

Report of Area Commander, Head of Operations

Review of Crewing Levels

Purpose of report

1. To inform Members of the outcome of a review of crewing levels against the £0.8m allocated to temporarily maintain a crew of 5 on wholetime based fire engines.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the following be noted:

- i. the temporary period of enhanced standard crewing levels of 5 on all first fire engines whenever possible has now come to an end;*
- ii. the £0.8m provided for the 2 year period to support this initiative is now exhausted;*
- iii. work is underway to provide options for increased future resilience at no extra cost.*

Introduction and Background

2. At the Fire Authority meeting on 1 October 2014 Members were informed that:

“Having four firefighters on a fire engine is considered safe: it occurred on 1,303 occasions in 2013-14 (15% of all mobilisations), and approximately 900 of these occasions were on the first fire engine. The safety of firefighters is very much dependent on their equipment (including Personal Protective Equipment), their training and procedures and, very importantly, the command and control exercised by their leaders at an incident. Having four on a fire engine may, on occasions, mean it takes slightly longer to carry out a task, or series of tasks, but it does not make tasks any less safe than having five on a fire engine. The Service would still do all it can to achieve five firefighters on fire engines but should any of the five options be selected (subject to paragraph 17 below), standard crewing would be considered to be four”.

3. At the same meeting, the Authority agreed that:

“the Service aims to have five firefighters on all first fire engines whenever possible but agrees that standard crewing for all fire engines be four firefighters”.

4. It was also agreed that:

“Up to £0.8m of reserves in total (£0.3m general reserves and £0.5m from the budget reduction earmarked reserve) be used to maintain five firefighters on all wholetime

based first fire engines (except those at Hereford and Worcester) on as many occasions as possible for an initial period of two years (2015/16 and 2016/17) and that the position be reviewed thereafter."

5. The changes to fire cover arrangements were to be implemented *"in a timescale and manner at the discretion of the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Authority"*.

6. In February 2015, it was also reported to the Authority that:

"Following implementation of the CRMP staff reductions there will be a surplus of uniformed staff in post above that approved for the Wholetime establishment.

The Authority had already approved the use of £0.800m of reserves (including £0.300m from general balances) to provide a higher number of firefighters on duty as often as possible for a two year period, which absorbs some of the excess cost."

7. As a result of these decisions the new temporary fire cover arrangements were successfully put in place at the earliest opportunity, April 2015, and have culminated in a review at the conclusion of the identified two year period in order to help understand how effective these measures have been and to inform the development of appropriate future crewing arrangements.

Review

8. The review of the temporary crewing arrangements was carried out to establish the following:
 - How many times during the initial period were the wholetime appliances at Kidderminster, Redditch, Malvern, Droitwich and Bromsgrove crewed with 5 personnel and how this was achieved.
 - To seek confirmation that the use of £0.8m of reserve funding has been exhausted.
 - To seek confirmation that the revised standard crewing level of four firefighters on all fire engines has been successfully implemented.

Findings

9. Between April 2015 and January 2017, the appliances at Kidderminster, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich were crewed with 5 on 77% of occasions.
10. This was as a result of a combination of methods including use of the resilience register, funding of excess staff above the establishment of 232 and flexible use of other Service resources.

11. The review has found that the amount of funding originally made available from reserves is likely to have been spent by the end of the 2 year period at 31 March 2017. This has been through use of the Resilience Register arrangements and to support the costs of excess staff available to provide the additional crewing.
12. The revised standard crewing level of four firefighters on all fire engines has been successfully implemented. Between April 2015 and January 2017 the wholetime fire appliances at Kidderminster, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich have been crewed with 4 on 23% occasions with operational safety and effectiveness maintained at all times. Therefore, whilst riding with 5 firefighters is popular with staff, as it will always provide Incident Commanders with a welcome additional resource at any incident, there is no operational imperative to continue to support this enhanced level of resource provision under existing crewing arrangements; to continue with such an over-provision at this time would incur an additional cost of approximately £400k pa.
13. It should be noted however that during this period, due to the expectations of the Home Office and the wider Fire Reform Agenda, as well as changes to the Service's Medium Term Financial Plan, which identifies a need to reduce spending by up to £1.6m by 2019/20, the Service has been proactively exploring new and more innovative ways of crewing its frontline resources. This work has progressed well and appears to provide potential opportunities to permanently enhance crewing levels above the level of 4 whilst reducing costs and maintaining the same service to the public. Successful implementation of such arrangements will however be dependant upon the flexibility and willingness of staff to change their existing working arrangements. This work has progressed to a point where discussions with staff and Representative Bodies can now take place and any significant developments in this area will be reported to the Authority in the appropriate manner.

Conclusions

14. The Service has successfully implemented a temporary period of enhanced standard crewing levels as directed by the Authority in October 2014. However this temporary arrangement has now come to an end and the Service is now able to confidently revert to the previously agreed crewing level of 4 on all wholetime appliances.
15. However, a review of crewing systems is underway with the objective of increasing resilience across the Service and providing crewing models that can provide for a crew of 5 on the first wholetime appliance at Kidderminster, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich on as many occasions as possible at no additional cost to the Service and with no change to service provision.

Corporate Considerations

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| Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues) | No additional resource requirements |
| Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications) | Link to Medium Term Financial Plan |
| Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores) | Maintaining the agreed crewing level does not add additional risk |
| Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter) | Conducted during CRMP |
| Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?) | CRMP |

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