



The Shropshire Fire Brigades Union Response to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services Integrated Risk Management Plan 2010/11





Foreword

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) represents approximately 48,000 members covering all ranks and duty systems in the Fire & Rescue Service including approximately 4,000 managers, 11,500 firefighters working the retained duty system and 1,500 firefighters (control). This represents over 85% of all uniformed operational personnel currently serving in the Fire & Rescue Services in the UK.

As we have pointed out in previous years of the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP), the Fire Brigades Union in Shropshire fully supports the principle of risk-based fire service planning and the concept of risk based emergency cover provision.

This stance is also supported by The Fire Brigades Union nationally when the position was formalised in the national policy position adopted at the Fire Brigades Union Annual Conference in 2002.

Risk-based response planning methodology, and the system of measurement which underpins it, should be the same throughout England to allow valid comparisons between brigades on a like-for-like basis, and to satisfy communities that like-risk will receive a like-response irrespective of location in England.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have a commendable track record in its approach to the IRMP process. Proposals have been thoroughly researched and analysed. Consultation has been comprehensive and a genuine dialogue has emerged with The Fire Brigades Union and also with staff, who of course are predominantly our members.

As we will see in this document, SFRS, as with all Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), face a difficult period over the next few years. The proposals in this year's IRMP Action Plan are far reaching. The FBU in Shropshire, as elsewhere in the country, will work tirelessly to protect the interests of our members and the public. However, in Shropshire, both the FBU and SFRS recognise that this is best done as a partnership, and we will work closely with SFRS to make sure that the correct outcomes are reached as a result of the IRMP process.

Matt Lamb
Brigade Secretary
Fire Brigades Union

Andy Brown
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	<u>Contents</u>	
Foreword		2
Introduction		4
	<u>National</u>	
Overview		5
Communities and Local Government (CLG)		5
Enforcement Fire Safety		6
Audit Commission “Rising to the Challenge”		7
Financial Impact of Fires		7
Bankers		8
Public Services		8
How to construct an IRMP		8
Firefighter Safety		12
Attacks on Firefighters		14
Fire Control		15
Global Warming/ Resilience		17
Major Incidents		18
	<u>Growing Importance of the Fire Service</u>	
Rescues involving Water		20
Animal Rescues		21
Industrial Accidents		22
Other Incidents		23
	<u>Shropshire</u>	
	<u>IRMP Action plan Proposals 2009/10 (Year 6)</u>	
Specialist Functions and Resilience station activities		25
Risk Analysis (Station Risk Information)		26
Water Rescue Provision		27
	<u>The Situation for SFRS in 2009</u>	
Regional Control Centres		28
Financial Crisis		28
Operation “Safeplace” Risk Reduction officers		29
Temporary staff		30
New CFO		31
CFS priorities		31
	<u>IRMP Action Plan Proposals 2010/11(Year 7)</u>	
Retained Development Managers		32
Reduction in Ridership factor		36
Relocation of ALP		42
Consultation and questionnaire		46
Conclusions		46
Bibliography		47
Appendix		48



Introduction

As in Previous years, this year's response to IRMP will comprise of two sections. Firstly, the national picture which sets the context of how national events will impact on all Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs), as well as SFRS. This also includes a round up of examples that show the continued importance of the Fire Service.

Secondly, the picture in Shropshire, which will include several areas of concern to the FBU with SFRS and also responding to the proposals contained within the Action Plan.

In both of these sections, there are considerably more events and situations that need comment than in previous years. The national picture is very different to previous years, with public spending constraints threatened by all political parties and the high probability of a different Government next year. Meanwhile, in Shropshire, the proposals outlined in this year's action plan are arguably the most far reaching since the implementation of IRMP in 2003.

We have had significantly more vociferous feedback to this year's proposals from our members, which is understandable considering the nature of the proposals and the effect that they will have on our members.

We have in this document tried to show the importance of maintaining the traditional values which have merit, but also look to suggest a way of moving the proposals forward, for the benefit of the people of Shropshire, for the efficient running of SFRS and to be acceptable to our members.



National

Overview

The entire UKFRS is either in the midst of financial cutbacks or preparing for them. This has been the cause of industrial unrest between FRS's management and the Fire Brigades Union in various counties. Many counties are facing difficulties, none worse so than in South Yorkshire; where industrial action has been taken against the Fire Authority to remove the threat of terminating the contracts of 744 Firefighters from January 2010 to impose new conditions of service on our members.

Despite the assertion from national politicians that frontline services will not be cut, that is not the experience that can be seen in several FRS. The number of frontline Firefighters has continued to decrease in many services, particularly in metropolitan areas.

It is easy for politicians to claim that cuts can be made to unnecessary managers and administrators in public services, but this is not the case for the FRS. The NHS and Civil Service have come under much criticism for being overly bureaucratic. Whether this is the case or not, it cannot be said for the FRS nationally and, it most certainly cannot be said for SFRS. Since 2004, the UKFRS has become leaner in its service delivery in terms of operational response with regard to weight of attack and attendance times.

At a time when FRS have lacked the central direction from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and since the dissolution of the CFBAC, now is the time that greater investment is needed in the FRS. This is because, although there have been plenty of initiatives, there has not been an underpinning and consolidation to the work of FRS. The lack of central training guidance and central operational guidance is the most reprehensible. Currently there are over 6000 pieces of information in FRS domain, much of which is outdated and contradictory. This is not the only area where it can be demonstrated that the UKFRS has been neglected.

Communities and Local Government (CLG)

The lack of know how and direction afforded to FRSs from the CLG can be illustrated by two documents it circulated this year.

Firstly, the "Guide to risk assessment tools, techniques and data, Fire Research Series 5/2009." The document should be an invaluable tool for FRSs, as it claims to give direction on:

- Transport
- Fire and Explosion
- Weather
- Pollution
- Industrial Infrastructure
- Human and Animal Health
- Structural Collapse
- Terrorist and Protest
- Domino Effects

However, the document only skims the surface by informing FRS of these risks and effectively informing them that they ought to be planning for them.



This is bewildering. The intimation that FRS, after 7 years of Integrated Risk Management Planning, have not investigated these risks is insulting and uninformed. The second is the rewritten IRMP Guidance note 4, which covers Fire Safety.

Since the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, FRSs have completely changed their enforcement Fire Safety provision to align to this new statutory requirement. Although we have doubts about the effectiveness of this change (see below), this guidance has been released some 4 years since the order came into force.

Certainly for SFRS and probably for the rest of the UKFRS, this work has already been implemented and is practically complete for existing businesses. Therefore the “Guidance” note is a summary of what has already been undertaken over the last 4 years, which can hardly be described as guidance from a forward thinking department.

Enforcement Fire Safety

We also believe that changes to Fire Safety enforcement made by the Fire Safety (regulatory reform) Order 2005 needs to be investigated.

The changes to fire safety law, puts the onus on employers and responsible persons to carry out fire risk assessments. The ability of employers and occupiers to adequately carry out these risk assessments is questionable, especially given the current economic climate, whereby businesses are fighting for financial survival, let alone investing in Fire Safety measures. This has a further impact on Firefighters entering workplaces on a fire call that may have significantly greater hazards.

The focus of the new Fire Safety legislation is on life risk, which is correct. However, non life risk buildings can endanger the safety of Firefighters dealing with incidents at such premises. The fire at Lakanal House in Camberwell, where six people died in July, highlights our concern. The building had been refurbished under the Decent Homes Programme, however it would appear that there were Fire Safety issues with the building.

We would recommend that the statutory prevention provision for Fire Safety is reviewed before experience and skills within Fire Safety departments throughout the country diminish. We would like to see a more stringent process and greater statutory powers for FRSs to ensure the protection of the public and Firefighters at work and in workplaces and public buildings.

Audit Commission “Rising to the Challenge”



The most polite description of the Audit Commission's report "Rising to the Challenge" released late last year is that it is nonsense. It has created great anger amongst our members who feel the report denigrates the Fire Service and belittles the excellent work that Firefighters carry out. Many of our members would not use such polite terms.

Its assertion that £200m can be saved from UKFRS's budgets without affecting service delivery is ludicrous. Chris Wormald's statement that longer response times do not lead to a worse service is also ludicrous. These are claims made by people who clearly do not understand the Fire Service.

We have already seen from insurance statistics that although events of fire are reducing, they are tending to be larger fires, which is costing the UK economy. When compared with the CLG's own statistics, contained within their circular 09/2009, that attendance times have increased by 18%, and fire deaths have increased by 8% the Audit Commission's assertion is shown to be scandalously untrue.

The increase in attendance times is hastily attributed to increased traffic congestion by the CLG. However, the period over which the statistics were taken have also yielded a reduction in the total numbers of Firefighters and also less appliance availability due various novel staffing systems that have been introduced around the country in the name of IRMP. We suspect that this has had a greater influence on fire deaths and the size of fires rather than the increase of traffic congestion, particularly as the economic crisis has had the opposite effect on traffic congestion.

From this, it can only be concluded, that more investment needs directed toward intervention in the Fire Service and not less. It is indicative of these cuts, that industrial unrest is spread to various counties around the country. The paradox that some FRSs have chosen to invest large sums into an alternative private firefighting provision rather than into the existing service is worrying and provocative.

Financial Impact of Fires

One aspect which is not widely reported in comparison to the apparent need to cut FRS funding is the worrying trend of increasing fire damage and insurance claims.

The Association of British Insurers reported in March, that 2008 had seen a rise of 15% and 17% to commercial and domestic fire damage respectively. This rise amounts to a cost to the economy of £1.3bn. In comparison to the falling occurrence of fires, this would suggest that fires are creating more damage before the FRS can intervene. Again, another reason to invest more heavily in intervention resources at this time rather than the cuts we are seeing. It may also indicate that a wrong turn has been taken in Fire Safety legislation and its enforcement.

Bankers



Following the bail out of the banks by Government, it has been universally accepted (driven by the media and political parties) that the national debt should be repaid from the public purse. This however is morally wrong. The banks have borrowed the money from the public purse and it is they that should repay the debt in the medium and long term. Therefore, we find it disgraceful that FRSs as well as other vital public services are in imminent danger of having their budgets cut to balance the central Government books.

However, we recognise that we do not exist in a vacuum, and we along with all FRS will have to deal with a bleak future when it comes.

Public Services

In a survey carried out by ComRes in October, they found that the public wanted councillors, and not MPs to decide on the funding for public services. The survey also found that on a scale of importance, the fire service was second only to hospital staff. Third was the Police followed by care for the elderly, refuse collection, child protection services and then social services.

It is therefore clear to us that, cuts to the fire service is not wanted by the public and cannot be justified by the economic crisis. The Fire Brigades Union therefore will resist cuts to services that endanger the lives of the public and also endanger our members by not adequately supporting them with the correct resources to enable the agreed safe systems of work to be carried out.

How to construct an IRMP

The Fire Brigades Union has this year published its document “How to Construct an IRMP/RRP” which has been circulated to SFRS and the Fire Authority.

The document includes great detail guiding Fire and Rescues Authorities (FRA) how to construct an IRMP using a 6 step methodology as follows:



The Fire Brigades Union

Integrated Risk Management Planning



The Framework Document: How to construct an IRMP/RRP



Step 1: Scope. Identify all of the issues that are the business of the FRS. Identify all of the internal and external controlling factors that impact upon the FRS.

Step 2: Risk assess each of the issues that are in scope. How likely are they to materialise? how harmful are they? Prioritise them according to overall risk and determine a performance outcome target (the degree to which you would like the risk to be reduced).

Step 3: Develop strategies to reduce the risks. Identify the resources needed to deliver each strategy. Allocate resources according to the degree of risk. Identify the inputs and outputs of delivery strategies – if short term inputs and outputs are achieved, long term outcomes should be satisfactory.

Step 4: Delivery. Remember that people are the most important part of any delivery strategy, so to make sure that the strategies work, consult staff about the practicalities of delivery mechanisms.

Step 5: Monitor the whole process from step 1 to step 4. Constantly look for new risks and changes to existing risks. Monitor performance against inputs, outputs and outcomes.

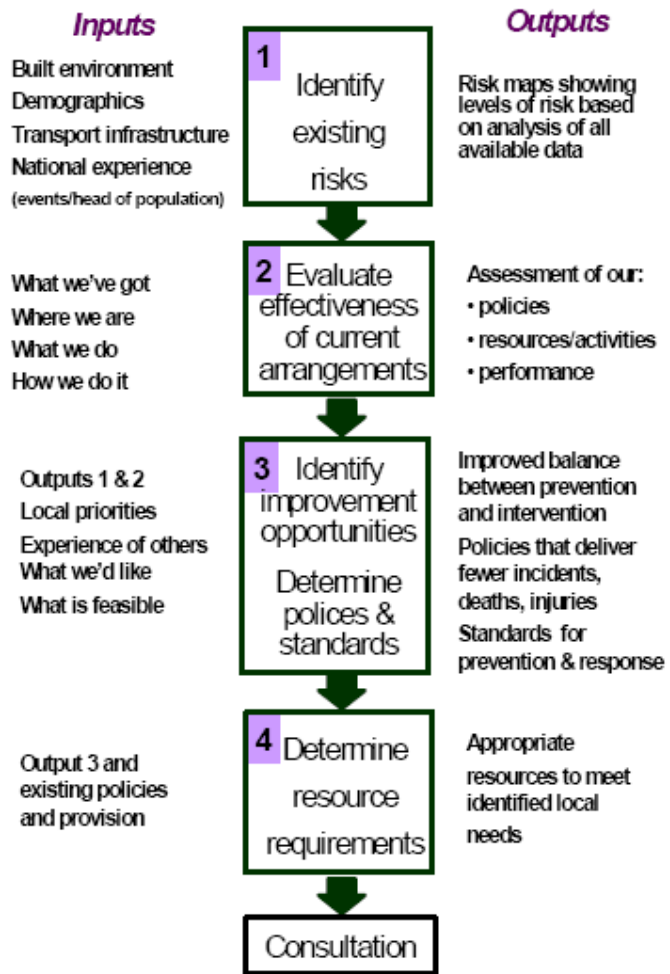
Step 6: Review the process in the light of performance. Did the strategies deliver the performance outcomes? If so, continue with them, if not, develop new strategies for the next planning cycle.

The document gives detail of how these steps are to be achieved. It is interesting that since year one of IRMP the FBU in Shropshire have pointed out in it's annual responses that this underpinning methodology needed to be in place before going head long into IRMP action plans. Last years inclusion of the Station Risk Analysis work in SFRS's IRMP action Plan was most welcome, and crucial to the whole process.

The Fire Brigades Union in Shropshire has also pointed out (in our responses to IRMP) that we have been pleased with the thorough and responsible manner in which SFRS has undertaken the IRMP process. That is not to say that we always agree with every aspect of some of the proposals, but it is fair to say that the Fire Authority and SFRS management properly engage in the process and in the consultation.

In the SFRS's Strategic IRMP 2009-2012 document, the methodology used by SFRS is replicated below. Obviously there are many ways of diagrammatically showing this process, but evidently the essentials from SFRS methodology have developed over the years and compare favourably to our document. This however cannot be said for many other FRSs.





The Fire Brigades Union

In the line of duty

Firefighter deaths in the UK since 1978

A report by the Labour Research Department (LRD) for the Fire Brigades Union

November 2008

In November 2008, the Fire Brigades Union published its document “In the Line of Duty.” It outlines research undertaken by the Labour Research Department in response to concerns held by the FBU that Firefighter fatalities and injuries were rising rapidly since the introduction of the IRMP process and the departure of the CFBAC.

The concerns centre on a lack of monitoring of the statistics of deaths and injuries and no analysis of how they have occurred. The trend in firefighter deaths was downwards until the turn of the century. Between February 1996 and October 2002 there were no recorded fire deaths in the UK.. However since then, and especially since 2003, there has been an alarming upturn. In the five years 2003-2007, 21 Firefighters died on duty.

There are no figures for work related deaths, injuries or illnesses such as stress related heart attacks, cancers and suicides. Investigation reports suggest that Firefighter fatalities are consistently related to failures in the risk assessment process. Firefighters have been committed into situations on the basis of inadequate assessments of the risks which have contributed to deaths and injuries

The Review of Standards of Emergency Cover stated that:

“It is essential to avoid situations which could motivate or pressurise fire-fighters to act unsafely in the interests of saving life.”

Investigation reports suggest that fire fighter fatalities are consistently related to failures in the risk assessment process. Fire fighters have been committed into situations on the basis of inadequate assessments of risk, which has contributed to poor management of risk at operational incidents. The previously unpublished Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) report contained evidence of failures across the service. They show that some integrated risk management plans (IRMP's) and in particular risk assessments have been inadequate and have compromised Firefighter safety. Other factors are specialist training in safety critical areas such as breathing apparatus and building construction) and failures of equipment, particularly communication equipment.

IRMPs in some Services have left in inadequate operational intervention provision. The research found that a significant number of FRSs policies and procedures are poor, when measured against the high standards expected to protect Firefighters and again most particularly risk assessments have been inadequate, compromising Firefighter safety.

The Fire Brigades Union believes the underlying problem is the absence of substantial guidance emanating from the CLG. The publication of brief and general circulars is no substitute for detailed policy guidance. There is a national policy vacuum with regard to Firefighter safety, and this is reflected in the fatality figures in recent years.

The document recommends that a national independent Fire and Rescue Service investigation unit should be established, with statutory powers to independantly examine Firefighter fatalities, major and serious injuries in line with other national



services such as Air, Rail and Policing. This body should also advise on and disseminate lessons and guidance.

It also recommends that a central body develop standards for individual integrated radio and breathing apparatus sets and individual locational tracking systems.

This body should also commission research on the impact of Firefighter workload on safety, looking particularly at training, operation preparedness and emergency response.

With this guidance from a competent central body, FRSs should then be able to ensure that policies, procedures and generic risk assessments are reviewed and updated to reflect the lessons from recent fatalities. They should ensure that safe systems of work are at the heart of IRMPs and that sufficient numbers of competent Firefighters and officers are committed to operational incidents.

Responding to fires and other emergencies is a high risk, labour intense activity. When FRAs develop their IRMPs, FRSs need to consider the risks to employees which should be the paramount consideration. In doing this, suitable and sufficient strategies for safe systems of work will then need to be developed, written and deployed by competent officers without the reliance upon the failing Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) thought process.

The financial, material and human resources required to deliver these strategies should be secured as priority. All other business activity identified during the IRMP development process should be delivered by resources secondary to this priority.

In essence, the Fire Brigades Union has identified that there is a need for a central body to lead the fire service that includes the input of all stakeholders. This has previously been done by the CFBAC which has been disbanded.

Interestingly the Fire Service in Ireland has this year announced new central arrangements for the promotion and delivery of Fire and Emergency Services by the establishment of a new National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management. It will engage with all the relevant stakeholders and will be responsible for standards in fire services and will develop national policies, without interfering with local authorities

Attacks on Firefighters

This clearly continues to be a cause for concern directly for our members and also for all FRSs. We pointed out some examples of how Firefighters were attacked last year, and there has still been similar experience in the last 12 months. However, there does seem to be a downward trend at present.

West Yorkshire FRS have experienced an average of nine incidents of attacks to Firefighters each month in 2008. Incidents ranged from physical assaults to vandalism and stonings to verbal abuse. There was also an incident in Strathclyde which reported



the use of a rifle shot at the Fire Station. The incidents however, are generally more likely to occur either whilst attending Fire Safety events or as part of a planned ambush at rubbish fires.

We still believe that working with children and young people is the long term answer to this problem, which will probably take a long time to completely eradicate in some areas. We also see the schools education programme that is developing in Shropshire is the key to reducing these attacks in the long term. It is also an opportunity to raise the profile of the Fire Service in Shropshire and to implant the idea of careers in the Fire Service to all parts of the community.

Fire Control

The “FireControl” project is still trudging toward the regionalisation of Emergency Fire Control Rooms. There is a direct impact in Shropshire, which we have outlined in the second section of this document. However, the countrywide impact of this project will undoubtedly lead to a poorer service for the public and will put the health, safety and welfare of all our members at risk.

This is why The Fire Brigades Union has redoubled its efforts to campaign for the scrapping of this dangerous move. This is illustrated by the recent rally and lobby of Parliament held last month, where over 1800 of our members assembled from all parts of the country to protest against this project.

It is evident that CLG do not understand the role our members working in Emergency Fire Control Rooms give to the entire service. This is why our renewed campaign is entitled “Part of the Team.” To see how this is exemplified go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS3LhuK593s>

Another example is given below from the “The Bolton News”

999 operator is hailed a hero in fire rescue drama

9:20am Monday 19th January 2009

By Steven Thompson »

A BOLTON woman has been hailed a hero after guiding firefighters to a man trapped in a burning pub.

Emergency services operator Karen Flanagan, from Horwich, helped save the life of the businessman who had called 999 to report the blaze, but did not know his exact location.



Alex Bell, from Nottingham, dialled 999 after he awoke in the room he was renting above the Pamona Palace pub in Cornbrook Road, Old Trafford.

But Mr Bell, who was in town on business, had no idea of his exact location and was only able to tell the operator he was somewhere near [Manchester United](#)'s ground.

But the quick-thinking mother of two, who grew up in Salford, asked the man to describe his surroundings.

And Mrs Flanagan was able to guide firefighters to the pub using her local knowledge.

The modest mum said: "I was just doing what I'm paid to do really. It is a team effort and I couldn't have done it without everyone else in the control room and the firefighters.

"I just kept talking to him because the one thing you don't want is them wandering off the wrong way into trouble.

"I asked him to try to look outside to see what he could see.

"He said he was near [Manchester United](#) and there was a BMW dealership opposite. That's how we found him in the end.

"Fortunately, he was at the front of the building and the firefighters saw him."

On Sunday, colleagues and firefighters praised the Bolton hero's actions.

Control room boss Liz Drummond said: "She did an outstanding job. She's a very professional control room operator and she used all her skills, knowledge and experience to keep that gentleman safe and alive, and obtain a location."

Steve Lloyd, of Stretford fire station, added: "The control room staff rose to the challenge. It could have been a much worse situation without that local knowledge."



Global Warming/ Resilience

We have since the floods of 2007, been highlighting the changes to the weather, the increasing frequency of flooding and other weather extremes that places high demand on the Fire Service.

The incidents we are required to attend as a result of climate change, and the incidents we need to be ready to attend due to terrorist threat necessitate FRSs being ready to make a large scale response to major incidents.

Extreme weather continued to plague many parts of the country over the last 12 months. Storms and lightning in Devon during June caused a plethora of incidents that stretched the Fire Service with multiple calls to flooding, many affecting electrics and a house fire caused by lightning. In the same storm two further houses were struck by lightning in Dorset as reported by the BBC below.

Lightning strikes hit two homes

Two Dorset homes have been damaged after being struck by lightning during overnight storms.

Dorset Fire Service was called to a "spate of lightning related incidents" due to severe weather.

It said the most serious call-outs were to a property hit by lightning in Willow Way, Christchurch, and another in Marnhull, near

Sturminster Newton.

A property at the bottom of Monmouth Road, Dorchester, was also flooded by heavy rain. No-one was hurt.

The fire in the Christchurch property, in the early hours, left the roof badly damaged.

Eight fire engines were called to the Marnhull property on Thursday evening, where a fire had also taken hold in the roof timbers.

Three floors of the home were also badly damaged by smoke.



Lightning struck across Dorset, including over Poole harbour

In August, Cumbria was also hit by flooding overnight with similar consequences, when half the normal rainfall for the month fell in 24 hours.

In the North East, £80,000 has been invested by the Northumbria Regional Flood Defence Committee resulting in Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service purchasing a



new Emergency Rescue Boat amongst other things. This boat was vital in saving 108 people stranded in flooded houses in September.

It is therefore incomprehensible how the recommendations made by the Pitt Review, has stalled to a standstill. The Pitt Review (supported by many, including several Chief Fire Officers) strongly recommendation 43, recommended a statutory duty and funding to be introduced to the Fire Service to provide a water rescue provision because:

“It appears that, in the event of another wide-area flooding emergency, those responding would still not necessarily have the right resources or training to respond safely.”

Some FRS, including Shropshire, fund the provision of water rescue both from fast flowing water and flooding, however, these Services are in a minority. The experience in the North East is not replicated across the country where often Firefighters struggle to serve their communities with inadequate equipment and training often putting themselves at intolerable levels of risk.

Major Incidents

As we have outlined, statistics indicate that the probability of larger fires is increasing and this is confirmed by our own experience. The work carried out by Firefighters and support staff in Community Fire Safety and education has had a real impact on the community’s safety. However, it seems that the average size of fires is increasing. It is easy to pick out examples around the country, but the same experience can be shown in Shropshire, with incidents such as that at Kingpin Tyres and the example below from the Shropshire Star:

Big blaze at industrial estate



Thick black smoke billowed across Telford as more than 60 tonnes of insulation material went up in flames.

Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service was inundated by calls as people spotted the smoke coming from Borgers in Hortonwood shortly after lunchtime yesterday.



Police sealed off roads as 40 firefighters were drafted in to tackle the incident.

Firefighters from nearby MoD Donnington also attended to offer help, while many emergency callers thought it was the base itself which was alight. One eyewitness, who declined to be named, said: “I was in the area near Borgers and got turned away from the scene by police.

“There were big clouds of thick black smoke. “It was very alarming.”

Fire investigators were today examining CCTV footage from the plant in an effort to determine the cause of the blaze.

The conclusions that can only be drawn from this are that a comprehensive fire and rescue intervention service should be the utmost priority of the UKFRS. The majority of incidents that the FRS attend are not able to be resolved by another agency. This is due to the professionalism and dedication of Firefighters who often go beyond what is expect of them to protect the public and property, which is illustrated in the next section.



Growing Importance of the Fire Service

The intervention work of the Fire and Rescue Service is well known by the public. Even though incidents of fire continue to steadily decline, road traffic collisions and other incidents such as chemical spills continue to need the full response of a fully trained and equipped rescue service.

In last year's response to IRMP, we pointed out that; it is the Fire and Rescue Service that the public look toward when faced with the most severe of emergencies. This is continuing to be the case, not just because of the threat of climate change where flooding and heath fires are becoming more common place, but also because of the extra professionalism of the FRS in dealing with a wide variety of emergencies.

Some examples of the more unusual incidents that Firefighters have been faced with over the last twelve months are listed below. These can be found on the FBU website at www.fbu.org.uk

Rescues involving Water

In August, two men were rescued by the FRS in Workington. They were stranded on a concrete structure, surrounded by a fast flowing river. Firefighters, wearing dry suits, used an inflatable boat and line equipment to rescue the men and brought them back to the bank.

Last October, Firefighters rescued an elderly disabled man and a woman near Caldercruix. They were stranded in their car, whilst rising flood water surrounded them.

In January this year, an 11 year old boy was rescued from a freezing canal in Burnley. Firefighters from Burnley's specialist water rescue team attended.

In November last year, a driver became stranded in the fast-flowing River Earn at Dalpatrick Ford. Firefighters used lifejackets and throw lines to rescue the man



In May, a 15 year old girl was trapped in slurry in a Manchester river. Firefighters saved the girl using the Water Incident Unit.

In June, a nine year old girl was rescued by Firefighters when her foot become trapped in a flooded drain. Pumping and cutting equipment was used to release the girl in Tipton.



In February, A woman was rescued by firefighters from the River Tyne. She was pulled from the river by firefighters in a Swift Water Rescue boat. However, due to the cold and serious injuries she later died in hospital.

In September, a nine year old boy was rescued by firefighters after falling off a rope swing into a river. They used ladders and ropes to rescue the boy from the fast flowing weir.

Firefighters also rescued a man and his son from the River Wye after a canoeing accident.

In October, a woman was rescued by Firefighters from the River Eden near Carlisle. Using dry suits and swift water rescue techniques, the Firefighters rescued her from the fast flowing river before losing her grip on an underwater branch.

In September, Firefighters rescued a woman who had fallen into a lock at Newbury, using a stretcher and a boat.

In August, an entire family was rescued by Firefighters, from a mud flat after they became trapped trying to rescue their dog at Elton. The water rescue team used a 20-metre inflatable pathway to reach them, and get them out.

Animal Rescues

In August, a cow which was stuck in four feet of mud in a river was rescued by Firefighters at Totnes. Firefighters used inflatable walkways and a cow net, as well as rescue lines, small tools and chain saws.

At a similar incident, Firefighters pulled a horse from the river bed of the River Meon in Hampshire in October



Industrial Accidents

In January, firefighters rescued a construction worker from the fifth floor of a flats complex after he fell 20 feet from the roof apartment in Market Harborough.

In June, a maintenance worker was rescued by firefighters, from his work cradle 120 feet above the ground, after the lift locked itself into one position. The rescue was performed by using line safety and an Aerial Ladder Platform.



Firefighters also rescued a worker after falling into a deep hole in a grain store in Aberdeenshire.

Firefighters in Shrewsbury rescued a lift engineer in March, whose arm had become trapped by a lift at New Park House. Cutting equipment was used to release the man.

32 Passengers were rescued from a Big Dipper ride by Firefighters in Blackpool. Firefighters used stretchers, spine boards and neck collars to rescue the passengers, who were stranded in carriages 20ft above ground in August.

At another incident on a Blackpool funfair ride, Firefighters released a girl trapped in the carriage attached to the arm that had collapsed from the Crazy Frog ride.

At a major incident on Merseyside, in July, where a crane collapsed onto a building, several people had to be rescued by Firefighters using an Aerial Ladder Platform





In the same month another crane collapsed onto a container ship as it was being loaded at Southampton dock. Firefighters released the crane driver whose legs had become trapped. Luckily, no one else was hurt.

In July, a worker whose hydraulic Platform broke down whilst he was working under a bridge over the River Strule, was rescued by Firefighters in Omagh.

Firefighters used heavy lifting gear, in Cornwall, to rescue a man who had become trapped by a mini digger when it fell on him.

Other Incidents

Firefighters rescued a man from the hold of a ship at Tilbury Power Station last October using Line Rescue equipment.

Firefighters rescued two boys after they got trapped waist deep in mud trying to retrieve a football, in Plymouth in January.

In February, Firefighters, including those from Urban Search and Rescue, worked painstakingly to rescue a man from a loft in Maldon. The man injured his back whilst working in the confines of a small loft, his back needed to be immobilised by the crews before they could continue with the rescue.

In June, a man trapped 30ft underground in the Avon Gorge had to be rescued by firefighters

Firefighters in Scunthorpe cut free a man who had become impaled on a fence post at the knee.



Firefighters used line rescue equipment to rescue an injured 12 year old girl in August. The girl had twisted her knee and fallen 15 feet in a quarry at Ruspidge.

In a very similar incident, Firefighters in Workington, rescued a 14 year old girl after she fell down to the edge of a steep slag bank in August.

Also in Workington, fire crews rescued a woman, using chainsaws and high pressure airbags, trapped under a fallen tree. The rescue which took place in January, lasted over two hours, and the woman escaped the need for amputation due to the successful rescue of the Firefighters.

In October, a man stuck down a 10 foot hole with an ankle injury at Audley End railway station, Wendens Ambo was rescued by Firefighters using ladders.



Shropshire

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is rightly proud of the achievements it has attained over a prolonged period now. These achievements are testament to the work of all members of the service and which is recognised in the Strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan 2009 – 2012, which states:

“Although one of the smallest fire services in the UK, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is known as an innovator and we are justifiably proud to be one of the best performing out of England’s 46 fire services and one of only five improving at the highest possible level.”

On pages 16 and 17 of this document, the impressive graphs of Shropshire’s continued success in reducing fires, both accidental and deliberate, and injuries continue due to the prevention and education carried out by Shropshire’s Firefighters and support staff. Although the rate of decrease is now in decline (i.e. the graph are starting to bottom out) this work will still need to be carried out by Firefighters otherwise there may be a rise appearing on these graphs in future years.

Other areas where SFRS still needs to continue to improve, to remain as a high achieving Fire Service, have been highlighted in previous FBU reports. These are;

- Training
- Personal Development
- Corporate Risk Assessment
- Risk Information gathering and contingency planning

IRMP Action plan Proposals 2009/10 (Year 6)

Specialist Functions and Resilience station activities

Both of these areas are still being developed following last year’s consultation. We have given support to the principles of these two proposals provided that they are managed properly and fully supported via management, training and time.

We are concerned that as these proposals are still ongoing that the impetus behind them may be waning. It is important that these proposals are fully developed to allow a homogenised approach to resources, where appliances of various types and their personnel are positioned where they are needed.

The areas that these two action cover are:

- Logistical Support at large incidents
- Fire-fighter Decontamination
- Mass Decontamination support
- Safety and Rescue (4 pumps and over)
- Water Safety



and

- Large and long duration incidents
- Cross border incidents
- Incidents that require us to meet our national and regional resilient commitments

Clearly these are important operational considerations, and it would be helpful for SFRS's service delivery and for the safety and well being of our members that these proposals are concluded satisfactorily.

Risk Analysis (Station Risk Information)

The Fire Brigades Union in Shropshire has, whilst responding to SFRS's annual IRMP action plans, consistently pointed out the methodology that should be used for constructing an IRMP is an iterative method to finely tune a properly risk assessed plan. We have also, whilst having differences of opinion on certain aspects, appreciated the thoroughness with which SFRS has applied Risk Assessment, Risk Analysis and Risk Management to IRMP. In last year's response, in respect of the Risk Analysis work that was being initiated, we pointed out:

“Due to the cautious approach that SFRS has taken to IRMP over the initial years Shropshire has guided itself to a position where; because the changes that have been made have been sensible ones, in year 6 Shropshire is now able to show that risk is being managed countywide. The Service is now in a position where the individual identification and management of Risk can be assessed by each station and personnel at each station are empowered to interact with regard to provision of cover, training and equipment.”

The information that has been unearthed by Firefighters all over the county and the way that this work has been embarked upon, is an asset to the Service.

The service must now have a clear and accurate picture of risks across the county and will be able to use this information, to inform future risk analysis of the Service's provision and to manage that risk in terms of training, equipment, personnel and risk critical information.

However, it must be recognised that this must be a continuing process. There are many risks throughout Shropshire which need to be constantly monitored, as pointed out in the Fire Authority document “Supporting Local Area Agreements across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin 2009 – 2011”

The Borough of Telford & Wrekin... [has] seen remarkable industrial and residential growth in the area, which totals 112 square miles. The Borough was among one of the fastest growing local authority areas in Europe throughout the 1990's, growth which will continue well into the new century. The majority of the population lives in the rapidly growing new town of Telford, where approximately 1,000 new dwellings are completed annually. Throughout the County there are over 6,500 farms, 110 Sites of



Special Scientific Interest and over 6,000 listed buildings, including the World Heritage Site at Ironbridge. Many areas of the County are at high risk from flooding and many rural areas are at particular risk from fires during dry spells. The use of Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) software through the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process has identified that over 37,000 dwellings (approximately 20% of all dwellings) in Shropshire are classified as being well above average risk of fire. Although a high proportion of these (approximately 60%) are in those urban areas previously identified and targeted with community safety initiatives, many are in more rural parts of the County, with correspondingly higher response times, when a fire does occur. Other incidents, which the Service attends, cause death and serious injury. Road traffic collisions, agricultural incidents and chemical spills all require our input.

Water Rescue Provision

As we predicted in our response to this proposal last year, the national direction of water rescue provision has ground to a halt. Without a recurrence of the scale of the floods in 2007, combined with conflicting opinion between the various reviews following those floods, the impetus to delegate this responsibility has vanished.

However, we are pleased that Shropshire has made forward steps to update and extend this provision by the purchase of a new boat, further training of more personnel to Swiftwater Rescue Technician and more widespread training for all staff.

We believe that there will be further future developments in this area at some point, and we will continue to work with SFRS to progress the water rescue provision in Shropshire.



The Situation for SFRS in 2009

During the last twelve months there have been a number of events both nationally and locally that have had an affect on Shropshire. As an active Trade Union we obviously will form a view on these events, and feel that it is appropriate to highlight our views in this document as they will affect the Risk Management of SFRS.

Regional Control Centres

Our opposition to Regional Control Centres has been widely publicised, and we would suspect that anyone with an interest in the Fire Service would be well aware of our opposition and the reasons for that opposition. Therefore there is no need to reiterate that here.

However, following another unsurprising delay to this project, we feel it necessary to repeat our concerns which we raised last year.

“although the responsibility of the function of the Emergency Fire Control Room will be discharged to the LACC, the public of Shropshire will hold SFRS responsible for its intervention cover, which includes the ability to mobilise appliances correctly.

The question for SFRS is; if the RCC does fail for whatever reason, what contingencies will the Service provide? Will the public of Shropshire accept that this function has been discharged and is the responsibility of the LACC? There is a strong possibility of a vehement media outcry if the RCC fails to perform its duty correctly, which potentially, will be directed toward SFRS and the Fire Authority.”

This latest delay will see the project completed 4 years later than its original completion date. We believe there will be further delays and still hope that the project is scrapped before it falls apart.

However, we feel it is time that SFRS progressed contingency plans to provide an alternative to the RCC. This would mean renewing equipment and technology. It would also mean re-evaluating all other relevant plans to include the future provision of an Emergency Fire Control Room in Shropshire.

Financial Crisis

Whilst the nation has been forced to prop up the faltering banking system, the knock on effect, that Public Services need to be cut in order to pay for this bail out, has been widely accepted, due to the media coverage and the stance taken by both political parties.

Whilst we do not agree with that logic, we obviously need to deal with the threats to our funding from whichever Government is in power. The will to defend the Fire Service by our members is already emerging in various counties around the country and unfortunately is likely to become more widespread. It is our feeling that budget



constraints that may be applied to SFRS will have a more profound impact than elsewhere.

As a relatively small FRS the capacity to deliver Services will be more greatly hampered by a budget cut than would be in larger Services. It is our belief that the intervention provision currently provided by SFRS is already at its most efficient. Any cut to that provision will undoubtedly provide a far worse service to the public of Shropshire, and will also put our members at greater risk of injury if the necessary support is not provided at operational incidents.

Therefore, it is important that any focus of budget cuts to SFRS's intervention provision must be at the last resort, once all other avenues have been exhausted.

Operation "Safeplace" Risk Reduction officers

This scheme has emerged separately to the IRMP process, at which we expressed extreme disappointment at the time of its consultation early in 2009. Since the introduction of IRMP the Service has progressed steadily to a position where risk identification, analysis and management has become embedded into the entire operational network. Wholtime watches and RDS personnel across the county are identifying their risks and are given responsibility for helping to manage those risks as described under "Risk Analysis (Station Risk Information)" above.

The scheme "Safeplace" was hatched to combat the possibility of an increase of fire activity, both deliberate and accidental due to the current financial climate. We would applaud the Service in attempting to tackle the possibility of increased fire activity due to the downturn in the economy but we have doubts about the effectiveness of this scheme.

Notwithstanding the purpose of the scheme to tackle the risk of a spike in fire activity, it is evident that it should have been put through the IRMP process as a proposal and evaluated against all other parts of the SFRS service delivery.

We do feel there were alternative options to combat this perceived risk. The work that the Service envisages will be carried out under project "Safe Place" almost entirely falls within the Firefighter Rolemap, most particularly Ff 1 and Ff 8 and therefore, opportunities to use other staff has now been missed. It could have been possible to absorb this work into station and watch IRMP activity, or it could have been included within the remit of RSO and Retained Development Managers. This would have created enormous flexibility for the Service and achieved far greater results. This would also give the benefit of all the other aspects within the Firefighters rolemap to the community in those areas.

Therefore we feel the Service had identified a course of fire safety activity that needed to be woven into SFRS and should not have been an incongruent bolt-on. We believe that the temporary nature of this project is not coherent with the rest of SFRS's Service Delivery Strategy.



Remit of the Teams

As part of the “Safeplace “ scheme, the employment of personnel to carry out Fire Safety activities in the community, riding cycles, is a potential hazard to both those people directly employed in the activity and indirectly to the rest of the service in terms of the Service’s perceived status.

Despite the Service’s assurances that every effort would be made to distinguish them as Fire Service personnel, we feel that they will be perceived as the Fire Service’s version of Police Community Support Officers(CSO) and therefore may be vulnerable to attack.

We also feel that there may be further consequences of this perception by the public, in that it may wrongly confirm to those that do not understand the role of the Fire Service, that the Fire Service is part of the wider law enforcement body. This may have a longer term affect on the neutrality of the Fire Service and may contribute to a more general rise in attacks on Firefighters.

One example which has come to our attention, is a similar scheme in Devon called Operation “Firewatch.” They have used Firefighters, Police and Police Community Support Officers in joint patrols on cycles. Although Devon and Somerset FRS have tried to emphasis education and prevention messages in their scheme, it was presented in their local press that “the culprits are still wanted.”

This message is not a helpful one and thankfully SFRS has managed to avoid such associations thus far, but it is a risk that we would have preferred SFRS to manage differently.

Despite our reservations about the scheme and its separation from the IRMP process, SFRS will soon be in a position where details of the effectiveness of Project Safe Place will be available, and more detail of the role of the Retained Support Teams will also be available. So perhaps it will be possible to look at both these areas as a pilot and be able to evaluate the next course of action.

Temporary staff

The relatively high turnover of staff in recent years (due to the creation of the fourth watch and expansion of personnel with Telford Central) has caused a great deal of movement of staff, many on a temporary basis. We are aware that the Service is trying hard deal with this issue, and hopefully in the near future the Service can start to implement more stability with staff positions being made permanent.



New CFO

Also during the last twelve months, Chief Fire Officer Taylor has retired and been replaced by the new CFO Raymond.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank CFO Taylor for his commitment to SFRS and also for his commitment to good industrial relations with The Fire Brigades Union.

We would also like to welcome CFO Raymond to his new position. We are confident that the good industrial relations, that have almost become tradition in Shropshire, will continue well into the future. We are also confident that SFRS will continue to provide the best service to the public of Shropshire.

CFS priorities

Prevention work is now well and truly woven into the work activities carried out by Firefighters all over the country. This has had a tremendous effect on reducing the number and severity of fires, both through smoke detector fitting and education.

As stated earlier, SFRS intervention provision must form the ultimate priority in the face of financial constraints. However, CFS activity carried out by Firefighters and support staff is also an important priority to protect the public of Shropshire. The most important priority of CFS activities at the stage we now find ourselves (following the success of previous policies) to secure the long term goal of education and prevention, is “Children and Young People.” This is recognised by the Fire Authority in its document “Supporting Local Area Agreements across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin 2009 – 2011”

“Children and Young People

The young people of today will be the householders and tax payers of tomorrow. They will be the life-force of our economy and the future of our country. Young people are too often the victims of fire, suffering painful and disfiguring burns that affect them for their whole life and impact on them socially and often financially. Young people can also be the cause of many fires within communities - resulting in severe damage to buildings and local economies. We must, therefore, do all we can to influence, educate and safeguard this group, if we are to succeed in our aims and ambitions in the long term”.



IRMP Action Plan Proposals 2010/11 (Year 7)

Retained Development Managers

The Fire Brigades Union in Shropshire has a long and documented support to providing full time support for Firefighters working the Retained Duty System (RDS). In our responses to IRMP 04/05 and repeated in 05/06 we also clearly identify the need to support training and the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) in the RDS system as well as in the wholetime system.

Our view in 04/05 was:

“On Retained Stations, ... the need for supporting staff is greater and IPDS will even more underline this need... . IPDS by its definition of proving competency places greater emphasis to a more accountable training structure. In our opinion this can only be done by providing retained stations with some sort of full time support. If there were full time junior officers and firefighters attached to retained stations, they would be able to pick up the burden of preparing and delivering the required training.”

Once RSOs had become established in the Service we pointed out in our response to IRMP07/08:

“It is however, disappointing for us that the Retained Support Officers (RSOs) were engaged at firefighter level and not crew manager level, as our position paper to the service some years ago proposed. This would have afforded greater flexibility and opportunity for both the service and the individuals. It would also have reflected the level of work that RSOs will be drawn into.”

We are however not into the business of trying to claim credit or score points here. The point is that; The Fire Brigades Union is very supportive of the intent to support RDS with a better management structure and development programmes. Before going into detail of this proposal, it is necessary to firstly re emphasise the huge success of the Retained Review in Shropshire and the continuing implementation of the 27 recommendations it made. The dedication of the RSOs has yielded a very positive effect on the whole service. This has manifested itself in a significant improvement in the areas of training, exercises, appliance availability, recruitment, retention, CFS and general coordination of the Service. This shows the advantage of employing Firefighters in these roles, where the full value of the Firefighter rolemap can be utilised.

It is also time to review the work carried out by the present RSO. We suspect that their role has developed over the years and the level of responsibility carried by the RSOs is probably above that of Firefighter. The Service has benefitted greatly from the enthusiasm and willingness of RSO to do that bit extra.



Comparable Management Structure

The presentation given to staff tried to demonstrate the difference in management support between the Wholetime and RDS service. Although we agree there is a need for greater management support for RDS, the assertion that the only management currently available to RDS is 2 Group Managers, compared to a plethora in the Wholetime service is misleading and not truly representative.

There are Crew Managers, Watch Managers and Station Managers involved in both parts of the Service. The difference is the time allocation to deal with management issues.

Therefore we agree that it is clear that further full time support is needed, but the presentation exaggerates this need.

Job descriptions- The Role of Retained Development Managers

The proposal identifies in the Action Plan under “Benefits to the Community”, that by introducing Retained Development Managers to create a District Development Team, their undertaking will be:

“The teams will support and compliment the introduction and delivery of structured development programs for all new retained duty system entrants and managers to ensure competence in their role. They will also improve support for retained duty system station management teams, further develop local and county exercises and provide specialist training. These teams may also conduct the initial retained duty system recruit training, previously carried out by the training department. This will benefit our wholetime staff through greater capacity being available from the training department. District Development Team members will, where necessary, be used to cover wholetime operational deficiencies”

As with any proposal, the difficulty is how much detail and research can realistically be done before implementation and how much will be left to a pilot scheme, or perhaps just develop the project over time, with regular monitoring.

Therefore it is not without sympathy but, we must assert that there is not enough detail of what the Development Managers remit of work is going to be, nor how the structure of the team will marry up to the rest of the organisation.

The reason we feel that there should be more detail is due to the assertion in the presentations that the post are likely to consist of 4 Watch Managers and 4 Station Managers. This would indicate that the service has a greater idea of what they want to achieve with these post, but is trying to keep flexibility by not providing that detail.

It is with this in mind that the Fire Brigades Union will look forward to being involved in mapping the new Job Descriptions to the relevant Fire Service Rolemaps.



Another concern that the above “Benefits to the Community” statement raises is the contradiction of the purpose of District Development Managers which is outlined under “Proposal” of the Action Plan. The proposal highlights that recruits on the RDS need their competency assured to the same level as Wholetime hence the introduction of these posts. However, under the “Benefits to the Community” it indicates that the Retained Development Managers may conduct the initial recruit training, rather than the dedicated training staff.

We would support the use of Retained Development Managers in other areas of the service, and would encourage that they be used to support the entire service, not just RDS. One example of this, given in the proposal, is developing local and county exercises. However, using them to conduct initial training for RDS would be a mistake as it will, in our view undermine the credibility of the recruit training between the two systems.

If Retained Development Managers are to assist in the initial recruit training, then they must be involved in all initial recruit training Wholetime and RDS. Also, if they are trained to be assessors, then this facility should be available to all recruits and development Firefighters, regardless of duty system. However, this then raises the question of how they fit into the structure of SFRS: Are they District Teams or attached to Training, or Workplace Development?

Whatever the outcome of how they align to the structure of SFRS, it is our strong belief that the District Development Teams should have a much wider remit and should be used to benefit the entire Service.

Assessment and Verification of Development Programmes

The role of the Development Managers shown during the presentation leads us to make the comparison with those that have been undertaken in SFRS in recent years under the Rank to Role process.

The presentation shows that a possible structure would be 4 Watch Managers who would be the Assessors of the development programme and 4 Station Managers who would be the Verifiers. Bearing in mind that this is intended to be an IPDS based system, and not at full NVQ level, this proposal will not integrate into the present structure of Assessors and Verifiers on Wholetime watches and in the Workplace Development Department.

Pyramid management structure

The cost of this proposal is £513,000 which is more than £200,000 than the savings made from the following proposal. The proposal recommends that each of the 4 teams would consist of 2 Firefighters, 1 Watch Manager and 1 Station Manager. There is clearly no progression for the Firefighters within the team as there are no Crew Manager posts. There will be 4 Station Managers having direct responsibility for three people, which does not seem to correspond to other Station Managers in the Service.



The most difficult question therefore must be; where and how will this management structure tie into the rest of the Service?

Clearly there is more work to do on this proposal, which is admitted by the Service, but our view is that SFRS would be better served if the structure of the Development Teams is more pyramid like. The inclusion of Crew Managers and a reduction of, possibly Watch Managers, but certainly Station Managers, will provide a better structure

Future Staff Mobility

Future staff mobility between RDS and Wholetime shift system will be the long term outcome of this proposal. It has long been The Fire Brigades Union's position that a Firefighter is a Firefighter, whatever the duty system that is being worked. This proposal will close the gap between the training and development that is undertaken by those two parts of the Service. SFRS must be applauded for this, and for the commitment that this proposal brings to address that issue.

There will be some complications that will need to be addressed over the coming years to ensure that there is no deferential equality impact that this proposal will bring in the long term. The National Firefighter Selection test and Assessment Development Centres will need to be equally applied to all. Of course the selection process for Wholetime posts will need to remain advertised to the public for all applicants regardless of whether the applicant is already a Firefighter working on the RDS, due to the restriction of locality placed upon RDS recruitment.

Financial

As stated, we believe that there is scope within this proposal to review the level of the roles that the Development Managers have been estimated at. That would mean that the intention of this proposal could be achieved at a lesser cost than the figure stated in the Action Plan. However, at an average increase of 7 pence per week to the average household in Shropshire, we believe that this scheme and what it has the potential to achieve will represent enormous value for money and greatly improve service delivery in every aspect for SFRS.



Reduction in Ridership factor

The Fire Brigades Union has severe reservations regarding the proposed changes to the staffing arrangements of personnel working the Wholetime shift duty system. We doubt that the proposed changes can meet the minimum requirement of staffing availability, a contention which is supported by the empirical staffing data from 2009 (see below and appendix). We also have concerns that these changes will impact on other areas of the Service as well as its impact on family friendly policies.

Background

Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) has been the method of analysing and improving Fire Service delivery provision since 2004. SFRS in producing its annual action plans, has seen changes to intervention fire provision and altered staffing for Aerial Ladder Platforms. The proposal for 2010/11 is to remove 8 Firefighter posts from the shift duty system. This is to partially fund the creation of 8 Retained Development Managers (see above), although the two proposals are presented independently of each other. However, the Development Manager proposal indicates the intention as 4 Watch Managers and 4 Station Managers. This therefore will be a considerable net increase in salary.

The Fire Brigades Union regard staff in excess of the minimum as a better provision, although the Audit Commission's assertion that this is inefficient has become ingrained into management psyche within the entire UKFRS.

Consideration to increase the minimum rider establishment should be given in respect of using 5 personnel to staff the second appliance at Shrewsbury, more staff being available to staff the Boat and relief crews for the Aerial Ladder Platform at protracted incidents.

Therefore it is our belief that SFRS should be looking to increase its establishment and not reduce it.

Ridership factor

The history of the ridership factor in Shropshire, although relevant to this proposal, has been presented to staff in this IRMP in reverse. The purpose of the ridership factor is to calculate the establishment number by multiplying the minimum staffing figure by a justified ridership factor (based on reliably estimated absences). The presentation however, shows the history of the minimum staffing and establishment levels to justify the change to the ridership factor.



Shift system

Each watch (shift) requires 28 staff. To fill each of these positions; each watch has a “ridership factor” to cover for various absences The current ridership factor 1.48 gives an establishment figure of 41 as follows:

$$\text{Establishment} = \text{Minimum staff} \times \text{Ridership Factor} = 28 \times 1.48 = 41$$

By reducing the ridership factor to 1.39 the establishment will then become

$$28 \times 1.39 = 39$$

Incident Command

If we also take into account the reduction of Incident Commanders from IRMP 2005/06 there is a further effect. This reduction has led to cover for Incident Command increasingly being provided for, by the Wholetime shift duty system.

This fact has not been taken into consideration in the IRMP, and we have not included it in our calculations. However it is clear to see that it will have an impact as, if Incident Commanders are included in the establishment, then this proposal would see an establishment of 40, and a minimum staffing of 29. This equates to a ridership factor of under 1.38.

Evidence

To establish whether this new ridership factor would be adequate (as IRMP Guidance does not allow for a preplanned shortfall), staffing figures for one watch in 2009 have been collated and extrapolated for statistical purposes to show a 12 month model (see appendix 1).

These figures show that 789 shifts will be lost in 2009 due to absence other than leave. When leave is added the number of shifts lost is 2060.

The number of person shifts required in a 12 month period is 5096.

The difference between the actual and the minimum in 2009 is 306.

By making adjustments to leave and absence figures at the same rate, the difference under the proposed model would be 143.

Leave

The current leave entitlement of 8 allows a flexibility of 23 shifts in a year. Under the new proposal this would fall to 9.



The difficulty in managing staff numbers can be shown by comparing this proposal to the changes that were made in 2006; where 8 posts were removed to reduce the number of ALPs to one.

The management intention of staffing alternately the ALP at Telford and Shrewsbury to allow for numbers to detach to the training centre for courses has not been successful. This has been for two reasons; mechanical factors of the appliances (servicing and breakdown), but more substantially due to staffing (sickness, courses, modified duties, leave, maternity, paternity, vacancy etc). This is substantiated to some extent by the existence of the third proposal; consolidating the ALP provision to Telford (see below).

It can only be envisaged as impossible to manage availability, courses, leave and other absences to such fine tolerances as 9 shifts in a 12 month period. It is also requiring staff to take leave at times of the year when leave is not traditionally taken or wanted. This will have a negative impact on Firefighters families as well as the Firefighters themselves.

Individuals will find the imposed necessity of taking leave in January or February rather than when their families are on leave, during summer months, unpalatable and this is likely to be a huge demotivational factor for Wholetime staff.

Overtime Principle

After the national dispute in 2002/3, the Fire Brigades Union lifted its long standing overtime ban, to enable FRSs to better able manage staffing deficiencies due to unforeseeable circumstances It has never been intended to cover a pre planned shortfall. Notwithstanding this, the Union principally is against extending the use of overtime as opposed to employing the requisite amount of staff.

Although the current overtime budget remains under spent, this does not necessarily mean that the human capacity to undertake overtime has not been exhausted.

The need to use personnel on overtime to cover deficiencies in staff is prone to considerable fluctuation. On recent occasions it has been necessary to fill up to 6 deficiencies on a single shift at one station. The available personnel to cover the shift under present circumstances would be from an initial pool of 8.

Under this proposed new staffing model, this pool would have been 6. There are certain to be more occasions when such staffing deficiencies require such drastic measures.

This would also mean that the burden of providing cover for staffing deficiencies is shared between less people leaving the Service with the risk of not being able to guarantee 100% availability of all appliances (as promised in the IRMP Action Plan of 2006/07) due to the lack of available people.



Overtime in Practice

In consultation with our members in the Fire Control Room who are administering the structured overtime system and our Wholetime members who are asked to undertake structured overtime, there are consistently difficulties arising with the present provision for overtime. These difficulties include:

- Short notice. This is exasperated at weekends when staff have family commitments. This may be able to be challenged under gender equality legislation as it may be more difficult for mothers and carers to make childcare and dependants arrangements at short notice
- Time to organise the overtime provision can often be a time burden for Fire Control Room staff, particularly at weekends when staff have other commitments and more find it necessary to turn down the opportunity to undertake overtime.
- Administration. Throughout the existence of the structured overtime scheme there have been many disagreements amongst staff in the procedure of booking personnel to undertake overtime and also the protocols of the rota itself.

The difficulties outlined above can only be exacerbated by the reduction of the Wholetime establishment. The risk to the Service here again is that SFRS will not be able to guarantee 100% appliance availability due to the impact on family life to our members.

Time off In Lieu (TOIL)

One benefit that the Service may have overlooked (in terms of efficiency), of the current staffing provision, which will be lost under this proposal (and will also disadvantage staff); is the reduced possibility of taking TOIL. Presently, staff are able to take TOIL provided that minimum staffing levels are not affected. This allows people to take time off when they want it, but also reduces the number of people over the minimum; creating a natural efficiency (in terms of the Audit Commission).

It also saves from the overtime budget as people are using their hours to take time off rather than putting it in for payment. Using the same sample watch, over ten months in 2009, 37 shifts were taken off in TOIL, which will equate to 45 shifts over a twelve month period. A modest estimate would put this financial saving at approximately £14,000 per watch, £56,000 per year.

With the restrictions in staffing that this proposal would bring, the opportunity for staff to take TOIL will be severely curtailed. This can result in staff dissatisfaction, more overtime accrued taken in payment rather than time off in lieu and less flexibility of managing staff numbers.



Sickness Absence

The figures for sickness absence have greatly reduced in recent years, which will be of great benefit to the Service. The combined effect of restrictive leave entitlement, increased expectation of overtime and difficulty in taking TOIL are recognised as factors which will demoralise staff.

In terms of sickness absence there is no doubt that there is a direct correlation between the level of sickness absence and the morale of workers. This is shown in the study carried out in 2006 by CCH HR Management entitled “Survey finds unscheduled Absenteeism Up in US Workplaces. (www.cch.com/news/hrm/a). This study also outlines a new phenomenon; “Presenteeism”, where staff attend work but do not actively participate, due to being disaffected by conditions at work.

SFRS has been praised on many occasions by both internal and external sources (including ourselves) for having a highly motivated and focused staff. We believe that the proposal to remove 8 Firefighters from the Wholetime duty shift system may well jeopardise this motivation and commitment.

Consultation

The consultation questionnaire for this proposal gives three possible options to one question. One of these options (do nothing) is not a realistic response as this would be in direct conflict with the Authority’s statutory duty to implement change and is contrary to the essence of the proposal outlined on page 4 of the Action Plan. The other two options only differ in what use is made of the savings. This is highly restrictive. There is clearly opinion amongst our members that a reduction of 8 personnel to the Wholetime shift system is too many. There is no option to reduce by 4.

The Service however has been clear during staff consultation that it is looking for qualitative comments to be made by staff in response to the proposals rather than leave it just to the tick box options.

We hope that the Service pay more heed to these comments rather than the restrictive options. We believe that there will be a sizeable staff response to this proposal

Staged approach

Under one of the Control Measures of this proposal, the Service is looking to stage the implementation of this proposal over two years. This is to minimise the impact on staff. The FBU believe that this proposal should have been a two staged consultation over two years of IRMP.

In effect, SFRS should not confine itself to a proposal of 8 posts removed without an intermediate proposal or further recourse of consultation during its two year implementation.



District Development Team Impact

As already stated, the Service sees the two proposals as independent of each other in terms of finances, however there is no doubt that in practical terms there may be an interdependent reaction.

The proposal for District Development Teams outlines in its “Benefits to Community Safety” those District Development Team members will, where necessary, be used to cover Wholetime operational deficiencies.

Regardless of whether this is to be used as a last resort following the failure of structured overtime, our view would be that; if this does occur, it would indicate to us that there are not enough Firefighters employed on the Wholetime duty system and therefore the reduction of personnel on the Wholetime duty system will be deemed as failed.



Relocation of Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP)

The importance of maintaining an ALP at all times are shown in the rescue examples given above the importance is also shown in the widely accepted acknowledgement that they are the only means of providing a safe working platform at height. From incidents that the ALP has attended in Shropshire (Kingpin Tyres this year being the main example), when it is required, it is both indispensable and irreplaceable. Another example of the successful use of the ALP is given below from the Worcester News.

Landlady praises reaction of crews

5:10pm Friday 13th February 2009

By Jack Davidson »

A QUICK reaction from firefighters has saved a historic pub from being burnt down, according to its landlady.

Crews used an aerial ladder platform to raise themselves over the roof of the Talbot Inn, in New Street, Ledbury, before putting out the flames in the pub's chimney on Monday.

Maria Ward, who runs the pub with her husband Andy, said: "The fire brigade saved the pub.

"One side could have burnt down but they were here in five minutes. They were absolutely fantastic."

Mrs Ward said she had been lighting the Talbot's log fire at about 11am when a blockage in the chimney caught fire.

"I didn't do it any differently from usual but because we have had the fire on so much this year it must have been clogged up.

"It could have been a lot worse because we have bedrooms directly above it."

She said the pub re-opened on the same night and commended the pub's regulars for being so understanding.

"It has reinforced how wonderful this community is and how supportive they are," said Mrs Ward.



The fire had added significance for Mr Ward as it was 14 years ago to the day that he began running the pub.

“It’s a strange anniversary present,” he joked.



Proposal

This proposal has sparked differences of opinion surrounding the crewing of special appliances during the consultation. The debate has extended to the Incident Response Unit (IRU) and the boat

The Fire Brigades Union in Shropshire fundamentally agree with the proposal to consolidate the ALP to Telford despite the extra cost of upgrading a bay at Telford to house the ALP.

With regard to building work, there is already work necessary to be carried out to the appliance bay at Telford, which would off set this cost. Another consideration would be to upgrade a further bay to house the IRU. The cost of upgrading two bays will not amount to double the cost of upgrading one bay. This would also allow more space to become available for the Shrewsbury rebuilding project.

It is important for SFRS that correct decisions are made to building programmes to avoid embarrassing reports in the local media such as suffered in Essex. The Essex Gazette News reported in April that the new aerial appliances bought by Essex Fire Service would not fit in their appliance bays.

The appliance bays which currently house the ALP and IRU at Shrewsbury are already a tight fit. Therefore, it would make sense to upgrade the appliance bays at Telford and house them there.

Staffing

This proposal then, although seemingly straightforward at first appearance, will create difficulties in managing the people that may be affected by this move and also balancing the specialist skills needed to staff various appliances. However, we believe it gives SFRS an opportunity to rationalise the skill levels and secure their future provision.

We do however foresee difficulties within the proposal “which would require the transfer of 4 staff from Shrewsbury.” Shrewsbury therefore, would be suffering a further detrimental factor, following from the reduction of the establishment in the previous proposal.

History

This proposal is a further development of the previous IRMP proposal in 2006/07 when SFRS reduced the number of personnel on Wholetime watches by 8 in order to permanently crew one ALP. The proposal this year effectively reverts part of the decision in 06/07 to proceed with option 3, to option 2 of that year which was to use one and store the other as a spare.

The decision in 06/07 to go with option 3, to alternate the crewing of the Aerial, between Shrewsbury and Telford, was based on maintaining competencies, and the difference between the appliances. This has been rectified by the sum of £500 to alter the controls of one vehicle so that they can be both operated in the same manner.

Although there has been a bit of a journey to get to this point, the experience has illustrated some difficulties which need to be borne in mind, these are set out below.

Course staffing.

Since the introduction of alternating ALP staffing model, as already explained under the Ridership Factor proposal, the intention to manage staffing by distributing courses accordingly, to accommodate this model has been unsuccessful. This would indicate that a more consistent and straightforward model for staffing special appliances is needed.

Protracted incidents

As with incidents in previous years (such as Acoustafoam), the Kingpin Tyres incident at Wem this year shows that the provision of a single ALP at times falls below the minimum that is needed to deal with protracted incidents.

It is very much down to the flexibility of staff, that when these incidents occur, SFRS is able to manage with what we have.



Reliefs

However, this ability to manage is with the present staffing levels, which are threatened by the previous proposal to reduce the establishment.

Moreover, it is experiences such as those at Kingpin Tyres, that indicates that not only does SFRS need the current staffing provision; further work needs to be done to explore the contingency arrangements at protracted incidents. This could only lead to the conclusion that SFRS needs to employ more Firefighters on the Wholetime Duty shift system, and not less.

Skills and availability levels on each watch

The opportunity of consolidating the ALP to Telford will assist the skills and staffing of the boat at Shrewsbury. The configuration of special appliances that need to be attached to the Wholetime service, due to the time needed to maintain competency, will be spread more evenly.

Shrewsbury specialising in the boat, Wellington with the Rescue Tender and Telford with the ALP will remove much of the complications of staffing appliances with people that possess the requisite skills.

As with the Rescue Tender at Wellington, it will be necessary to train as many staff as possible in the use of the special appliances at their respective station. This will remove any complications of staff availability and leave entitlement and could also assist where special appliances are detained at protracted incidents.



Consultation and questionnaire

Although we have pointed out a weakness in the restrictive nature of the proposals under the ridership factor, we recognise that SFRS continues to genuinely interact with staff and stakeholders during its IRMP consultation programme.

The use of tick box questions is an unavoidable necessity to ensure a reasonable response rate. The need for brevity, again to ensure a reasonable response rate is also an unavoidable necessity.

However, we do appreciate that SFRS places much emphasis during the presentations to encourage people to substantiate their views by filling in the comments section of the questionnaire. We also appreciate that SFRS places more importance to these qualitative responses rather than to the quantitative tick box answers.

This is in direct contrast to another FRS in the region, facing severe cuts to frontline services, where their consultation document has created a political storm amongst MPs and councillors, for being wholly inadequate and detrimentally misleading.

Conclusions

We have taken the opportunity, as in previous documents, to outline the context of IRMP in both the national and local situations. These are important considerations when making decisions about the future of SFRS and this context is undoubtedly of greater significance this year than in any other since IRMP came into existence.

We have outlined above many issues that we have identified with the Proposed Action Plans for 2010/11 and we will, as always, continue to be involved in these changes, and their implementation for the benefit of our members.

We also praised SFRS last year for having a cautionary and sensible approach to IRMP, a statement which continues to be true especially in comparison to many other FRSs.

The proposals this year are more challenging, and as we have shown above, there is much merit to most of them. There are clearly differences of opinion on certain aspects in each of the proposals, which hopefully we can find a sensible solution to.

We obviously cannot condone in any way the removal of 8 Firefighter posts from the Wholetime shift duty system and look forward to constructive dialogue with both the Service and the Fire Authority, during the review of the consultation period, before the Action Plan is finalised in the coming months.



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Absence figures for a Wholetime watch in 2009*

Totals	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Total
Sick Leave	14	27	14	20	26	23	44	17	29	29	233
Modified Duties	30	10	15	0	15	6	18	10	12	12	128
Courses	7	12	21	26	12	6	10	17	33	18	162
Seconded	18	7	19	3	10	8	3	8	20	7	103
Special Leave	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	6
Paternity	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	8	0	16
Totals	70	56	69	57	64	43	79	52	102	65	657

*Figures do not include leave

