean that even a delayed turnout would be unreasonable and dangerous.

Anyone who has tried to deliver training or a presentation in the Emergency Fire Control Room, will be well aware that the constant disruption renders the session ineffectual. The time taken to deliver the information is doubled, disruption leads to distraction for both the presentation/training **and** the focused concentration needed to carry out unpredictable tasks within the Emergency Fire Control Room is compromised.

Recommendation- Training courses are important to the brigade and public safety and it is imperative that quality of training is maintained (if not improved). Personnel need to continue to be detached from duty when undertaking training courses.

Shift Options

Three Eights

As discussed above, any staffing system requires an inherent resilience to ensure continued service provision during times of unforeseen fluctuation. The Three Eights system spreads each individual's working week over a longer period of time. In effect, there will realistically be no chance of personnel working extra shifts to maintain that resilience. To avoid continuous duty, individuals could only be available for 4 shifts (32 hours) on the 2 rota days. On the 2-2-3 system, because the hours are compressed into a shorter time period, this could extend to 6 shifts (72 hours) individuals are available for extra shifts.

In practical terms the current systems requests personnel to provide resilience cover on rota days 2 and 3, which gives adequate rest. The Three Eights in practical terms will mean that any extra shifts undertaken will mean insufficient time away from work, and so cannot provide any resilience whatsoever. Because the first rota day includes 6 hours of work, it is highly unlikely that an individual will be prepared to return to work for a shift in that same day. When there is only one rota day free of duty it is also unlikely that personnel will want to undertake extra shifts on that day either!

Therefore to fulfil the Fire Authority's promise to provide 5 fire engines immediately available for 100% of the time would require a significant increase in personnel than that already budgeted for. Apart from being unpopular amongst staff for family friendly reason, this system is a non-starter as it will not achieve the flexibility in shift changes to ensure minimum crewing. Therefore it can only cost more rather than produce a cut.

Day Crewing Plus (DCP)

Day Crewing Plus was the example shift system used for the initial 20:20 consultation. Our response to this at the time was clear, describing in depth its risk and unsustainability. This is illustrated by only 5 positive response from WDS staff for this system when a minimum of 14 would be required and recognition that the capital investment could be wasted.

Since our previous response, the HSE have formally responded that DCP does not comply with the Working Time Directive. Although the HSE will not take formal action against DCP at this time, it is clear that if there were an injury to a Firefighter whilst on this duty system, they will be investigating its causes. To implement a move to this system with that knowledge would be extremely risk laden for that brigade.

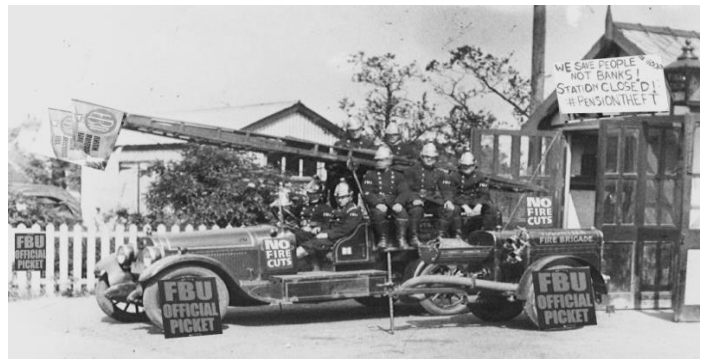
Although DCP stations have proliferated quickly since its recent inception, there are several examples of DCP stations being reverted to 2-2-3, both in Wales and brigades in NW England.

Although the DCP system also assumes a 24 hour period with 12 positive hours and 12 on-call hours, this is not for the reasons discussed earlier under the 12 hour shifts for equality and productivity.

The document recognises that DCP has a potential to decrease productivity in real terms due to the long hours spent at work, and the need for recuperation and reimbursement of positive hours for calls during the on call hours. However, the split of 12 hours makes an erroneous

assumption. Further work on the WTR will need to establish that this is permissible and we would expect a calculation on a similar basis to flexi duty to work out the hours.

To ensure that the extra payment for DCP does not risk being compared to the Employment Tribunal outcome which we highlighted last time in our **Initial Response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020**, any agreement would need to show that the payment is more akin to a shift allowance and that there is a further compensation of hours. That is to say, in the same way that the flexi duty system converts positive hours into on call hours would also need to be applied to DCP and therefore the split is more likely to be 9/15 rather than 12/12.



This then would have an even greater impact on productivity, especially as stated previously, DCP is designed for station with low call volumes and low expectation of prevention and protection. Neither is the case for Shropshire stations, where call volumes are higher and work output is very high.

5 Watch System

The documents attribute this system to Cambridgeshire FRS and also highlights that its introduction in Cambridgeshire instigated tensions in industrial relations. This 5 watch system is an iteration of that introduced in the West Midlands FRS over ten years ago. West Midlands FRS endured periods of industrial action on introducing the 5 watch shift system and has undergone countless shift reviews and changes since it was introduced, and is still not settled in its staffing profile.

Essentially, this system is extremely inflexible and restrictive. It perversely restricts leave to set periods and then bases the leave entitlement on shorter length shifts. It also has an expectation that personnel will cover shortfalls in staffing on rota days 2 and 3. This assumption without an incentive outlined above is unrealistic. Creating a worse shift system that hampers family life and is more inflexible whilst expecting staff to provide more availability without recompense is hardly going to foster good relations.

Self-Rostering

To work as it is truly intended, self-rostering will require a shift in culture and management. Starting with a blank page and filling in the spaces represents a considerable leap of faith. The balance of freedom and flexibility to book shifts wherever and whenever against successfully achieving the correct staffing numbers raises many questions as to how such a system would operate.

Some rules are included in the documents regarding sharing out weekend working, but it is probable that further rules regarding the proportion of night and day duties and how leave periods are administered would need to be introduced. There would also be future

complications regarding periods of sickness and the entitlement to reclaim leave for those periods. The result, when taking these factors (and probably other factors) into consideration, is a set of prescriptive rules that almost determine a shift pattern.

The administration and management of self-rostering will take a considerable amount of time, many brigades operating a "Staff Office" to coordinate the system. In Shropshire, the day to day management of the shift rotas is carried out by Operational Watch Managers, coordinated by Emergency Fire Control. It is doubtful that the capacity to manage a self-rostering system exists within the service. If there were not some extra resource created to carry out this function, the impact on Operational Watch Managers and Emergency Fire Control would have a detrimental effect on productivity.

Of course there are many benefits of a watch based system which will be lost under self-rostering. Meeting training needs and the effectiveness of a crew who have trained together are important factors in the operational response, not just to the public, but also for Firefighter Safety. Watches also provide a structure for all other work that is carried out on station. Each watch is autonomous in meeting its risk intelligence, CFS and BFS duties. The countless permutations of personnel on duty that self-rostering will bring will mean that this work will need to be centralised and more likely to be disrupted due to the changing needs of the personnel on duty.

In many cases where self-rostering has been introduced, the personnel have often decided amongst themselves to organise a pattern. Unsurprisingly, 2-2-3 has been the outcome. In the case of DCP, again unsurprisingly the outcome has been 4 on 4 off.

Optimum Crewing Model

This "minimum" crewing model, embellished as "optimum," is in effect self-rostering in reverse. Instead of starting with a blank sheet and working up to minimum, it starts with a full sheet and works down to minimum. In practical terms, it will be self-rostering within a shift pattern.

As mentioned above, the cuts to staffing numbers anticipated with all of these options are overestimated. But as the basic premise of this option is no different to self-rostering, the number of theoretical personnel should be the same. The option here believes that it will operate with a further two cut from the establishment!

We are under no illusion, that although this is the least unfavourable option, it still represents a considerable worsening of our conditions of service and as such oppose the imposition of this change. As ventured above, the brigade has rightly initiated a voluntary system whereby personnel can exchange shifts above the standard staffing numbers into deficient shifts. The effect of balancing staffing fluctuations is the ultimate aim of the brigade, and this may be achieved using the voluntary system.

Conclusions

SFRS has suffered a prolonged programme of cuts through Public Value and yet more are proposed here in 20:20. Some of the deeper cuts initially identified in 20:20 have been averted, but the cuts proposed in IRMP 1 are far too deep to approach the future with a sustainable service.

This document has covered the proposals in IRMP 1 and IRMP 2, but has also examined them in the context of the entire service, the practicalities of providing an emergency fire and rescue service and possible future risk through societal, economic, environmental and political change.

The underlying conclusion can only be that whilst IRMP 1 and IRMP 2 can provide a base position to examine the way in which staffing of fire engines and in the Emergency Fire Control Room is managed there are still many other factors which need to be brought into play.

Meeting the needs of service delivery is achieved through the entire service. The cuts proposed to the WDS will have a detrimental impact on SFRS's ability to deliver its service. With a concentrated focus on the WDS, the proposals have overlooked the further implications that would materialise should these cuts go ahead. If as with IRMP 2, IRMP 1 is used as a starting position to create an efficient structure to be able to reinvest into the service, then there are possibilities that some of the loss can be mitigated against. But this is dependent on resources being reinvested; in the final analysis, it will all come down to capacity. Cutting 16 posts from the service, means 16 posts worth of work being removed from the service. Output will be reduced and so it is difficult to see how the intervention provision can be maintained.

In effect, the coming months of engagement with the FBU will be crucial to making any changes work. This joint enterprise is in the best interest of both parties whose aim is to continue to provide a professional service to the people of Shropshire. The risk critical nature of our intervention service means that we cannot afford for staffing systems to fail.



Recommendations

The recommendations listed here are a reflection of our response to IRMP 1 and IRMP 2 within this document. The FBU's position/vision for Shropshire is for SFRS to provide a fully funded fire and rescue service as described in our ***Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012***.

Recommendation- The Fire Authority need to maintain a precept of 1.99% for the foreseeable future.

Recommendation- The design and reconstruction of the Telford site is a unique opportunity that requires careful consideration and planning. Funding to support this development will need to be extensive.

Recommendation- Consider reinvesting cuts back into the service by the greater availability of special appliances.

Recommendation- Resilience staffing maintained at +1

Recommendation- Efficiencies realised through the change to shift pattern should be reinvested to the WDS fire engines to enable sufficient staffing for the reinstatement of a fire engine at Tweedale.

Recommendation- The number of cuts to establishment levels in each option is too high. The options are primarily designed to even out fluctuations in staffing and reduce the overtime bill. Cuts to the establishment levels on each of the options cannot be afforded.

Recommendation- Calculations of watch strength need to be re-examined. The low levels of staffing described for each of the options will not sustain the crewing levels necessary

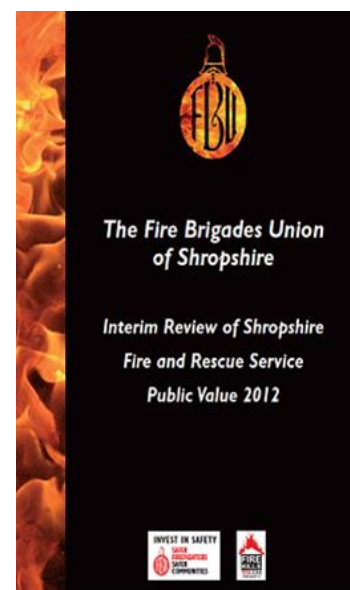
Recommendation- Further investigation should be given to planning of courses and other demands placed on staffing to investigate whether these could be arranged or planned for differently.

Recommendation- Increasing the establishment levels in Training, Operations and Fire Safety departments will first be necessary to remove the burden from the WDS of supplying staff to other departments. Once the capacity is increased enough, only then can staff from other departments be used to support the WDS.

Recommendation- The Integrated Crewing Model must be designed to consider the entire service. But each constituent part must be designed to be independently sustainable, before providing resilience/back up to other parts of the service. The nature and operation of any resilience pool will need to be fully negotiated with the FBU.

Recommendation: recruit more RDS Firefighters to the Emergency Fire Control Room.

Recommendation- Develop the Flexible Shift Exchange System and encourage further its use with greater numbers of personnel. Delay introduction of shift changes until this system has been fully appraised.



Recommendation- Substantiate temporary posts to permanent and consider accounting for absence/vacancy from elsewhere in the brigade.

Recommendation- Remove the 12 hour proposal from each option. Seek a collective agreement with the FBU on maintaining the present start and finish times.

Recommendation- Negotiate with the FBU to introduce an incentive mechanism for staff who make themselves available for short notice recall to duty.

Recommendation- Training courses are important to the brigade and public safety and it is imperative that quality of training is maintained (if not improved). Personnel need to continue to be detached from duty when undertaking training courses.

Bibliography

The Fire Brigades Union Initial Response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020

The Fire Brigades Union of Shropshire Interim Review of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Public Value 2012

It's About Time

Sounding the Alarm: the future of our fire and rescue service

IRMP 1 Integrated Crewing Model- Stage 1 – Wholetime Firefighter Shift Option Appraisal

IRMP 2 Fire Control Review – Stage 1 Fire Control Shift Option Appraisal