

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No 10

MEETING: 24th JANUARY 2011

SUBJECT: REVIEW INTO THE SUITABILITY OF THE LOW ACTIVITY STAFFING MODEL

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY,
THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the findings of the review into the potential use of a low activity staffing model within the service, undertaken as part of the Integrated Risk Management (IRMP) Annual Action Plan 2009/2010, and to seek approval to the recommendations resulting from this review.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will recall, the 2010/11 IRMP annual plan contained four key actions one of which was to undertake an examination of the potential benefits to be derived from the introduction of a low activity staffing model at specific fire stations within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.2 With the exception of Gateshead West Community Fire Station, which uses retained staffing, this service exclusively employs a shift system that utilises a four watch rota providing staffing on stations 24 hours a day, seven days a week using firefighters who work a 42 hour week. From an operational perspective this is a highly effective model. However, it also has high cost overheads associated with it and finding the right balance between effectiveness and cost is an ongoing issue for all fire and rescue services
- 2.3 In light of this, a small number of services have introduced a staffing system that aims to maintain the high level of operational capability associated with the wholetime duty system, whilst realising significant savings on staffing costs.
- 2.4 This system is commonly referred to as a low activity staffing model (LASM) that incorporates a two-stage duty system comprising a period of positive, or working, hours followed by a period of standby hours for staff who reside on, or near to, the fire station for the duration of their 'on call' duty period. This ensures that operational response times remain broadly the same as these provided by the wholetime system but, because it requires a smaller number of staff to operate the system, costs are reduced significantly.
- 2.5 However, due to the fact that those individuals working this type of system are required to be available for a period of time that is at least double that required

of the wholetime staffing model, it can only be effectively deployed at stations where the level of risk and overall operational activity is deemed to be low.

- 2.6 Consequently, the review set out to examine the levels of risk and operational activity within those fire and rescue services that had employed this staffing model as well as examining risk and activity levels at specific fire stations within Tyne and Wear in order to ascertain whether there was scope for a low activity staffing model to be deployed at key locations within the area.

3 UNDERTAKING OF THE REVIEW

- 3.1 In undertaking the research for this review a range of information sources were used, as highlighted below:

- Risk profiles using:
 - Fire Services Emergency Cover (FSEC)
 - MOSAIC to identify population make up
 - CFRMIS to identify number of and type of risks.
- Tyne and Wear operational incident data.
- The current annual staffing costs associated with two specific stations where risk and operational activity were already judged to be comparatively low, namely Sunderland South and Gateshead South Community Fire Station.
- Details from West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's (WYFRS) Day Crewing (Close Call) staffing model
- Details from Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service's (MFRS) Low Level Activity and Risk (LLAR) model
- Details from Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's (LFRS) Day Crewing Plus system.

4 EMERGING COMMON PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 From the above sources of information it became apparent that there were a set of common principles which were applicable to all of those fire and rescue services that had introduced low activity staffing models and these are set out below:

- In considering the suitability of a fire station to operate such a staffing model, each fire and rescue service considered the risk profile of the fire station area concerned in order to confirm that the area involved was low risk with low levels of fire service activity.
- Based upon the information gained from the examination of risk, activity levels and local needs, each service opted to split a 24 hour period into

two shifts with the first shift (shift A) broadly covering the period containing the higher levels of operational activity and the second shift (shift B) the period of low activity.

- A fire appliance is required to be fully available for all duties commensurate with those of wholetime crews for shift A, and shift B is covered by the crew being placed on standby, which means they are available for operational incidents but are not required to undertake other duties.
- Personnel are required to stay in accommodation provided by the service, either on the fire station itself or adjacent to the station.
- All of the services visited provide staff with an enhanced salary for the additional cover provided.
- All of the models in operation have generated savings on staffing costs in the region of 40%.

Taking all of the above information into account the review team undertook a careful examination of the data relating to Sunderland South and Gateshead South community fire stations in relation to the viability of introducing a low activity staffing model into Tyne and Wear and the details of this work are set out in the following section for the attention of Members.

5 SUNDERLAND SOUTH COMMUNITY FIRE STATION: RISK AND ACTIVITY PROFILE

- 5.1 Sunderland South community fire station serves the residential areas of Houghton, Hetton, Shiney Row and Easington Lane. It provides fire and rescue cover mainly for residential premises and a number of small industrial and warehouse sites within the area.
- 5.2 The station serves a population of 37,706 who occupy 16, 379 dwellings. The tenure classifications for the dwellings within the four wards within area are as follows:
- 62.7% owner occupied
 - 3% private rented
 - 23.8% local authority rented
 - 8.7% housing association rented

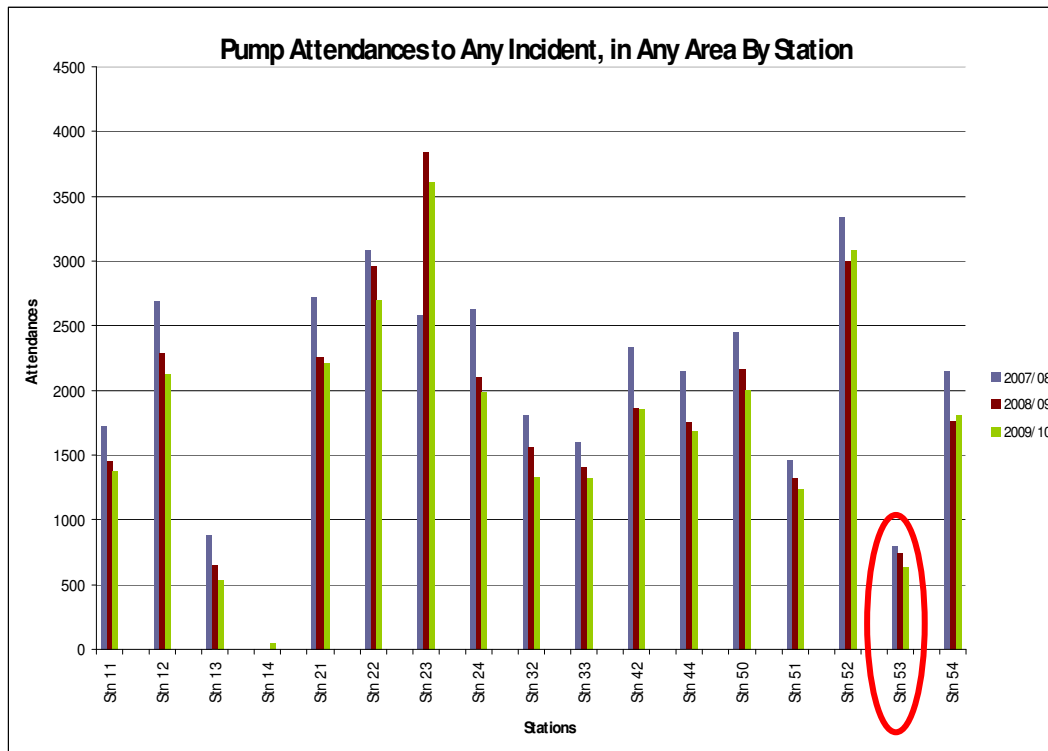


Chart 1

- 5.3 As can be seen in the chart above, Sunderland South fire station (Stn 53) is one of the least operationally active stations in the service, with only Gateshead South fire station (Stn 13) and Gateshead West retained fire station (Stn 14) attending fewer incidents.
- 5.4 Furthermore, the chart also illustrates that, over time, the fire station in question has seen the number of operational incidents within the area fall significantly. Thus in 2007/08 the fire appliance from Sunderland South fire station was used 797 times and this has reduced over the years to a total of 635 incidents in 2009/10, which is a 20% reduction.
- 5.5 Finally as can be seen in chart 2 for the Sunderland South area, the data highlights the activity level throughout a 24 hour period and serves to illustrate how a two shift system could be split to provide standby and positive hours.

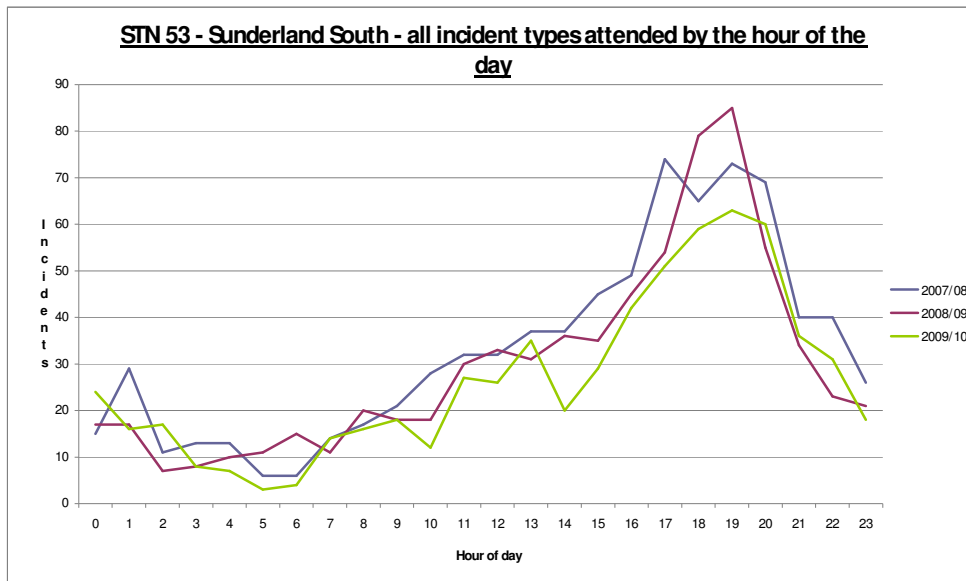


Chart 2

6 GATESHEAD SOUTH COMMUNITY FIRE STATION: RISK AND ACTIVITY PROFILE

- 6.1 Gateshead South Community Fire Station serves the residential areas of Birtley and Kibblesworth. It provides fire and rescue cover mainly for residential, commercial and warehouse premises within the area.
- 6.2 The station serves a population of 26,181 occupying 11,785 dwellings, with a tenure classification as follows: -
- 57.4% owner occupied
 - 2.7% privately rented
 - 32.8% local authority rented
 - 5.2% housing association rented

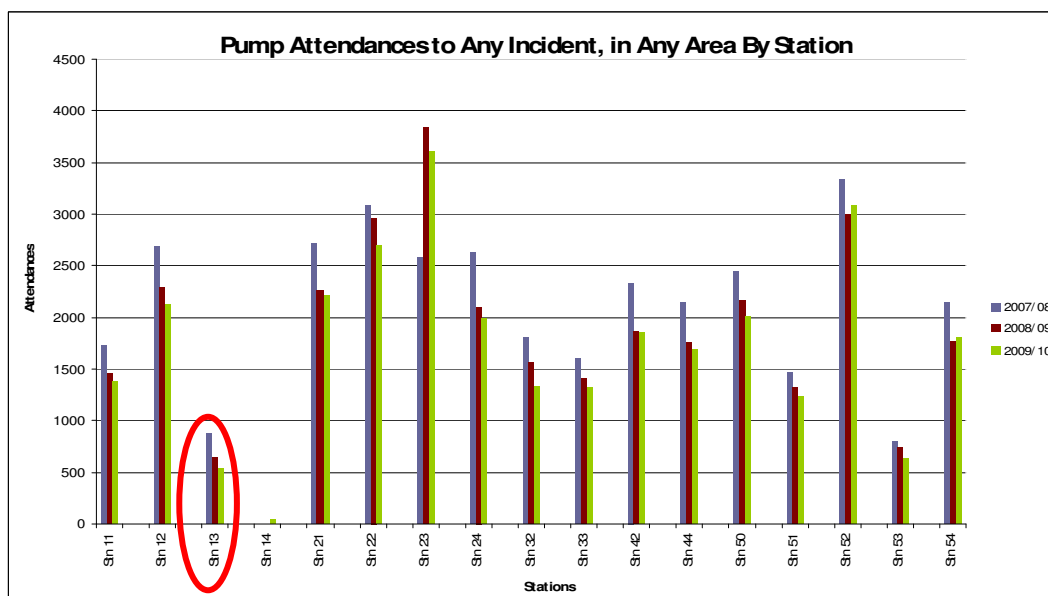


Chart 3

- 6.3 As can be seen in chart 3 above, Gateshead South fire station (Stn 13) is also one of the least operationally active fire stations in the service and the incident rate measured over time is also falling.
- 6.4 In 2007/08 the fire appliances from Gateshead South were used 882 times, this has reduced over the years to 534 in 2009/10, which is a 39% reduction in operational incidents.
- 6.5 The number of incidents within each year also provides an activity profile for the station.

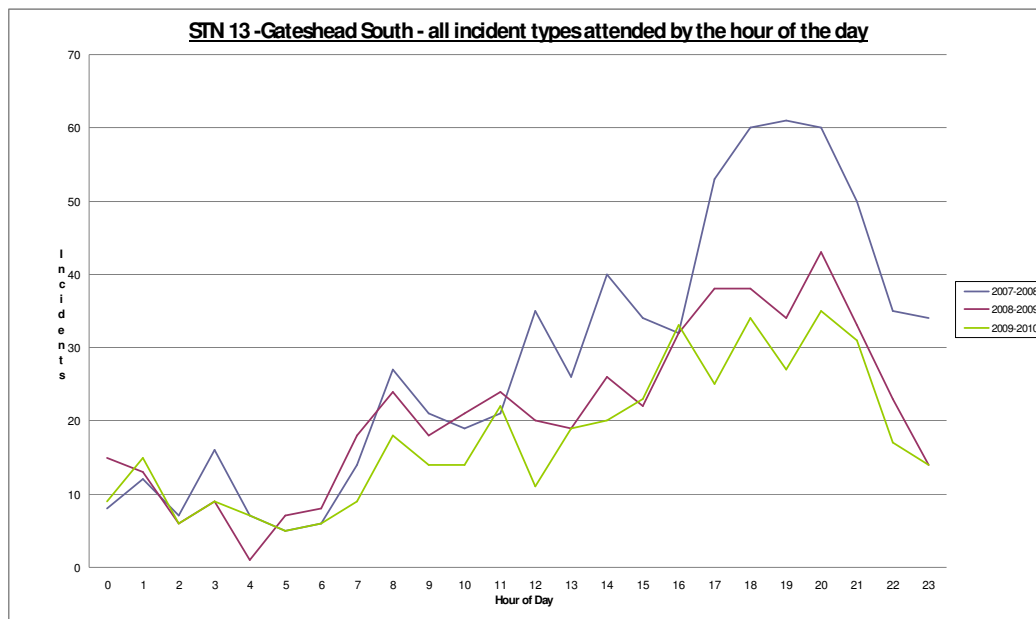


Chart 4

- 6.6 As detailed within 5.5, the above chart also shows the lowest levels of activity occur during early morning with incident levels building up during the day to then reduce towards late evening, once again facilitating a two shift system utilising positive and standby hours.

7 ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS

- 7.1 During standby periods, staff reside within accommodation provided by the service and all of the fire services visited by the review team had made such dedicated accommodation available. This is not currently available within this service
- 7.2 The current Authority plan to replace the Sunderland South fire station, in line with the estates development strategy, provides an opportunity to design such accommodation into the new station. In the case of Gateshead fire station provision will have to be made for the construction of bespoke accommodation on the existing fire station site.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Following the analysis of the risk and activity profile of Sunderland South fire station and Gateshead South fire station and taking into account the information forthcoming from other fire and rescue services who have implemented such models, it is the opinion of the Chief Fire Officer that both fire stations could operate effectively utilising a low activity staffing model.
- 8.2 The evidence gathered and the modelling undertaken confirms that implementation of such a system will not adversely impact on the response times within the relevant station area, nor the service provided to the community of Tyne and Wear.
- 8.3 However, due to the duration of the shifts that firefighters on this shift system would be required to work, both locations would require dedicated accommodation to be provided.
- 8.4 Subject to the approval of Members, officers will also need to commence consultations with the representative bodies to agree the many details related to the operation of this model and this work needs to commence swiftly if it is to be implemented within an appropriate timescale.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 It is envisaged that the implementation of a low activity staffing model at the two stations specified in the review would realise annual revenue savings of approximately £800,000 per annum.
- 9.2 However, in order to implement the model, suitable accommodation will need to be provided on both of the fire stations in question. In the case of Sunderland South fire station the funding for this can be accommodated from within the estates development reserve, in which this fire station has already been identified for replacement.
- 9.3 In the case of Gateshead South fire station it has been estimated that the cost of the additional accommodation to be constructed on the existing site will be in the region of £300,000, and this will be built into the capital programme.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 The Chief Fire Officer is of the opinion that the introduction of a low activity staffing model will not impact on the emergency response arrangements provided to the community of Tyne and Wear.
- 10.2 The Chief Fire Officer is also satisfied that the arrangements will not have a detrimental impact on the safety of operational firefighters.

11 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications resulting from this specific report.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Consider the contents of this report,
 - b) Approve the commencement of work towards the implementation of a low activity staffing model at Sunderland South and Gateshead South community fire stations,
 - c) Receive further reports as appropriate.
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- SCSP/IRMP 2010 – 2012
- SMT report 29th September 2010