



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

3rd February 2014

Operational Resourcing Strategy (January 2014- March 2015)

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To brief Members on the Service's Operational Resourcing Strategy for the period January 2014 to March 2015.

Background

- 2 At an extraordinary meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 10th December 2010, Members voted unanimously for a budget frozen at £32 million for the next three years. This required savings of £2.45 million to be implemented which formed the basis of the financial strategy 2011-2012 to 2013-2014.
- 3 In implementing this financial strategy officers adhered to a set of principles agreed by Members during the drafting process:
 - i. The reduction of 7.5% was to be evenly spread over the 3 years i.e. a reduction in the budget of £800,000 in years 1, 2 and 3.
 - ii. That savings should come from packages of changes across the whole Service and all budget lines.
 - iii. Members reiterated that support staff should not be cut before frontline options but rather that they should be reduced in proportion to the core service for which they provide support.

- iv. In year 1 the majority of savings were to be achieved through the Officer Cover Review. In years 2 and 3, the additional savings would mainly have to be found by changes to the number of firefighters employed. This was done through the introduction of a new system of rostering wholetime firefighters for duty which reduced the number needed by 22.
 - v. The creation of a strategy to mitigate the risk of compulsory redundancies. It was recognised that in having to reduce the number of firefighter posts it was unlikely that this could be achieved through retirement or natural wastage.
- 4 The resulting strategy to mitigate the risk of compulsory redundancy was the suspension of widespread firefighter recruitment. This was successful and turnover during this period was all of a voluntary nature.
 - 5 During this period 22 volunteers were formed into an 'operational resource pool' to provide flexible support to locations impacted upon by the suspension of widespread recruitment.
 - 6 In January 2013 it was judged that the risk of compulsory redundancies had passed and therefore it was possible to recruit to retained duty system firefighting contracts. This successful, targeted, campaign resulted in 25 firefighters being appointed.
 - 7 During 2013-2014 a second intervention was introduced which was designed to increase the flexibility of operational response to changing incident patterns and rates. The additional hours pilot utilises the professional skills of existing NWFRS firefighters, increasing the Service's operational resource on a voluntary basis whilst taking cognisance of the Working Time Directive.

Information

- 8 The operational resourcing strategy is focused on the delivery of a professional and resilient emergency response service which will provide a competent, skilled, healthy and safe workforce. The intention is to contribute to the achievement of the proposed 2014-2015 improvement objective of ensuring the best level of service within financial constraints by using a variety of management solutions to optimise fire and rescue cover.

- 9 Members will be aware that for a number of years the Service has sought to respond to the challenges of recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of individuals to traditional Retained Duty System firefighter contracts, recognising the substantial associated financial investment and the resulting availability issues.
- 10 Taking long term sustainability and affordability of service as guiding principles, the strategy is designed to introduce suitable alternative options for the provision of fire cover particularly in rural areas. This strategy will enable the measured implementation of a range of options including recruitment.
- 11 The CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Annual Survey Report 2013 indicates that the most common approach to addressing recruitment difficulties is to develop existing employees for hard to recruit for positions. This is the preferred first choice as a route to capitalising on existing organisational knowledge, reinforcing competence and firefighter safety. The proposal therefore features the reconfiguration of existing arrangements and the recruitment of new employees, in small numbers, to both WDS and RDS contracts.
- 12 Consultation has taken place with the representative bodies on the introduction of innovative 21 hour contracts which would be ring-fenced to existing RDS firefighters. There would be the option for these firefighters to increase worked hours beyond 21 within the parameters of the Working Time Directive.
- 13 Support would be given to RDS stations by backfilling the vacancies created via external recruitment to traditional RDS contracts, modelled upon the successful 2013 campaign.
- 14 Members should note that there is a need to influence the workforce age profile and the resourcing strategy provides a chance to create youth employment opportunities through firefighting apprenticeships. This element of the strategy has the potential to positively impact upon a small group of young people from North Wales providing the opportunity to be economically active and avoid the potential negative health impacts of unemployment.

Benefits

15 It is anticipated that the strategy will have a range of benefits for the organisation and individual employees whilst creating employment and sustainable fire cover for the communities of North Wales:

- A mixed strategy lessens the organisational reliance on traditional recruitment of retained firefighters with the inherent difficulties experienced in North Wales and evidenced elsewhere in the UK
- The use of 21 hour contracts mirror the concept of the operational resource pool leading to increased flexibility of deployment and improved fire cover
- Internal rather than external recruitment to 21 hour contracts will result in a reduction in recruitment, selection and training costs
- Firefighters that secure a 21 hour contract will overcome the restrictions of the retained duty system on their work life balance
- Increased movement between duty systems may reduce turnover of RDS firefighters
- The recruitment of apprentices will provide employment opportunities and contribute to creating balance in the workforce age profile (Appendix 2, Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2012-13)

Recommendation

16 Members are asked to note the content of the report.