

19 July 2010

Retained Duty System

Summary

This report gives members an overview of the key issues facing the Retained Duty System and sets out a proposal for a focussed LG Group project.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Agree the proposal
- Agree Cllr Kay Hammond to sponsor the project

Action

As determined by Members.

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Retained Duty System

Background

1. At the May 2010 meeting Cllr Kay Hammond suggested the Committee undertake a formal piece of work on the challenges facing the retained duty system (RDS). Members agreed that a proposal be brought to the next meeting.
2. The challenges are not new. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published a review into the retained duty system in 2005 entitled, *The Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System - A Review of the Recruitment and Retention Challenges*. The review made 51 recommendations (attached at **Appendix 1**) and identified several key reasons for recruitment and retention issues for RDS firefighters. The priorities for the service were identified as terminology, recognition, modernisation, integration, recruitment and retention practices and making change happen. The review stated that a “retained duty system firefighter has a different pattern of duty, not a different job”.
3. RDS staff are responsible for operating 60 per cent of all fire appliances. In England at any one time there are more RDS firefighters providing emergency cover than their whole-time colleagues. RDS firefighters are not limited only to rural fire and rescue services, in fact all but two of the 46 English Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) employ RDS staff. There are currently over 11,000 RDS firefighters in England. This figure has remained largely constant over the years since the Government review identified recruitment as an issue, suggesting that interventions to date have not been particularly successful. Staff turnover in local government generally is around 11% which is consistent with the figures below.

Year	Number of RDS firefighters in the English fire and rescue service	Year	Number of RDS firefighters leaving Fire and rescue service
2004	10,853		
2005	11,037	2004/2005	1,112
2006	11,321	2005/2006	1,042
2007	11,860	2006/2007	1,155
2008	11,740	2007/2008	1,130
2009	11,867	2008/2009	1,069
	Percentage change 2004 – 2009 = +9.3		

Table 1: from CLG's *Fire and Rescue Service: Operational Statistics Bulletin for England 2008/2009*

Current work relating to the RDS

4. Since the publication of the review in 2005, work to take forward the recommendations has mainly been carried out by CLG and CFOA. CLG's work programme has focussed on producing materials for use by FRAs such as an employers' toolkit, a radio ad, a recognition scheme and carrying out research. A CFOA working group is looking at a wide range of issues including recruitment, retention, development, training, pay, pensions etc and will be holding a two day conference from 2-4 September at the West Midlands Fire Service Training Centre. These are complex issues with implications for the service as a whole and it is important that members are kept up to speed with developments.
5. There have also been developments since the Committee discussed this issue. The coalition Government is committed to devolution to the local level and the new Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, has announced a strategic review of the fire sector, government's role in it and the future of the service. Although the exact terms of reference of the review are not yet known, we understand it will include the RDS. The Minister has also indicated less government involvement in national standards, priority setting, targets and workforce issues.

What Fire and Rescue Authorities have told us

6. Following the May Committee and discussions with Cllr Hammond, officers wrote out to FRAs asking for copies of any research, scrutiny or other projects relating to the RDS in the last three years. Replies were received from 14 FRAs on their work, although the experiences of each FRA were different, there are some common problems identified which reflect the findings of the 2005 review.
7. Recruitment was identified as a key issue. FRAs reported that the incentives for employers to allow their employees to become a part of the RDS were not being made clear and there was a need for better communication with employers as well as employees about these benefits. Catchment areas and the introduction of the National Firefighter Selection test (NFS) have also had an impact on the recruitment of RDS staff.
8. Retention of RDS staff was a difficulty for many FRAs. A lack of recognition for the work of the RDS, both internally and externally, remains a contributory reason for many FRAs. This had led to a feeling of dissatisfaction amongst some RDS firefighters. Many also reported a feeling amongst RDS staff of being "second-class citizens" in comparison to wholetime fire-fighters. Legal obligations, such as the Working Time Directive and Drivers Hours Regulations, had made a significant difference to the availability of staff.

9. Many felt that RDS staff development and the amount of time spent in practical training needed be improved. There also needed to be clearer opportunities for advancement and guidelines on performance management.
10. The pay and conditions of RDS staff were also an issue, but one that is covered by national 'Grey Book' Conditions. The question of whether or not to opt out of the Grey Book and introduce a salary scheme was considered by most of the FRAs, with different solutions arrived at. The current working patterns employed by FRAs had led to many RDS firefighters saying they needed a better work-life balance. This lack of flexibility was also identified when RDS staff change their primary employment.

Project proposal

11. The RDS is essential to maintaining fire cover for nearly all FRAs and an area where the FSMC could make a difference. If the overall project objective is to support FRAs to meet the challenges of maintaining the RDS in ways appropriate to their area, then given the Minister's announcement of the strategic review it is suggested that we adopt a two stage approach to the work:
 - Stage 1 – prepare submission to the first stage of strategic review by: looking at those FRAs that have made the greatest progress in developing the RDS in order to gather case studies of good practice; identifying obstacles (e.g. legislation, national standards) to effective working of the system; promoting use of the materials CLG has produced. This would be completed by the end of Autumn 2010.
 - Stage 2 – a more in depth piece of work on the strategic issues around the long term sustainability of the RDS and the implications for FRAs. This would be a published document, to include some of the materials developed at stage 1, presenting a thorough assessment of the RDS and setting out proposals to be used as the basis of a lobbying strategy. This would be published at the Fire Conference in March 2011 but submitted at the appropriate time to the Committee.
12. In terms of project governance, it is proposed that Cllr Hammond sponsor and lead the work reporting to the FSMC and Fire Forum. A virtual sounding board could be set up if other members would like to be involved or it was felt necessary to get wider views at an early stage. We would also engage with CLG and CFOA to exchange ideas and minimise duplication.

Financial Implications

13. None identified

Implications for Wales

14. Welsh FRAs also use the RDS and project materials will be shared with the WLGA.

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