

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

# RETAINED REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS AND KEY WORKER LIVING PROGRAMME

## 1 Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the progress of the Retained Review Implementation Project and opportunities arising from the Key Worker Living Programme

## 2 Recommendations

### Retained Review Implementation Project

Members are requested to:

- a) Note the progress of the Retained Review Implementation Project

### Key Worker Living Programme

It is recommended that:

- a) Officers are tasked with lobbying local Members of Parliament and writing to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to ask for immediate action; and
- b) Members lobby their constituent authorities to ensure that retained firefighters are able to access affordable housing close to fire stations by getting retained firefighters recognised as key workers in Shropshire.

## 3 Background (Retained Review Implementation Project)

At its meeting on 14 December 2005 the Fire Authority resolved to:

- Note the recommendations of the Best Value Review into the Retained Duty System within Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- Provide feedback to the Retained Review Team for inclusion in the final Best Value Review Report; and
- Approve investment in the Retained Service, as detailed within the draft Best Value Review and summarised within the report.



At the subsequent meeting on 8 February 2006 the Fire Authority agreed to:

- Sanction the continuation of the Retained Review Team;
- Agree a change of reference for the Retained Review Team from Review to Implementation of Recommendations; and
- Agree that the Retained Review Team have the power to co-opt personnel onto the Team as and when required.

## 4 Progress

The Appendix to this report contains a Progress Report Matrix, which gives an overall picture of the progress of the implementation process. Implementation of those recommendations, which were given a high priority rating by retained personnel, can be summarised as follows:

### Training

#### **Retained Review Team Recommendation 23 Additional Training**

That an additional three hours of training be allotted to each retained station per four week period to be managed at a local level to suit the requirements and wishes of each station

This has been fully implemented as of 1 April 2006.

### Working Time/Recruitment

#### **Retained Review Team Recommendation 2 XL Cab Appliances**

That XL (Extra Large) Cab Appliances are introduced into the Brigade:

- i) On a phased basis in conjunction with the vehicle replacement programme and that the opportunity is taken to utilise three existing appliances that are suitable for conversion to XL Cab status; and
- ii) That analysis of all available data is used to determine the positioning of these appliances for the maximum benefit of the community.

The second priority for our Retained staff was working time. At the moment personnel find it difficult to plan time off for family activities due to the requirement to maintain emergency cover in their station area; this is a particular problem for those stations, which are understaffed at present.

The introduction of Extra Large Cab Appliances (carry 8 firefighters as opposed to 6) effectively raises the establishment levels from 11 to 14 on single appliance stations. The additional 3 personnel will allow some scope for firefighters to arrange time off.



The following table shows the 2006 XL Cab Placement Programme:

Station	Placement Programme		Current Establishment
Clun	XL Cab 2005	☺	14
Albrighton	XL Cab 22 February 2006	☺	11
Prees	XL Cab 4 April 2006	☺	12
Ellesmere	XL Cab due end of April 2006	☺	13
Cleobury Mortimer	XL Cab due last quarter of 2006	☺	8
Much Wenlock	XL Cab due last quarter of 2006	☺	8

Recruitment is ongoing within the Fire Authority's area, but is currently being focussed on those stations where staffing is an issue or where XL Cab Appliances have been allocated.

Results from recent Retained Recruit Tests have been particularly pleasing, with people from the following station areas being successful:

- 2 x Much Wenlock
- 1 x Craven Arms
- 2 x Cleobury Mortimer
- 1 x Bishops Castle
- 1 x Wem
- 2 x Shrewsbury
- 1 x Minsterley
- 4 x Market Drayton

The next Retained Recruits' Course, which will begin on 17 May 2006, should be full.

## Help and Support

### **Retained Review Team Recommendation 18 Cleaning, Maintenance and Administration**

That an allocation of hours is made available to the Officer in Charge of each Retained Station to permit the cleaning and maintenance of equipment and appliances and administration duties. The mechanism for the allocation of hours should consider:

- i) Different allocations dependent on the type of station, i.e. single appliance, two appliances, specials; and
- ii) The means by which the hours used will be monitored.

This has been fully implemented as of 1 April 2006. Multiple appliance stations now receive 15 hours per month allocated to cleaning, maintenance and administration duties. Single appliance stations will receive 12 hours.

The Finance Department will monitor usage. District Officers and District Support Officers will monitor station and equipment maintenance and cleanliness and the upkeep of station administration.



**Retained Review Team Recommendation 19 Retained Project Manager**

That the position of Retained Project Manager is created within Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service and that their responsibilities include:

- i) The co-ordination, management and assessment of projects arising from this review; and
- ii) The continual monitoring and assessment of factors affecting retained staff.

The position of Retained Project Manager has been created as of 1 April 2006.

**Retained Review Team Recommendation 17 Retained Support Officers**

That the position of Retained Support Officer (8) be created within the Brigade and that their responsibilities include the provision of support for retained personnel and the organisation in general by:

- i) Providing operational support by organising recruitment campaigns, and liaising with employers and families;
- ii) Co-ordinating district community fire safety campaigns, training staff and dealing with the associated administration;
- iii) Assisting with the organisation of district training exercises, including assessments of competence and the associated administration;
- iv) Providing operational cover, when required;
- v) Sitting on community safety partnerships; and
- vi) Liaison with district, parish and town councils.

Job Descriptions for these positions are currently with the Representative Bodies. The supporting infrastructure (office equipment etc) is being put in place and the vehicles have been ordered.

Dependant upon the recruitment process these positions should be filled by 1 July 2006.

**Community Fire Safety**

**Retained Review Team Recommendation 26 Community Fire Safety**

That the current roll-out of Community Fire Safety work be continued across the Brigade and that all Retained Duty System personnel have the opportunity to become involved within their communities.

All of Shropshire's Retained Duty System personnel are now actively involved in carrying out Community Fire Safety work. Up to the end of March 2006 over 10,000 homes have been visited and over 3,000 smoke alarms have been fitted.



## 5 Key Worker Living Programme and Retained Firefighters

Rural towns and villages across Shropshire are fast becoming ghettos for either the very rich or the very poor. Those on average incomes are excluded, including hundreds of public sector workers vital to the wellbeing of the area. The situation in Shropshire is just an example of a growing crisis in a number of property hotspots across the country. The cause of the problem is simple: in a country obsessed with property ownership, house prices have been increasing sharply for decades, while earnings - particularly in the public sector - have risen modestly at best.

At the same time, the number of homes set aside for social housing is decreasing. Although around 25,000 new homes for rent are being built by housing associations each year, about 50,000 council homes are lost each year to the right to buy policy. This means that the dwindling supply of affordable housing has become increasingly rationed for the neediest. For example more than 70% of new social housing tenants claim housing benefit.

Key Workers earn too much to qualify for social housing, but most earn too little to afford to buy a home by themselves in an increasing number of property hotspots nationwide. Someone on an annual salary of £20,000 could obtain a mortgage of £80,000 at a push but the average house price is now well over £160,000 and climbing. In an increasing number of areas across the County, average house prices are more than £200,000. Key workers are, therefore, faced with a number of undesirable options:

- Rent privately, if there are properties available;
- Share housing;
- Commute long distances to work; or
- Choose a more lucrative profession.

### Impact on the Fire and Rescue Service

For one set of Key Workers – retained firefighters – many of these options are not available. Increasingly, stations are closing for many hours at a time due to reducing numbers of staff available to turn out for emergencies. The Retained Review is dealing with many of the problems causing this but the issue of housing affordability is one that until now, we could do nothing about.

In his budget speech the Chancellor said:

*'Britain is pioneering shared equity to bring homeownership within the reach of first time buyers. The Deputy Prime Minister is today announcing the allocation of £970 million for shared equity to help 35,000 new homeowners get their first step on the ladder of home owning in our country.'*

The Key Worker Living Programme, a £690m Government scheme, which aims to help people working in front line roles for key public services, offers a lifeline for our retained service in that it offers different types of help:

- Equity (Homebuy) loans of up to £50,000;
- Shared ownership of new properties; and
- Intermediate Renting, where the rent is set at a level between that charged by social and private landlords.



Unfortunately, the list of Key Workers, who can claim such shared equity, does not always include retained duty firefighters. Key Workers who can take advantage of this scheme are:

- Nurses and other National Health Service clinical staff;
- Teachers in schools and further education and sixth form colleges;
- Police officers and some civilian staff in some police forces;
- Prison and probation staff; and
- Social workers, educational psychologists and occupational therapists employed by local councils.

Retained firefighters only appear on the list for Hertfordshire!

Members are already aware of the increasing difficulty in recruiting these community spirited volunteers, who make themselves available from home and work to provide an essential service to their communities. Indeed, it could be argued that of the list above, they are the only Key Workers who MUST live in close proximity to their work.

If we cannot secure Government support, both local and national, for including retained firefighters on the list of Key Workers in Shropshire, the options would be to make very difficult decisions, for example:

- Buying houses close to retained stations to rent to our staff – this would need to be considered by the Fire Authority’s legal advisors to ensure that it were *intra vires* (i.e. within the powers of the Fire Authority);
- Opening wholtime stations in the most expensive areas; or
- Closing stations and significantly reducing our service in rural areas.

### **Action**

Members are asked to support actions to lobby local and national government to support our desire to:

Urge Ministers to include retained duty firefighters on lists of identified Key Workers, thus enabling them to continue to provide a service to their local communities.

The Chief Fire Officer has already written to all local Chief Executives asking for their support. It is recommended that officers are tasked with lobbying local Members of Parliament and writing to the ODPM to ask for immediate action in getting retained firefighters recognised as key workers in Shropshire.

## **6 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly out of this report although the long term financial implications of not securing affordable housing for retained firefighters in many of our rural towns and villages may mean the provision of alternative arrangements, such as wholtime crews providing cover, which would be substantial.

## **7 Equality and Diversity Implications**

There are no direct implications arising from this report, although the way the scheme would operate may raise issues with access to limited housing.



## 8 Appendix

Progress Report Matrix

## 9 Background Papers

### RETAINED REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION

#### Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System, A Review of the Recruitment and Retention Challenges (February 2005)

Fire and Rescue Service Circular 7 – 2005 Review of the Retained Duty System (February 2005)

#### Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

9 February 2005, Report 17 – Retained Service

26 April 2005, Report 23 – Retained Review

20 July 2005, Report 18 – Retained Review

19 October 2005, Report 14 – Retained Review

14 December 2005, Report 9 – Retained Review

### KEY WORKER LIVING PROGRAMME AND RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS

The following web sites offer further information for Members

DirectGov web site information on Key Worker Living Programme

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/HomeAndCommunity/BuyingAndSellingYourHome/HomeBuyingSchemes/BuyingSchemesArticles/fs/en?CONTENT\\_ID=4001345&chk=RM9Qsx](http://www.direct.gov.uk/HomeAndCommunity/BuyingAndSellingYourHome/HomeBuyingSchemes/BuyingSchemesArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4001345&chk=RM9Qsx)

ODPM web site on Key Worker schemes

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1151221>

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk); the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balance Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Equality and Diversity	*	Retained	
Efficiency Savings		Risk and Insurance	
Environmental		Staff	
Financial	*	Strategic Planning	
Fire Control/Fire Link		West Midlands Regional Management Board	

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Phil Clarke, Retained Project Manager, on 01743 260232.



**RETAINED REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS PROGRESS REPORT MATRIX**

No	Recommendation Heading	Priority	Comments	Progress
1	Terminology		Implemented	
2	XL Cabs		In progress, Albrighton on the run, PR, & EL next.	
3	Employers recruitment packs		Work ongoing, temp post in HR to facilitate completion.	
4	Employers support system		Work ongoing, temp post in HR to facilitate completion.	
5	Links with business organisations		RSO's to develop and support. Work ongoing at present via District Officers	
6	Liaison with Councils		RSO's to develop and support. Work ongoing at present via District Officers	
7	Partners information in recruitment packs		Work ongoing, temp post in HR to facilitate completion.	
8	National TV campaign		No action at present. Copy of Report sent to ODPM.	
9	Using current assets (i & ii) Using current assets (iii)		Permission obtained for external notice boards at stations. Designs available for RSO vehicles.	
10	Targeting female applicants		Temporary post to be advertised in Human Resources to facilitate.	
11	Formalise recruitment procedure		Temporary post to be advertised in Human Resources to facilitate.	
12	Recruitment Tests		New intakes will be required to undertake National Selection Tests.	
13	Exit interviews		District Officers and OIC's aware, database in operation in HR.	
14	Policy Group mechanism		New District Meeting structure to be implemented	
15	Policy Group /CFA Reports		Implemented from April 1 <sup>st</sup>	
16	Communications procedure		Temporary post to be advertised in Human Resources to facilitate.	
17	Retained Support Officers		Job Description out for consultation. Target is July 1 <sup>st</sup>	
18	Cleaning/Maintenance and Admin		Implemented from April 1 <sup>st</sup> .	
19	Retained Project Manager		In position.	
20	Pay		No action at present.	
21	Employers information, call stats etc (i & ii) Acknowledging employers (iii)		Information produced for Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock, Craven Arms, Ellesmere and Shrewsbury other Stations ongoing.	
22	Partners information, call stats etc		Information produced for Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock, Craven Arms, Ellesmere and Shrewsbury other Stations ongoing.	
23	Additional hours training		Implemented from April 1 <sup>st</sup>	
24	Associate Trainers		Being actioned by Training and Development staff.	
25	Training by Wholetime Watches		Being actioned by Training and Development staff.	
26	Community Fire Safety		Implemented.	
27	Management Procedures		New Management Information System at tendering stage.	
	Priority		Progress	
	Gold Target - Implementation Target 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2006		Implemented	
	Silver Target - Implementation Target 1 <sup>st</sup> Jan 2007		Work has commenced	
	Bronze Target - Implementation Target 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2007		No action at present	