



INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN
2004/2005 Action Plan Item 10.6

Review of Mixed Crewing arrangements

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Project 10.6 : REVIEW OF MIXED CREWING ARRANGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

As part of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan, this project aims to consider existing arrangements within Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service for mixed crewing with a view to considering a revised approach to assist in maximising flexibility and optimising staff deployment.

Mixed crewing arrangements are those which facilitate wholetime and retained firefighters forming part of the same crews for Fire and Rescue Service emergency appliances. Traditionally, within the Fire and Rescue Service, such arrangements have not generally existed, with the exception of certain locally negotiated arrangements on some fire stations which have both wholetime and retained personnel.

There are occasions, particularly during daytime periods from Monday to Friday, when it is possible for retained fire appliances to be unavailable due to staffing deficiencies at the same time as there are more than sufficient wholetime personnel to maintain crewing levels on wholetime appliances. Annex 1 gives an overview of retained appliance non-availability in 2003/4.

FIREFIGHTER COMPETENCE

In the past, it could be argued that wholetime and retained firefighters had different training arrangements and skill sets, and therefore justified the maintenance of separate wholetime and retained crewing arrangements. However, as a result of changes in training and development, such as the creation of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's Maintenance of Skills Training (MOST) and the introduction of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), systems based on nationally recognised role maps and competences, the differential in core skill training requirements for wholetime and retained personnel has been removed.

Consequently, a competent firefighter is such, irrespective of whether that firefighter is wholetime or retained and therefore there should be no reason or barrier why any firefighter cannot fulfil that role at any fire station or on fire appliance, providing that he/she has had relevant training and has demonstrated an appropriate level of competence.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING MIXED CREWING

It is anticipated that the implementation of mixed crewing arrangements will bring the following benefits:

- Increased integration between personnel working the wholetime shift system and those working the retained duty system
- Improved availability of retained appliances, particularly during identified problem periods for staffing
- Enhanced flexibility in relation to staff deployment, thereby providing opportunities for improving service delivery

OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING MIXED CREWING ARRANGEMENTS IN LANCASHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Wholetime firefighters riding retained fire appliances

1. Detachments to retained Fire Stations

There are occasions throughout the year (mainly daytime weekdays) when retained fire engines are unavailable due to shortages in crew numbers, either due to recruitment difficulties or due to retained individuals' domestic or professional circumstances. It is possible to address some of those shortages by detaching surplus wholetime personnel to affected retained stations, thereby ensuring greater availability of retained appliances.

Any additional cost implications are likely to be limited to those already associated with detached duties and, in addition, those firefighters could then be utilised for community fire safety tasks or for some routine maintenance duties whilst outposted to retained stations thereby decreasing overall running costs for that station.

It would be necessary to ensure that adequate health and safety measures were in place but those are not considered to be significant obstacles to overcome.

2. Wholetime firefighters riding retained appliances at the same station

There are occasions when there are more wholetime firefighters on duty than there are riding positions on fire appliances, particularly at times outside of annual leave periods. Usually, those firefighters can be utilised to undertake activities such as those relating to Community Fire Safety. However, during some periods such as after 9pm on night shifts, opportunities for that type of work may not exist and the individual may not have a commitment to provide an emergency response.

On those occasions, it is entirely possible that those firefighters take riding positions on retained appliances. Whilst it may prevent all available retained firefighters taking up a riding position on a fire appliance, it will ensure a quicker response to an emergency incident.

Retained firefighters riding wholetime fire appliances

1. Pumping appliances

Due to the introduction of IPDS, there is no reason why retained firefighters cannot ride wholetime fire appliances. However, due to the fact that wholetime firefighters are immediately available for any turnout, this arrangement is unlikely to result in quicker response times. Nonetheless, should acute or other foreseeable wholetime firefighter staffing shortages arise, there is no reason why retained firefighters could not attend for part or full shifts to maintain crewing levels.

2. Special appliances

Currently Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service has a number of specialist vehicles, such as Aerial Ladder Platforms, Chemical Incident Unit, etc. Such specialist appliances are not

always needed as immediate response vehicles to emergency incidents and, as such, could be crewed on a retained or a mixed crewed basis. Whilst IPDS would render this an option, however, consideration would have to be given to the practicalities of maintaining competencies for specialist appliances for retained personnel, particularly given the limited amount of training time currently available for personnel working the retained duty system.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the Integrated Personnel Development System, differences no longer exist with regard to maintaining core skill operational competence for personnel working either the wholetime shift system or the retained duty system. Consequently, the concept of mixed crewing should be seen as a valid management tool for improving service delivery.

To that end, the following recommendations are made:

1. That mixed crewing be endorsed as an accepted operating policy for Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.
2. That an appropriate system of work for wholetime personnel to ride retained appliances, either at the same station or at a station on detached duties be drawn up and implemented
3. That the proposal for retained firefighters to ride wholetime appliances to maintain crewing levels or to provide specialist appliance availability be investigated further.