

## Community Safety Scrutiny Committee

### Scrutiny Review of Recruitment and Retention of Retained Fire Fighters



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# **Community Safety Scrutiny Committee**

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2008**

## **Recruitment and Retention of Retained Fire Fighters**

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1 The Review set out:

- To examine the current system and processes for recruiting retained fire fighters and to recommend ways in which these could be enhanced to attract and then maintain a higher establishment.
- To incorporate recommendations on how to improve workforce diversity and (incidentally) whole time fire fighter recruitment. (This aspect is relatively “light touch”).
- To monitor the implementation of the recommendations and outcomes of the in-depth (internal) authority review on Fire Cover (which was largely focused on recruitment and retention) as compared to the position the previous year. (Again, this is a light touch exercise).

Elsewhere, the introduction to this report and the background sections set the context for this work. As explained elsewhere, because of perceptions that there are difficulties in recruiting and then retaining retained firefighters, because figures indicated that at the start of the Review the Fire & Rescue Service was about 30 under the complement of retained firefighters and there was a 16-17 % turnover, it was considered that a thorough investigation needed to take place. At national level and in other services over recent years, similar investigations have been taking place and the Review's evidence indicated that the situation in Oxfordshire was better than in most (similar) authorities and that the Service had taken the initiative in developing/being proactive etc in new recruitment and retention strategies. In fact, several authorities looked to Oxfordshire as an example of good practice and as the Review progressed, we appreciated that the recruitment/turnover problems were reducing, primarily due to the vigour and lead taken by good example in Oxfordshire, of the Retained recruitment Officer. The recommendations to the report duly reflect the Review's acknowledgement of this good work.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That for Oxfordshire to remain at the forefront in Recruitment & Retention strategy, the Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to lobby Government to properly fund recruitment and retention initiatives for the retained duty system and to endorse proposals in the following areas:

### **1. Funding/resources**

- a) To endorse a principle recommended by the Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service of supporting the introduction of tax incentives which may include reductions in income tax to employees and reductions in business rates to employers - and accordingly to **RECOMMEND** these to central government.
- b) To explore the implications and costs of a mobile whole time model as recommended in the model/option in the Fire Cover Review (see page 8).

### **2. Publicity**

- a) To endorse in principle a “Charter Mark” style logo that could be termed a “Community Support” logo for all the shops and employers locally that support and release their staff for the Fire & Rescue Retained Duty Service. This should be promoted on one set day locally, and ideally extended on a nationwide basis.
- b) Raise public awareness of the role of the Retained Duty System and their recruitment process by continuing to be proactive and strategic, making links to local businesses in Oxfordshire and in taking forward the good work that has already been done by the retained recruitment officer.
- c) Regularly promoting an advertising and recruitment strategy taking into account the different demographic make up of areas and continually examining effective methods of attracting and recruiting under-represented groups.
- d) That elected members working alongside senior officers, should give clear leadership and encouragement to the service to show understanding of the RDS’s role and importance.

### **3. Communications**

- a) That an individual from the retained service be invited to the appropriate Senior Management Team level meetings, to represent the retained firefighter viewpoint.
- b) More work is necessary on monitoring organisational quality standards and targets; this should include endorsement of the equality targets and the means to achieving them as

described in the recent “Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service 10 Year Strategy and Implementation Action Plan Towards Diversity”.

- c) Improve communications and involvement by senior managers visiting stations more regularly, looking at ways to make retained staff feel more involved and urging national government through a national seminar (if appropriate, to be instigated on the initiative of Oxfordshire County Council), to start a national recruitment campaign;
- d) That the potential for Corporate ICT facilities, including e-mail, is maximised to promote working for the RDS.
- e) Promote a retained firefighter to carry out duties in his/her area of employment if appropriate.

#### **4. Inclusive of whole time developments**

- a) It should be a priority to encourage cadet units throughout the county, so as to provide for the transition to the retained and whole time service; (for instance, this might be achieved through employer sponsorship (see page 20).
- b) To provide more support for using whole time personnel as recommended in the model/option in the Fire Cover Review (see page 8).

#### **5. Recruitment incentives**

##### **Specific measures/strategies**

- a) The introduction of more flexible arrangements to encourage a wider variety of applicants. This will include encouraging those who can provide RDS cover of 120 hrs a week to do so, fixed salary schemes and related to this - commitment models, rewards, adjustments to terms and conditions, pensions, the continuation of a consultation on the new/pilot pay scheme (pages 11 and 16) and careful monitoring of the outcomes of this new pay and hours of availability system. In the Integrated Risk Management Process, such options to attract and retain staff should be fully considered.
- b) Develop the components for a retained duty system toolkit of guidance, advice and good practice together with the idea of a “Welcome Pack” for those indicating an interest in entering the retained duty system and to improve communication strategy. This should include a questionnaire for the families of prospective employees in the pack as per the Shropshire model described on pages 17-20.
- c) An employers’ policy should be developed further in Oxfordshire so as to encourage and enable staff to become

retained FFs.

**Strategies to be considered/to be progressed further**

- d) With respect to whole time recruitment, to consider whether to make it advantageous/beneficial to transfer to whole time from the retained service.
- e) The Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service should plan for the wider role for RDS personnel in areas such as co-response and community fire safety work.
- f) Continue to give specific consideration to the benefits of varying response times in order to widen the recruitment catchment area for RDS stations.
- g) To ensure that retained fire fighting is acknowledged as a vocation and accordingly, that Oxfordshire should continue with and progress its extension of more targeted recruitment campaigns (i).
- h) Encourage enhanced training at weekends and away from home station, more realistic fire training and strategies, but with due consideration to cost.
- i) In the future, the Fire & Rescues Service should target the self-employed workforce more, particularly in small rural/market towns/villages where there are recruitment difficulties.

**6. Retention incentives**

- a) Encourage retained personnel to do more community safety work – particularly after their operational retirement, in order to make use of their valuable experience.
- b) Following from evidence in the report and recommendations above (provide refs), to promote further ways of allowing whole time firefighters to carry out retained duties.

**7. Selection processes**

- a) Following the lead being taken by the Fire Service Training College to introduce consistency and uniformity; that the point of entry selection test should ensure that the new process sets appropriate, fair and measurable criteria for the assessment of candidates for all of the operational service. By adhering to the national selection testing, Oxfordshire can encourage a fast track route into whole time from the retained service and transfer between services.

**The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee RECOMMENDS the Cabinet to track and review any recommendations adopted, with an interim evaluation to the Committee in February 2009 and 12 month on evaluation in July 2009.**

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2 The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee commissioned this Review in September 2007 because of its interest in the problems surrounding the recruitment and retention of retained firefighters, and its desire to monitor the implementation of the recommendations in the County Council's recent "Fire Cover Review". The Review Group has compiled this report and made recommendations based on its findings and analysis. We believe that the Review has achieved the objectives set out in the scoping document at **Annex 1**.

### **Aims of the Review and the Review process**

- 3 The Committee appointed Councillors M. Altaf-Khan, John Farrow and Charles Mathew to undertake this Review. The scoping document which was approved by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2007 sets out the Review's objectives and specific tasks that it set itself. The Review was carried out through primary and secondary research, benchmarking, visits to other fire authorities, a focus group and a series of interviews with key witnesses.

### **Background**

- 4 The Review stems from the Oxfordshire Fire Cover Review (the outcomes of which were submitted to the Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2007). The need to carry out a comprehensive review of fire cover for Oxfordshire using the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model software was an issue identified within the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2006/07. The project was designed to achieve an optimum strategy to improve Community Safety through the allocation of resources and the nature of the response to incidents by the Fire & Rescue Service.
- 5 Having considered the risk, incident activity and location of fire stations, the Fire Cover Review turned to the individual components that impacted on the Service's ability to respond in a timely fashion to incidents. In this respect, it recognised that the Retained Duty System has been and is a highly cost effective component of the modern Fire & Rescue Service. The retention of retained firefighters is an ongoing matter for national debate within UK Fire & Rescue Services, with the Oxfordshire Retained Recruitment Officer having presented innovative solutions in use in Oxfordshire, to national conferences.
- 6 Meanwhile, the Fire Cover Review looked at a number of options to encourage the retention of the retained workforce and it is from here that the Scrutiny Review originated. The options at that time (January 2007) were:
1. A fixed salary scheme (cost neutral); sometimes referred to as a "commitment" model).
  2. Increased realistic practical training (cost and venues to be identified);

3. Reducing the impact on employers by increasing the use of whole time personnel.
- 7 The Cabinet agreed to note the options and indicative costs, which would be subject to further financial analysis; to note the expectations and parameters of a “fundamental review” into Retained Firefighter costs (that started during the course of this scrutiny review and has run simultaneously, although covering a different scope), and that the Fire Cover Review would be a continuous process monitored with successes or challenges being identified by Best Value Performance Indicators and the local performance standards that would flow from the 365 Alive Strategy.
- 8 Shortly after this Scrutiny Review started, the Authority’s Integrated Risk Management Plan 2008/09 identified a further 6 Action Plan projects, 2 of which were particularly relevant to our work: a review of childcare provision for retained duty staff (because arrangements were potentially out of date and a barrier to entry into the service and extended hours of availability), and a retained duty system review of crewing and availability at fire stations (covering a range of options, such as using spare retained duty system personnel from other stations). The former is discussed briefly in the evidence concerning barriers to women in the retained duty system. The latter ran simultaneously with this Review.
- 9 As well as the work internal to the County Council, the Office of the Former Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Fire Officers Association (ODPM and CFA) undertook a review of the Fire & Rescue Service Retained Duty System in 2004 that resulted in the successor Department for Communities and Local Government, publishing a report with 51 recommendations; 35 of which, Fire Authorities have been required to respond to. It has prompted several authorities to carry out reviews of recruitment and retention in the retained service, some of which are referred to in this report. (The key issues in the ODPM & CFA work that this Scrutiny Review began from and the main recommendations, are briefly summarised in **Annex 2.**)
- 10 So far as Oxfordshire is concerned the response to the recommendations has been largely positive. The Fire & Rescue Service provided temporary funding for a Retained Duty System Recruitment Officer – 0.6fte, subsequently increased to full time. However, there is quite limited information available on the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns. Partnership with businesses/local employers needs to be enhanced. There has been good performance on targeting women recruits; less so on ethnic minorities, but this is understandable for reasons given elsewhere in this report. The use of role models has been good in campaigns and advertising – as have “positive action” measures.
- 11 Oxfordshire has been slightly less than welcoming of “retained liaison duty system officers” (RLOs - see elsewhere in the report), as it is considered that the role may detract from existing pump availability levels.



- 12 Co-response and community safety are well developed. Specific consideration has been given to varying response times and the Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service has varied these for some years; eg turning out a second pump even if it is a few minutes later is better than none at all.

### **Chronology and Development of the Fire Service including the Retained Duty System**

- 13 At the turn of the century, Fire Services were provided on a voluntary basis; later they were funded by public donations. After WWII a National Fire Service was established through legislation and the retained and full-time distinction was introduced; “volunteers” continued to provide part of the service.
- 14 Around the same time, National Fire Cover Standards were introduced which assessed property risk in defined geographical areas, leading to a categorisation as A-D. The location, number and type of fire stations were derived from this and the use of retained firefighters was included in the lower risk areas.
- 15 The current structures governing the fire services date back to the framework that was established by the Fire Services Act 1947. Since that time, however, the relationship between central and local government has developed and changed. In particular, after the Fire Services Act 1959 the Government lost its responsibilities in respect of pay and hours of duty, but retained other powers. The National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades, originally set up in 1947, consisting of the representatives of the employers and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), became responsible for negotiating the pay and conditions of service for fire service staff. A separate Retained Firefighters Trade Union (RFU) was also established to negotiate on behalf of its members.
- 16 The major changes impacting on retained firefighting in recent times have been brought about through the European Union Working Time Directive and the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004, which introduced a statutory responsibility relating to road traffic collisions and other life threatening incidents. The National Standards of Fire Cover were replaced by local response standards determined by the risk to life.
- 17 The current situation concerning the recruitment and retention of retained firefighters has been exacerbated over time by changes in culture and employment practices, which are elaborated upon below. During recent years Members, alongside the Directorate for Community Safety, have tried to develop incentives to recruit and retain, retained staff. Conditions of employment have changed over the course of time but at the time when this Review commenced, retained staff were paid a retaining fee, an attendance fee and an hourly rate. The so-called “turnout fee” has been changed recently to an hourly rate once any firefighter has been called out beyond 1 hr 16 minutes. These conditions are derived from the (national) “Grey Book”.

- 18 A little while ago, Oxfordshire trialled a “salaried scheme” (sometimes called a commitment model) for its retained staff. 3 stations were piloted and a salary scale agreed based on staff’s consent to being available for a prescribed amount of hours a week (up to 120). The limiting factors in this scheme were that the pilot did not achieve both of the intended outcomes: to increase the number of people coming forward as potential recruits and to sustain the number of people already in employment.
- 19 This Review monitors the implementation of the recommendations and outcomes of the Fire Cover Review as compared to the position the previous year. It is important to recognise that whilst identifying the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of retained staff, workforce diversity will be addressed. This was highlighted in the Fire & Rescue Service by the 2007 Annual Audit & Inspection letter; “performance in equalities and diversity is currently mixed”.

### **An overview of the problems and challenges that impact on Recruitment and Retention**

- 20 Socio-economic and demographic changes - Over recent decades these have changed the profile of local populations as a consequence of the demise of local industry, fewer employment opportunities in the locality and of fewer self-employed people in rural locations. These have had a progressive impact on the ability of Fire & Rescue Services to recruit and retain retained firefighters. There have been other factors too, including changed pension rights; a lack of engagement within the community and with local businesses; other changing work patterns; pay factors; the effects of European legislation and the degree of success of community fire safety programmes. Ironically, the latter have affected the range and extent of retained firefighters’ activities because better education within the community leads to fewer fires and less call outs.
- 21 Common Entry Standards - point of entry tests - New Regulations do not differentiate between the provisions for appointments to the whole time and retained duty systems. The former Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) engaged consultants to develop a standardised national test. The intention was that any new selection process should set appropriate, fair, measurable criteria for the assessment of candidates for all of the operational service. According to the Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, the National Fire Service selection testing represents a “massive sea change”. In fact, some brigades initially refused to implement it because the new process was so “long-winded” but it has subsequently been streamlined and there has been at least 95% sign up to it. In Oxfordshire it has been suggested that in practice, the testing process does not work very well in some respects, especially for retained firefighters. This is elaborated upon in evidence later on in the report.
- 22 Variable Response Times - There has been a long-standing national “5 minute rule” for Service staff to respond to a call. Because of changes over

time to work patterns, it has been perceived that catchment areas have needed to be widened to enhance recruitment. Extending the distances that a retained firefighter is permitted to live or work from the fire station, can create a potentially larger catchment area for retained firefighters and provide a more flexible approach. For example, by:

- removing the prescriptive minimum response times and instead looking at the risk and resources available;
- recruiting personnel to the retained duty system who live or work beyond the traditional limit, especially if this makes the difference between a response and no response;
- making significant variations, especially in the more remote areas;
- having some leeway where a response can sometimes take much longer than five minutes, but the alternative back-up response would take even more time.

23 The Review considered the evidence available about the benefits of varying response times (already put in place in Oxfordshire) in order to widen the recruitment catchment area. For instance:

24 Variable commitments - as a consequence of the effects of social change and changing attitudes. The Review considered whether it was possible to improve recruitment and retention in the current climate, by introducing flexibility in work patterns. The main tenets of the retained duty system contained in the old “grey book” were designed in the post World War II era during the 1950s. Whilst some changes have occurred at both national and local levels, the basic principles have until recently, remained the same: ie

- train the retained in a shorter period than wholetime firefighters;
- pay a retaining fee for availability up to 168 (now 120) hours per week;
- pay for attendance at training;
- pay for responding to an emergency call;
- pay to attend incidents.

25 Part of the problem of retained cover deficiencies can be attributed to a reduced level of commitment by more recent recruits. Research has indicated that many recruits find that after joining, their job prospects/horizons immediately start to widen! The rigidity of the retained duty system as a pattern of working has largely assumed that personnel employed on the duty system can provide 24 hour cover, are capable of responding at any time within four to five minutes of the call-out and have the ability to flexibly juggle the conflicting demands of the fire and rescue service, primary employment and family. This is no longer the case. Hence there is a drive towards and an opportunity to introduce greater flexibility to make the most efficient and effective use of the retained duty system.

26 Rewards, Terms & Conditions - Among the areas that this Review touched upon are methods of remuneration for commitment to improve retention rates, such as exploring “one size fits all” vs a specialized “toolkit” of

options; eg national structures for pay and commitment with an allowance for local flexibility to meet exceptional demands/circumstances. There is a growing realization that the current system of retainer based on 100% or 75% availability is anachronistic. The option of a customized Toolkit was suggested by at least one of the “expert witnesses” who contributed evidence to the Review.

- 27 As identified elsewhere, there is some cause for concern because higher earnings are linked to higher turnouts, whilst success in community fire safety initiatives may lead to lower turnouts. Consequently there might be fire stations that have had successes in improving community fire safety, whilst also having full establishments of retained duty system firefighters.
- 28 Pensions - a long-standing problem had been that RDS firefighters were excluded from membership of the Firemen's Pension Scheme (FPS) (and also the Local Government Pension Scheme). This has now changed and a pension scheme has been introduced and ought to be publicized as a recruitment incentive.

### **The methodology and process of gathering evidence**

- 29 In order to find out about how recruitment and retention was being managed and to suggest good strategies, the Review Group gathered and assessed published research on this topic, visited a range of other fire and rescue services to find out how they approached these issues, had a “focus group” discussion with a range of watch managers and retained staff at the Fire Service HQ in Kidlington; benchmarked using relevant material and interviewed “expert witnesses”.
- 30 The **Annexes** provide summary points from published research that the Review Group regarded as particularly relevant for this Review.

### **3. FINDINGS AND EVIDENCE**

- 31 In addition to the wealth of evidence from secondary research material covered in the preceding sections of this report, the Review considered the primary research and evidence that it received in terms of the barriers to retained recruitment and retention (if indeed it was proven that there were barriers); barriers to women and possible solutions such as family friendly policies; greater diversity and barriers to ethnic minorities and the diversity and equality agenda.

### **The Recruitment and Retention problem: what are the barriers to recruitment and retention?**

- 32 The Review Group asked itself whether there was a recruitment and retention problem in Oxfordshire. In doing so, it looked at a range of issues. One was the median age when people joined the service in line with the national and local patterns which are consistent in this respect.

### **Age profile and experience**

- 33 Recruits tended to join the service around their late 30s; in other words quite late in their working lives and when family life was well established. The maximum possible length of service obviously changes with the age that individuals join at, so the average length of service is driven down for retained duty staff. People remained in the Service for less time than whole time firefighters who tended to join in their early 20s. Because the retirement age is 55 for all firefighters, retained members' periods of service tend therefore to be reduced.
- 34 As previously suggested, there is evidence that the Fire Service provides people with training that enhances their personal skills, gives them confidence, develops their written and verbal communication skills; first aid, health and safety training and a LGV licence. The individual is therefore much more of an attractive applicant in the job market and they are lost to other employers.
- 35 In Oxfordshire and elsewhere, a case has been made for personnel to continue non-operational duties beyond age 55. The Retained Recruitment Officer drew the Review Group's attention to the situation in the County and demonstrated that there was not in fact, a great deal of turnover, particularly when the same calculation basis was used as for whole time. There were recruitment "spikes" every few years that could lead to a false impression of a tail off in staff numbers. When there is a push on increasing recruitment, the average length of service tends to go down in the short term. The more successful the recruitment push is, the more that the length of service reduces. However, in the long term it starts to rise again; the average length of service of RDS is 7.6 years, but if the "recruitment spike" is removed from the calculation, this increases to 11.2 years. The latter is more indicative of the current retention situation.

### **Image and culture**

- 36 Among other barriers identified both in Oxfordshire and nationally, is the internal culture of the Fire & Rescue Service. The image of the service is uniformed, male, ex military and white so there are difficulties inherent for many potential recruits and particularly for women and ethnic minorities. We recognised and noted, nevertheless, that in Oxfordshire there is a desire to enable everyone with the potential to get through the recruitment process. Once recruited though, the training costs for a retained fire fighter equate to about £30,000 for the first year – salary, training centre costs and actual training costs.
- 37 Other factors that have an impact on the recruitment and retention of retained duty staff have been referred to, but the Review Group recognised that some of these factors also affect recruitment and retention of whole-time staff. These factors, at the risk of repeating them again, include:

- the impact of demographic change
- movement of industries away from rural areas
- modernisation of the selection process
- the need for more standardisation and consistency
- the effect on recruitment and retention of legislative changes.

### **“Welcome packs”**

38 The Review Group considered whether there was a need for a recruitment “welcome pack”. There are examples where each entrant to the volunteer service is given such a pack. For interested potential recruits a pack ought to provide a means of communication to the individual’s family and provide an opportunity for them to give their views, perhaps by means of a questionnaire as Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service has introduced. A recommendation about a “welcome pack” follows at the end of the report.

39 A “classic” recruitment solution suggested during the Review was a well constructed “Toolkit”, but there is no “catch all” solution. Different things may work for different areas, cultures and people. They must be cost effective and among other things, will need to provide incentives for local businesses such as means to publicly thank employers and events for employers, alongside other solutions to the recruitment and retention dilemma considered by the Review Group. These include:

- changing the 5 minute rule and widening the catchment area of retained stations to enhance recruitment
- measures aimed at mitigating the general effects of social change and changing attitudes that take account among other things, of the demographic profile, cost of living and one’s place of main work
- greater flexibility in work patterns to ensure the right availability and to overcome gaps in cover, including co-responding strategies
- the need to explore methods of remuneration for individual commitment and improving retention rates
- setting a national pay structure for pay and commitment with some allowance for local flexibility to meet exceptional demands/circumstances; (national pay negotiations were ongoing at the time of completion of this Review)
- ways of extending operational duties beyond 55
- avoiding the tendency of Fire & Rescue Services (though nationally rather than locally) to focus around issues affecting the whole-time duty system.
- Publicity for the pension benefits accruing to the retained service

40 Assistance with housing in areas of high property prices may also help for both whole-time and retained duty firefighters so that they can live within appropriate turnout areas. This was echoed by a focus group of

retained firefighters in Oxfordshire and a plea for “key worker” housing to be provided in the locations where potential and current staff lived.

- 41 There are financial implications attached to anything that might be done: the cost of remedies, the cost of inaction and from the unrealistic expectation that a history of under investment in the retained duty system can be overcome cost neutrally. This, as has been highlighted elsewhere, was a problem so far as the 3 station “pilot” in Oxfordshire was concerned and is also recognised in the options put forward by the Fire Cover Review. There is a new pay system being worked upon and we await the outcome of consultations on it and the subsequent implementation and evaluation. At the moment, the average annual take home pay for a retained firefighter is about £5-7,000. The scarcity of funding to tackle an issue as large as retained duty system recruitment and retention runs throughout the Review and there is a case for lobbying central government to properly fund changes that are deemed necessary. **In respect of incentives and rewards it is the Review Group’s view that central government funding is necessary to support a firmer, more positive pay structure and recommendations follow to this effect.**
- 42 Within the Review there are comments on the possibility of reductions in employer’s rates and tax incentives to help people who wish to undertake a RDS role. There needs to be a balance recognising the employer’s/employees contribution and having for too long, run services “on a shoestring”. Discussion around these issues led to suggestions in discussion with the Fire Service Training College, that there must be more central government and political involvement with the College – perhaps by inviting government ministers to a seminar there. However, it is acknowledged that this may put the College into a difficult position in as much as it is central government funded by CLG. It functions as a government agency with traded funding status.
- 43 The Review Group also considers that there is a need to develop an effective communication strategy and to deliver the key messages coming out of this review. In particular, for both whole-time and retained recruitment there has been a history of long delays in communicating with interested and potential recruits because of the length of time between initial contact with applicants, recruitment promotion exercises, the recruitment process itself and final appointment. More regular training courses for applicants may be recommended; poor communication has been highlighted as to the fall away in interest of applicants over lengthy periods of time before training). More can be done to promote the benefits to employer organisations of people being released for retained duty; eg offering the releasing employers good health screening, a reduction in days off sick and better retention.
- 44 The following sections of this Review provide first hand evidence against a framework of the barriers to recruitment and retention, to women and to ethnic minorities as described on pages 23-24 and in **Annexes** and the Review group’s suggestions and recommendations for change.

### **Shropshire and Dorset reviews**

- 45 The Review Group had the opportunity of comparing the Oxfordshire situation with that in a similar authority/service; **Shropshire**; a largely rural area that has 5 whole time and 23 retained stations and that had recently carried out a Best Value review.
- 46 The Review also assessed the Dorset Best Value review draft of the Retained Duty System which runs to 172 pages and includes 12 recommendations concerned with recruitment and retention. However, there are no themes or recommendations in the Dorset review that are not otherwise addressed or suggested from the evidence and research referred to throughout this report.
- 47 The Shropshire strategy to improve recruitment and retention included a range of features, several of which are outlined below, and combined with similar strategies and suggestions that were made elsewhere among the evidence gathered, the Review endeavours to link the common strands together. Priority issues identified in the Shropshire review included **training, working time and recruitment**.

### **Training**

- 48 The Review has speculated that there is an impact on retention because training is time consuming and complex for retained staff working limited hours. As an incentive to recruitment and retention, Shropshire recommended that every fire fighter would receive an extra 3 hours supported training every 4 weeks.
- 49 Extra large cabs were introduced that could take up to 8 firefighters. At smaller stations these had worked particularly well because often, 6 retained staff would respond and be taken to a call whilst another 2 or 3 (be it at any hour of the day or night) could not be accommodated on the call. The benefits flowing from these measures were identified as improvements in community safety; experienced retained staff, better morale and in particular, the complement of retained staff at single pump stations had been increased to 14 which allowed for recruitment drives and time off for members of staff - simply because there were increased numbers available. At an absolute minimum, the appliance could operate with 3 staff. There was greater flexibility and pressure was eased. The replacement programme had therefore proved cost effective.
- 50 So far as extra large vehicles are concerned, Oxfordshire has chosen not to pursue this further, mainly because access in rural areas could present problems in emergencies could leave the service without another vehicle available and difficulties in cascading the pumps across stations.



### **Retained Liaison Officers**

- 51 A decision was also taken to create 8 Retained Liaison Officers, the contingency on this being cost (£315,000) to provide operational support, community fire safety, including presentations to schools and training. Earlier the Review outlined Oxfordshire's position regarding RLOs and the Review Group wished to reflect the differing points of view in any recommendations that might be made. In Oxfordshire's view, a distinct retained recruitment role is necessary in order to relieve the pressure on individual retained duty officers having to undertake a recruitment role. There are now whole time officers in Oxfordshire who each have responsibilities for a retained station.
- 52 The Review recognises that there are ongoing problems in training, equipping and then retaining people. In Shropshire, among the recommendations implemented is station equipment cleaning and maintenance, as retained staff did not have sufficient time to do this on training nights. Again, this has costs but there was evidence that it had worked very well and had boosted morale.
- 53 By involving all retained firefighters and retained stations in community fire safety work, the service could recruit new retained staff at the same time and the retained service's profile was raised among the community.

### **Advertising and publicity**

- 54 Recruitment strategies could include the use of external notice boards provided for all stations, recruitment posters on site, service vehicles advertising the pay that can be anticipated in the retained firefighter role, websites established for staff, partners and employers. (These, of the various strategies and recommendations adopted elsewhere, do tend to take longest to implement effectively.)
- 55 Advertising, in Shropshire's case via the internet home page - has proved an effective medium. In addition to the service advertising the salary on vehicles, community fire safety work is heavily promoted in the recruitment pack which also includes an employer's pack because consultation had identified that employers were sometimes a stumbling block and sometimes reluctant to release staff. Statistics were provided in the pack to reassure employers about the level of commitment required from individuals and of the various benefits to employers - eg staff being trained in manual handling, health and safety and so on which could reduce the employer's costs. The suggestion of a website for employers including information on the actual number and duration of call outs has been well received across the board – but the limiting factor is finance. This applies across the board to any strategies that may be recommended.

- 56 In Shropshire, there had been a large investment in the review and in its recommendations from the outset; £823,000 initially, rising to £1,107,000 over 5 years; all revenue. Shropshire also benefits from having a unitary Fire Authority and of it having been able to commit significant funding to the review in a way that Fire Services under County auspices might find it more difficult to do. Sufficient and guaranteed sustainable funding is clearly an advantageous basis to work from.
- 57 The Review Group acknowledges that more publicity generally can only be beneficial. In the view of the operational staff, there is an untapped market.
- 58 In terms of improving retention rates, exit interviews must be carried out as part of a more systematic performance management process. Consequently, it may be possible to spot trends. For instance, in Shropshire at the time when the review recommendations were being implemented, there were a number of leavers where "no reason given" for departure was identified. This had now reduced to zero. Moreover, leavers had reduced from 19 two years ago to 6 for the current year. This was enhanced by recruitment having raised the number of retained staff from the mid 290s to 325 over a similar period. Previously the service was gaining 20 a year but losing 20.
- 59 Culture and attitude change appears to be critical in the evidence taken during the Review and consequently, communication and strategy is at the crux of improving recruitment and retention work. There is evidence of different cultures within the Retained Duty System, even between stations; the key to unlocking this may be communication with station managers/officers in charge to encourage them to be proactive on recruitment.
- 60 Elsewhere, evidence of the barriers, incentives and initiatives to improve recruitment and retention highlighted the commitment required; traditionally there has been a dependence on and expectation of goodwill from staff, a community spirit and personal responsibility as motivators, rather than financial reward. But this seems no longer to be the case for everybody. Disincentives, once people were in the role, included commitment taking precedence over families.
- 61 To provide cover, particularly during the day time is critical; individuals have never been able to be further than 5 minutes notice from the local retained station.
- 62 Among the incentives and disincentives around the Service, the impacts of social and demographic change have frequently been mentioned. Among operational staff, the model of a salaried scheme has been received favourably as it would assist with obtaining mortgages, for example.
- 63 In Oxfordshire, there is an issue around corporate bureaucracy. The Retained Recruitment Officer wished to send a promotional recruitment e-mail to all Oxfordshire County Council employees but this was vetoed by

County ICT; however, the rationale for this decision was not articulated. A recommendation follows at the end of the report aimed at rectifying this situation.

### **“Fast Track”/preferential routes into the Service**

64 Several Fire Authorities run a “cadet” system. In Oxfordshire at present, there is no preferential treatment for cadets to go into the retained and whole time Fire Services. But the cadet system should act as a strong encouragement for young people wishing to go into the professional service. The cadet centres are in the larger populated areas so more often than not, there simply aren’t any retained posts to move in to. An idea that sprung from focus group discussions and which the Review Group considers worth recommending in the review report, is to seek sponsorship from local employers to develop the local cadet forces. At senior management level, there is a desire to secure a fast track or preferential route for cadets into both retained and whole time services as the absence of this is seen as a recruitment barrier generally. The benefit of the cadet system is that it helps to develop an understanding of what the service involves – in this respect it is very good and helps to publicise the service through word of mouth.

65 Oxfordshire is currently consulting at the moment on a system whereby retained firefighters could transfer to whole time via a “fast track” or “preferential” process. With respect to this, the Fire Service College considers that there must be greater recognition of what the RDS personnel have achieved in their work to facilitate an easier migration process into whole time. The other overriding factor in respect of such migration is the equality and diversity agenda. Most authorities’ retained services comprise white males. If they transfer into whole time, this may simply shift and exacerbate the problem. In the new national selection testing, among the qualities and attributes that the Fire & Rescue Service is seeking, is a commitment to equality and diversity. In the behavioural assessment elements of the selection process, one has to pass the equality and diversity attributes at each stage. People may have adverse perceptions about the role and personal image of a firefighter and the selection testing is seeking to overcome these.

### **National selection testing**

66 National selection testing and costs have to be taken into account in some detail at this stage in the Review. It is claimed that there are disincentives inherent in the new process. There is a view that the guidance and application form is eliminating potential recruits from the Service from the outset, who may not be able to meet the written testing requirements. A 26 (now 17) page form has to be completed in order to enter the service for what is “in reality, a 2 hour a week commitment”. However, if the national standard is not complied with authorities could open themselves up to insurance and legal challenge.

- 67 The bottom line is that a Fire & Rescue Service is essential and one must take great care that whatever selection process is adopted, it does not jeopardise the viability of the retained service. The new selection testing raises dilemmas. Can one allow people who are not 100% competent under the new process to go out on a call? If that is the case then it raises the question in people's minds as to why this should be different for whole time. Hence the College's view that there must be a basic level of competence that all fire fighters must achieve and this can be met through the new selection process. Furthermore, a national standard makes cross migration and transfer between services easier and more acceptable and this had not been the situation until now.
- 68 The Review Group gave some thought as to whether there is any merit in Oxfordshire applying its own rules and guidance around recruitment, to facilitate some entrants into both the retained and whole time service, such as cadets. The current requirement is that cadets/retained staff have to retrain and re-apply for the whole time service. Among the focus group of retained firefighters such a process whereby retained staff would not have to re-apply, was considered to be a great incentive both to enter the retained service and if desired, the promise and prospect of transferring into whole time. However, on balance, the Review Group believes that it is important to adhere to the national process because of the aforementioned insurance and legal issues. The following sections explain the rationale for the national process from the Fire Service Training College's perspective.
- 69 Whilst the Review Group's first hand "evidence" was that the new testing was perceived as being too severe, the Chief Fire Officers Association had advised the College initially that the tests "had lowered the standard". Among the reasons for introducing the new testing process, according to the College, was that the RDS's standards had varied across the country. Now, the whole time and RDS have been drawn closer together. In the final analysis, the College's view is that "a firefighter is a firefighter" and all have to do the same job to the same requirements. The application form that supports the new national selection testing has been modified and many of its pages just require "tick boxing". There are only 5 "key" questions on the application form, all of which are competency based. Historically, there have been large numbers of applicants for whole time posts and the opposite for the RDS where services are quite stretched to get applicants and in the right locations.
- 70 The psychometric testing has been pitched quite low, to test English literacy and numeracy at basic levels. The College's view is that if applicants are unable to achieve these levels then they ought not to be working for the Fire & Rescue Service. In practice, every applicant is "ranked" if they reach interview stage, but they are not ranked at any other stage in selection.

- 71 The Review accepts that there must be a “baseline” for applicants to the RDS, but has questioned whether there is any latitude for services to have their own baselines. The difficulty with allowing any latitude is that, in the College’s view, competence to do the job is essential. Authorities have to define the risks around providing the service and can no longer allow any leniency. Because of this concern about risk, it is essential to have minimum standards. CLG has recently agreed that the application form does not have to be used as a “sift” for RDS applicants. Interested applicants can complete the basic eligibility aspects of the process and if successful, they will then be asked to complete the form. At least applicants now have the opportunity to become familiar with the new selection process although this may imply that there can be differentiations in the process between retained and whole time firefighters up until the interview stage. I.e, if applicants come through the physical, written and numeracy tests, most authorities will be offering them guidance in order to raise awareness of what the competencies are that they will have to demonstrate to enter the RDS.
- 72 The College’s summary of the RDS position in a nutshell, is that it is more difficult to recruit into the RDS, that the new national selection process is the way to improve this, but that there must be a baseline of competency to enter the service. The new application form provides an indication of “potential to develop” but doesn’t guarantee getting into the service.
- 73 Apart from the discussions with the College about the new selection process, the Review Group questioned how Fire & Rescue Services could retain the retained. It was suggested that by providing adequate skills development and opportunities for career development, retention could be improved. The service may provide benefits that are not tangible at the outset. Statistically retained staff, once they enter the service, score higher in testing than their whole time counterparts.

### **Mobile whole time units**

- 74 The concept of a mobile whole time firefighter unit has also been mentioned and it is important that it has, given the context of the Fire Cover Review and recruitment and retention to both the retained and whole time services that the Review aimed to cover. The whole time mobile unit principle is being revisited as in the Chief Fire Officer’s words Oxfordshire needs to explore “what is needed to provide the retained service in the long term, what is expected and what is the tolerance of risks that can be coped with?” The earlier pilot pay scheme would have cost approx £620,000 per year if implemented, with no guarantee of cover. If there were to be £620,000 available per year, the Authority may have to seriously consider whether this money is better deployed on a mobile whole time unit around the County or for retained recruitment and retention.

75 To conclude; in Oxfordshire to date, recruitment and retention strategy has revolved around the work that the Retained Recruitment Officer has progressed and has benefited from his close knowledge of stations and employees. However, more work with employers is critical; a good strategy in this respect provides an opportunity for using a range of public service skills effectively. The Review Group considers that there must be means to publicly thank employers who support the retained service, alongside real practical incentives such as reducing the business rates of employers who are willing to release their staff for the Retained service. Recommendations follow to this effect.

### **Other reviews**

76 Reviews of recruitment and retention across Fire & Rescue Services are actually fairly scant. Shropshire is exceptional in terms of the depth of exploration of the issues. In terms of different “models”, there are really not all that many different options across the services.

77 Realistically, the equality recruitment gap between those who work as retained and as whole time firefighters may be difficult to close; as the services become more technically difficult in the future, the gaps may widen. To provide a 24 hour service, the technical knowledge required is increasing and a gulf is beginning to develop between what a whole time and a retained firefighter can do. But, a uniform selection process aims towards equality between the services.

### **Barriers to women – family friendly policies, diversity and equality**

78 So far as the recruitment of women is concerned, the image and culture issues have already been addressed in the report. In fact, Oxfordshire is one of the best performing services at recruiting women (*there are statistics to support this; there are 34 women among approximately 360 RDS and on current training courses they comprise about 15% of the intake*). Given this, Oxfordshire must continue to promote its positive role models so that it continues to overcome the barriers that can hinder recruitment, such as family friendly hours, the new entry testing and standards, childcare, specific facilities for women and diversity training (these are elaborated upon in more depth at **Annex 2**).

79 In terms of work-life balance – there are pressures on appliances in August holiday times and at other un-sociable times of the year – but these cannot necessarily be overcome by recruitment from women as their childcare arrangements are exacerbated at those times; childcare arrangements are potentially out of date and can be seen as a barrier to entry into the service and to existing personnel who due to the aforementioned problems are not able to provide extended hours of availability.

80 The existence of equality targets in themselves present barriers because they are over-ambitious given local demographic profiles, but Oxfordshire

at least outperforms others in recruiting women. Shropshire's review acknowledged that Oxfordshire was more advanced in appealing to and recruiting female retained firefighters.

- 81 The Department of Communities and Local Government has recently issued a Fire & Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy: 2008-2018 consultation. This set out its approach to targeting under-represented groups. In response, Oxfordshire has recently developed its own 10 year strategy and action plan for diversity within the service over the next 10 years. Targets locally have since changed to reflect the more realistic situation within areas of the county and the Review goes on later to endorse the targets.
- 82 So far as recruiting women and the diversity agenda (including recruitment from ethnic minorities) is concerned, a difficulty in these respects is in enabling appropriate circumstances through which people might come forward in the first instance. The perception is that women and ethnic minorities and other minority populations are not comfortable about approaching the service or walking into a fire station - although there are some comments to the contrary. There is a need, perhaps, for more work around the rather intangible concept of "culture change".

### **Barriers to Ethnic Minorities**

- 83 Whilst some of the difficulties around recruiting from ethnic minorities into the retained service have been raised in the section above and elsewhere, it is reasonable to conclude that the issues that have to be addressed are to some extent the same as those for women, including the image of the service, positive role models, the new selection and testing standards and diversity training. But, in addition, there is a low proportion of ethnic minorities in rural local communities. This is particularly pronounced in Oxfordshire with very small BEM (British Ethnic Minority) communities in the rural market town/village areas, where most of the stations that are supported by the retained duty system are based and where recruitment problems are in any event, most pronounced. In Oxford for instance, where the percentages among the local population are higher, the stations have whole time staffing. In Shropshire, the problems are similar to Oxfordshire's - small percentages in the areas where retained stations are located but the former national requirements were to recruit in numbers equivalent to the percentage of the ethnic minority population across the county as a whole.

## **4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 84 Much good work has been achieved in Oxfordshire dependant upon the initiative of the Retained Recruitment Officer; features of this have been referred to throughout the report. It is also worth highlighting at this stage, as it is not dealt with elsewhere, that when the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004 introduced parity in pay and treatment, Oxfordshire was at the forefront in implementing the new pay arrangements.

85 An example of good recruitment practice within the Oxfordshire retained service is the strategy referred to in presentation material produced by Tony Whiting called “The Attack on Recruitment” and involving:

Phase

- 1 County wide – media
- 2 Station based – media – posters in towns – and banners in stations
- 3 Station based talks – groups – visit large employers
- 4 Schools and groups – leaflets
- 5 Door knocking at station level

86 Among the range of issues identified with possible solutions and strategies in the earlier findings and evidence, much is replicated in and hence drawn from Oxfordshire’s current strategies. However, Oxfordshire manages recruitment and retention of retained firefighters and workforce diversity within its profile, on limited financial means. The Retained Recruitment Officer role has only recently been increased from 0.6 fte to 1.0.

**Recommendations**

87 There is a range of issues in this report that the Review Group considered it could make recommendations about given the wealth of evidence that it has gathered. But for the sake of being concise, those that it wished to put the main emphases and priority upon are identified here. Moreover, the report aims to identify the problems around recruitment and selection to the RDS and to offer some evidence based options and solutions in the main body of text. Whilst there may not be recommendations here concerning all that the Review Group covered, reading the report will serve to raise the profile of all the issues surrounding this complex area of work.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That for Oxfordshire to remain at the forefront in Recruitment & Retention strategy, the Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to lobby Government to properly fund recruitment and retention initiatives for the retained duty system and to endorse proposals in the following areas:

### **1. Funding/resources**

- a) To endorse a principle recommended by the Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service of supporting the introduction of tax incentives which may include reductions in income tax to employees and reductions in business rates to employers - and accordingly to **RECOMMEND** these to central government.
- b) To explore the implications and costs of a mobile whole time model as recommended in the model/option in the Fire Cover Review (see page 8).

### **2. Publicity**

- a) To endorse in principle a “Charter Mark” style logo that could be termed a “Community Support” logo for all the shops and employers locally that support and release their staff for the Fire & Rescue Retained Duty Service. This should be promoted on one set day locally, and ideally extended on a nationwide basis.
- b) Raise public awareness of the role of the Retained Duty System and their recruitment process by continuing to be proactive and strategic, making links to local businesses in Oxfordshire and in taking forward the good work that has already been done by the retained recruitment officer.
- c) Regularly promoting an advertising and recruitment strategy taking into account the different demographic make up of areas and continually examining effective methods of attracting and recruiting under-represented groups.
- d) That elected members working alongside senior officers, should give clear leadership and encouragement to the service to show understanding of the RDS’s role and importance.

### **3. Communications**

- a) That an individual from the retained service be invited to the appropriate Senior Management Team level meetings, to represent the retained firefighter viewpoint.
- b) More work is necessary on monitoring organisational quality standards and targets; this should include endorsement of the equality targets and the means to achieving them as

described in the recent “Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service 10 Year Strategy and Implementation Action Plan Towards Diversity”.

- c) Improve communications and involvement by senior managers visiting stations more regularly, looking at ways to make retained staff feel more involved and urging national government through a national seminar (if appropriate, to be instigated on the initiative of Oxfordshire County Council), to start a national recruitment campaign;
- d) That the potential for Corporate ICT facilities, including e-mail, is maximised to promote working for the RDS.
- e) Promote a retained firefighter to carry out duties in his/her area of employment if appropriate.

#### **4. Inclusive of whole time developments**

- a) It should be a priority to encourage cadet units throughout the county, so as to provide for the transition to the retained and whole time service; (for instance, this might be achieved through employer sponsorship (see page 20).
- b) To provide more support for using whole time personnel as recommended in the model/option in the Fire Cover Review (see page 8).

#### **5. Recruitment incentives**

##### **Specific measures/strategies**

- a) The introduction of more flexible arrangements to encourage a wider variety of applicants. This will include encouraging those who can provide RDS cover of 120 hrs a week to do so, fixed salary schemes and related to this - commitment models, rewards, adjustments to terms and conditions, pensions, the continuation of a consultation on the new/pilot pay scheme (pages 11 and 16) and careful monitoring of the outcomes of this new pay and hours of availability system. In the Integrated Risk Management Process, such options to attract and retain staff should be fully considered.
- b) Develop the components for a retained duty system toolkit of guidance, advice and good practice together with the idea of a “Welcome Pack” for those indicating an interest in entering the retained duty system and to improve communication strategy. This should include a questionnaire for the families of prospective employees in the pack as per the Shropshire model described on pages 17-20.
- c) An employers’ policy should be developed further in Oxfordshire so as to encourage and enable staff to become

retained FFs.

**Strategies to be considered /to be progressed further**

- d) With respect to whole time recruitment, to consider whether to make it advantageous/beneficial to transfer to whole time from the retained service.
- e) The Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service should plan for the wider role for RDS personnel in areas such as co-response and community fire safety work.
- f) Continue to give specific consideration to the benefits of varying response times in order to widen the recruitment catchment area for RDS stations.
- g) To ensure that retained fire fighting is acknowledged as a vocation and accordingly, that Oxfordshire should continue with and progress its extension of more targeted recruitment campaigns (i).
- h) Encourage enhanced training at weekends and away from home station, more realistic fire training and strategies, but with due consideration to cost.
- i) In the future, the Fire & Rescues Service should target the self-employed workforce more, particularly in small rural/market towns/villages where there are recruitment difficulties.

**6. Retention incentives**

- a) Encourage retained personnel to do more community safety work – particularly after their operational retirement, in order to make use of their valuable experience.
- b) Following from evidence in the report and recommendations above (provide refs), to promote further ways of allowing whole time firefighters to carry out retained duties.

**7. Selection processes**

- a) Following the lead being taken by the Fire Service Training College to introduce consistency and uniformity; that the point of entry selection test should ensure that the new process sets appropriate, fair and measurable criteria for the assessment of candidates for all of the operational service. By adhering to the national selection testing, Oxfordshire can encourage a fast track route into whole time from the retained service and transfer between services.

**The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee RECOMMENDS the Cabinet to track and review any recommendations adopted, with an interim evaluation to the Committee in February 2009 and 12 month on evaluation in July 2009.**

**Concluding Remarks**

- 88 The Review Group is satisfied that it has achieved the aims and objectives of the Review as set out in the scoping document.
- 89 The Group would like to thank all those who contributed as "expert witnesses" or by providing information, or as hosts for any visits that Members made.
- 90 It is difficult to find easy and comprehensive solutions to the issues that have emerged, but it is hoped that the conclusions and recommendations that we have reached will assist the Cabinet and other agencies in developing policies and strategies and in contributing to improvements in performance in the main areas covered by this report.
- 91 There may be other people and agencies that the Review could have invited contributions from. However, with limited resources and time, it was considered that a cross section of useful evidence has been achieved given these parameters.

## **5. GLOSSARY**

A glossary of terms used in this report follows, preceding the annexes. The Review Group has tried so far as possible, to write the report in plain English.

BEM – British Ethnic Minorities

CFA - Chief Fire Officers Association

CLG – Communities & Local Government

Co-response – response to incidents involving work with other agencies

EU – European Union

FBU – Fire Brigades Union

FPS – Fireman’s Pension Scheme

FRS - Fire & Rescue Services

FSEC – Fire Service Emergency Cover Model

IRMP – Integrated Risk Management Plan

ODPM - (The former) Office for the Deputy Prime Minister

RDS - Retained Duty System

RFU – Retained Firefighters Trade Union

RLOs – Retained Liaison Officers

SMT – Senior Management Team

**Scrutiny Review Scoping Template****Annex 1**

<b>Review Topic</b> (name of Review)	Ability to Recruit (and Retain) Retained Fire Fighters
<b>Review Reference Code</b>	CS00X
<b>Parent Scrutiny Committee</b>	Community Safety
<b>Lead Member Review Group</b> (Cllr's involved)	Cllrs Farrow, Mathew, Altaf-Khan
<b>Member responsible for tracking</b> (nominate one Cllr)	To be nominated
<b>Officer Support</b> (Scrutiny Review Officer lead)	Julian Hehir
<b>Rationale</b> (key issues and/ or reason for doing the Review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both the Fire Cover Review and the Directorate have highlighted the fact that one third of the retained firefighter complement have left the service in the last 3 years. It is widely acknowledged that the Retained Duty System is "a highly cost effective component of the Service".</li> <li>In identifying what the problems are in recruiting retained staff, workforce diversity will necessarily have to be addressed, as it has been highlighted in the Fire &amp; Rescue Service by the Annual Audit &amp; Inspection letter; "performance in equalities and diversity is currently mixed".</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose of Review/Objective</b> (specify exactly what the Review should achieve)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To examine the current system and processes for recruiting retained fire fighters and to recommend ways in which these can be enhanced to attract and then maintain a higher establishment.</li> <li>To incorporate recommendations on how to improve workforce diversity and whole time firefighter recruitment.</li> <li>Following the in-depth review on Fire Cover, this Review will monitor the implementation of the recommendations and outcomes of the former (largely focused on recruitment and retention) as compared to the position the previous year.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Indicators of Success</b> (what factors would tell you what a good Review should look like)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A good secondary research base.</li> <li>• Appropriate methodologies for and means of gathering evidence.</li> <li>• Recommendations that, if implemented, will enhance recruitment, retention and diversity, whilst also being cost effective.</li> <li>• Being satisfied that what the Review perceives as the “problems” with recruitment &amp; retention, <u>are</u> the problems.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Methodology/ Approach</b> (what types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why)</p>	<p>Secondary and primary research:</p> <p>Including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with expert witnesses.</li> <li>• Visits to other authorities.</li> <li>• Visits to retained stations.</li> <li>• Benchmarking.</li> <li>• MORI/opinion surveys of Oxfordshire residents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specify Witnesses/ Experts</b> (who to see and when)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Parry – Director for Community Safety and Chief Fire Officer.</li> <li>• Mike Smyth – Deputy Chief Fire Officer.</li> <li>• HR – Community Safety Directorate.</li> <li>• Representatives of FBU and RFU.</li> <li>• Representatives of other fire authorities (2 diverse authorities).</li> <li>• Retained firefighters including those in pilot scheme for 3 Oxon stations.</li> <li>• Adrian Harper-Smith – Corporate Strategies Manager.</li> <li>• Cllr Judith Heathcoat – Cabinet Member for Community Safety.</li> <li>• Tony Whiting – Recruitment Officer for Retained Firefighters – Community Safety Directorate.</li> <li>• Fire Cadets.</li> <li>• Chamber of Commerce.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specify Evidence Sources for Documents</b> (which to look at)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oxfordshire Fire Cover Review – January 2007.</li> <li>• Integrated Risk Management Plan 2007/08.</li> <li>• Government Circulars.</li> <li>• OCC Intranet.</li> <li>• Centre for Public Scrutiny.</li> <li>• LGA Fire Service Conference.</li> <li>• Annual Audit &amp; Inspection letter.</li> <li>• Comprehensive Performance Assessment.</li> <li>• BPR on Fire Fighter Recruitment - 2006</li> <li>• Relevant legislation.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment guidance and packs.</li> <li>Citizen's Panel.</li> <li>Other published documents.</li> </ul>	
<b>Specify Site Visits</b> (where and when)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To Oxfordshire fire stations – probably including the 3 piloted for a retained salary scheme.</li> <li>Two other diverse fire authorities (not in the South of England)</li> </ul>	
<b>Specify Evidence Sources for Views of Stakeholders</b> (consultation/ workshops/ focus groups/ public meetings)		Mainly interviews and visits, but possibly conferences and seminars too.	
<b>Publicity requirements</b> (what is needed – fliers, leaflets, radio broadcast, press-release, etc.)		N/A – to be reviewed on completion of review report.	
<b>Resource requirements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person-days</li> <li>Expenditure</li> </ul>	40. £1500.		
<b>Barriers/ dangers/ risks</b> (identify any weaknesses and potential pitfalls)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unrealistic recommendations – ie costs incurred from the review for the implementation of any proposals drawn, before going to Cabinet for approval/comment or refusal.</li> <li>Duplication of activity in Fire Cover Review and of similar projects being undertaken by other authorities/agencies.</li> </ul>	
<b>Projected start date</b>	Sept 2007	<b>Draft Report Deadline</b>	April 2008
<b>Meeting Frequency</b>	Not Wednesday – every 2 weeks.	<b>Projected completion date</b>	Jun 2008
<b>When to evaluate impact and response</b>	Jun 2009 approx		
<b>Methods for tracking and evaluating</b>	Member-led tracking using tracking template and methodology. Question and answer session at Committee.		

**Useful links:**

<http://www.fireservice.co.uk/>

(re definitions of retained fire fighters)

<http://www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk/index.php>

(re equality and diversity toolkit)

Recent joint review of the retained service by the then ODPM and the CFOA /Chief Fire Officers Association (ref folder on shared:drive).



**Annex 2****Main issues and related recommendations on retained recruitment and selection from the ODPM/CFA review in 2004**

These are the key issues that the review started its work from:

- High turnover rates compared to the whole-time system.
- Impact of demographic change.
- Movement of industries away from rural areas.
- Modernisation of the selection process. Need for standardisation and consistency.
- Retained duty system as a whole-time recruitment stream.
- The effect on recruitment and retention of legislative change to the DDA.
- Need for a recruitment welcome pack.
- The 5 minute rule – how to widen the catchment area of retained stations to enhance recruitment.
- The effects of social change and changing attitudes on recruitment and retention.
- Introducing flexibility in work patterns.
- Exploring methods of remuneration for commitment and improving retention rates...including to deal with local shortages (one size fits all versus toolkit options).
- Setting a national pay structure for pay and commitment with allowance for local flexibility to meet exceptional demands/circumstances.
- Introducing pension arrangements for RDS.
- Operational duties beyond 55.
- The need for good practice guidance.
- Ensuring that RDS issues are considered at the inception of policy making.
- Lack of ownership for addressing challenges around RDS.
- Tendency of senior managers and members to focus around issues affecting the whole-time duty system.
- Assisting with housing in areas of high property prices so that firefighters can live within appropriate turnout areas.
- The impact of European legislation requires the service to examine the hours of commitment expected from RDS personnel.
- The potential impact of new legislation.
- Financial implications – the cost of remedies and the cost of inaction; unrealistic expectation that many years of under investment in the retained duty system can be overcome cost neutrally; retained duty system run on the cheap.
- Creating an effective communication strategy and delivering the key messages coming out of the review.

Certain of the issues dovetail into the recommendations. Those that seemed most pertinent for this scrutiny review's work are highlighted here:

Recommendation 2 - Raising public awareness of the role of the RDS and their recruitment process.

3 - Being proactive and strategic....making links to local businesses.

7- Fire and Rescue Services should develop an advertising and recruitment strategy taking into account the different demographic make up of areas.

10 - Recruitment strategies should ensure that they include effective methods of attracting and recruiting under-represented groups.

11 - Need to change internal culture to ensure that the RDS is properly valued.

13 - Services should include in strategic planning, the wider role for RDS personnel in areas such as co-response and community safety.... and (rec15)....how to make better use of RDS staff in community fire safety work.

23 - In the IRMP process – should consider the options open to them to attract and retain staff including utilising different remuneration and commitment models.

24 - Point of entry selection tests should ensure that the new process sets appropriate, fair and measurable criteria for the assessment of candidates for all of the operational service.

27- Should give specific consideration to the benefits of the varying response times in order to widen the recruitment catchment area for RDS stations.

28 - Consider introducing more flexible arrangements to encourage a wider variety of applicants by eg: trialling alternative remuneration systems; encouraging those who can provide RDS cover of 120 hrs a week to do so.

30 - General set of principles around pay and hours of availability to be agreed.

31 - New pension provisions.

32 - Develop the components for a retained duty system toolkit of guidance, advice and good practice.

35 - Elected members and senior officers to give clear leadership to the service to show understanding of the RDS's role and importance.

39 - Research by ODPM into primary employment of RDS staff should be used to inform debate.

**“The Retained Duty System: Making Change Happen”**  
**Summary points**

- Equality, diversity and fairness – some services were not active in recruiting women and felt that women were relatively difficult to attract in some areas.
- External recognition – engagement with the business community.
- Many felt that by releasing employees for the RDS employers were, in effect, sponsoring the Service.
- Employer recognition or reward schemes are important.
- A national TV campaign, centrally funded on how the RDS worked and recognising the employers’ contribution, was a key priority.
- Use of the local media, free press features; using local Councillors to spread the word, rewards system for employers. Leaflet drops, local radio, local newspapers for ads and leaflets, supermarket leaflets, poster campaigns, local events’ banners at stations, websites, visits to educational establishments, mail shots, pizza delivery leaflets, word of mouth.
- **In Recruitment and retention the work done by Oxfordshire in engaging with the community and with employers was seen as an excellent exemplar by the workshop.**
- Need for a national awareness strategy.
- Encouraging people to stay – through salary and pension schemes, improving communication, providing access to development programmes. The new RDS pension scheme was seen as a big incentive.
- Aspiration should be for a dedicated member of staff to look after RDS in every fire service; rewards that could be enhanced by negotiating special rates for gym membership and employers’ rewards.
- **NB** Success stories noted included awards’ ceremonies for achievements in co-responding, highest availability award for RDS personnel, awards to employers, full inclusion for RDS in assessment development centre process, mixed crewing, covering sickness for whole time staff, use of Prince’s Trust volunteers, inclusion of RDS in road traffic collision extrication competitions, training as trauma cares etc.

- The role of senior management and elected members in leadership and championing was also recognised as vital.

**Annex 4****Witness list**

Tony Whiting – Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service – community Safety Directorate

Alun Taylor – Chief Fire Officer – Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service

Phil Clarke – Training Manager– Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service

Dave Jennings – Retained Liaison Officer– Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service

Members of the Shropshire Fire Authority

Mick Stead – Dorset Fire Authority

Retained Staff – Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service – Focus Group

John Parry – Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire

Mike Smyth – Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire

Sue Evans – Fire Service College, Moreton-in- Marsh

John Johnstone – Fire Service College seconded from CLG

Ian Mills – Corporate Risk & Performance Advisor – Oxfordshire County Council

## Annex 5

### Dorset RDS Review recommendations on recruitment and retention:

#### Recruitment and Retention

<p><b>Recommendation 9</b> DFRS adopts the policy of using its fleet to raise the profile of the RDS by advertising the benefits of contributing to the community while receiving a financial reward.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10</b> Information boards are sited outside every RDS station or appropriate locality so that they can be used for recruitment purposes and community education.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11</b> A consistent approach to the management of recruitment practices should be developed for firefighters working the retained duty system.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12</b> Performance indicators should be developed to indicate the effectiveness of recruitment practices for all stages of the process.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13</b> Following a feasibility study consideration is given to developing a policy of transferability between duty systems.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 14</b> DFRS considers the introduction of all of the schemes that have been identified as being successful for other FRSs in improving employer liaison.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 15</b> That DFRS adopts a more corporate and consistent approach to developing partnership arrangements with local and National employers through improved communication with representative trade groups such as the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, Business in the Community and local chambers of commerce.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 16</b> RDS contracts are reissued to allow individuals to confirm their current availability levels. In addition the statement of particulars will be changed to indicate that there is the requirement to be available to attend fire calls for the period of availability specified in the DFRS 176.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 17</b> That responsibility for deciding the extension to individual response standards at RDS stations is devolved to the Group Managers with line manager responsibility for each station.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 18</b> All managers in DFRS should, where practicable, release personnel from their daytime work to undertake RDS duties.</p>

**Recommendation 19**

To support station availability/contract profiles and to ensure that the issue of 120 hours constituting full cover is effectively managed a flexible, financially viable, risk assessed approach to establishment levels should be considered as one method of managing risk within DFRS's Community Safety Plan.

**Annex 6****BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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**Summary of CLG, published Dec 07- The Retained Duty System: A Survey of Local Employers.**

These are the main points that seem worth drawing out.

- There appear to be no insurmountable barriers to releasing staff for the RDS.
- Contractually, most treat RDS in the same way as other staff.
- Employers who do release their staff now, acknowledge the various challenges, but appear to be willing to work around them.
- Where former employers were surveyed, in most cases RDS were no longer employed because of changes in their individual circumstances rather than as a result of a change in policy.
- Generally, there is limited contact between employers and the Fire & Rescue Service and/or their local fire station. Better communication would be welcomed by employers
- Some employers would like recognition or a show of gratitude from the service for their support.
- Employers could be invited to certain social events etc but the F&R Services might also consider some sign of association (eg logo) to employers which could be incorporated into note paper, letterheads etc
- It was suggested that individual F&R Services should canvass local employers in the vicinity of fire stations (mailshots, telephone, face to face) to promote the benefits of RDS firefighting.
- Before being approached by staff for release for RDS duties around half of current and former employers had no contact with either the local station or the FRS.
- Levels of imagined benefits – only around a quarter of non employers (and this was similar to employers) envisaged that staff released for RDS duties would bring extra health and safety and first aid training, or experience of and training for dealing with emergencies; (Would have imagined that this was higher?)
- Most employers will accommodate RDS staff where possible.
- Less than a third of employers imposed restrictions on availability of their RDS employees.
- The majority (81%) release staff during work hours.
- Only a minority (9%) have turned down a request to be released.
- Among the benefits of employing RDS firefighters are: having staff with health and safety and first aid training; training in and experience in handling emergencies; ability to conduct fire safety checks; respect/prestige in the local community etc.
- Disadvantages perceived include employees being away during working hours, leaving work at short notice; adverse effects on productivity; problems in covering staff absences; late night call outs; tired employees
- Almost 2/3rds of current employers have never received any information explaining what employing an RDS involves

- Very few current employers say that the F&RS publicises their commitment to the RDS
- Among non-employers, it is clear that the disadvantages are much easier to envisage than the benefits.
- If a new employee was already a firefighter when they joined the new organisation, an encouraging 74% of non-employers said that they would consider continuing to release them; only 9% would not.

The findings from this survey do not present any new themes that the Review has not been aware of; but it does provide some statistics to support some of the things that we know about.

Among the things that have either been suggested or tried are the contact by mail shot, direct contact etc that Tony Whiting (and other authorities) has used; a logo or other means of recognition for employers; that staff are generally allowed to be released; that there are various other benefits to employers having retained f/f s. But, that there are perceived disadvantages is new.

The Review also had some case study anecdotes which suggested that some (smaller) employers locally, are less than willing to release staff than this survey would indicate.