

**Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

**Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee**

**Item: 7**

**22 October 2013**

**Evaluation of the Retained Duty System at St Mary's Fire Station**

**Report by the Chief Officer**

**Contact: SM Rob Cole, GM Jason Avery - Telephone: 07918887850**

**1 Summary**

- 1.1 The Retained Duty System (RDS) involving a crew of retained firefighters at St Mary's Fire Station commenced as an operational section on 1 October 2007 as part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2007/10.
- 1.2 The aim of the introduction of the RDS section was to improve the operational resilience within Southampton and to reduce the number of times that appliances were called into the city to attend incidents or provide fire cover.
- 1.3 The RDS section at St Mary's increases the county's performance by 0.2% and costs the service £92,304 per year plus indirect costs for training, one appliance and equipment etc.
- 1.4 This paper makes recommendations on the future of the section based on a thorough analysis of risk data.

**2 Recommendations**

That the Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 notes the content of this evaluation report and recommends that the RDS section at St Mary's be highlighted for inclusion in the Risk Cover Review.
- 2.2 recognises that efficiency savings of nearly £100k could be made by removing the RDS section from St Mary's with a decrease in overall performance within HFRS of only 0.2% on the 8/80 response standard.

**3 Introduction and background**

- 3.1 The introduction of the RDS section at St Mary's was as a result of IRMP objectives, which included the introduction of a first response vehicle at Redbridge Fire Station. An appliance was then relocated from Redbridge to St Mary's to be crewed by the RDS personnel.

- 3.2 The St Marys RDS staffing was set in line with other one-pump RDS sections. The initial problems caused by the lack of competence of the section, and the shortfall in staffing against the approved establishment, were overcome by using whole-time firefighters to supplement the RDS section. This was achieved by increasing the watch strength from fifteen to nineteen to allow three rider positions to be filled by whole-time personnel 24/7. The whole-time watch strength at St Marys has been reduced to fifteen as part of recent efficiency savings. Efforts to bring the RDS section up to full strength and maintain competency at firefighter and supervisory manager levels has been problematic ever since.
- 3.3 The long term viability of this section has in recent years been of great concern to station manager of St Mary's and the group manager of Southampton. Since its inception there has always been a problem with recruiting and retaining the right people for RDS contracts at St Mary's. There is no shortage of what would appear suitable applicants but the majority are failing to either live or work within the recognised response area (four minutes) or cannot give a reliable amount of hours to provide cover (for example students or young people experiencing city living).
- 3.4 St Mary's fire station is positioned in a transient area. In the last six years this has led to RDS personnel at St Mary's continually changing. For example, only one member of the section has been employed since the section's conception, and this is the only person competent in role either at firefighter or supervisory manager level.
- 3.5 Additional management time has been dedicated to dealing with the low experience levels in the section, problems in the maintenance of competency/skills and section cohesion issues. This has been far higher than the time dedicated to a long standing retained section.
- 3.6 Over the past six years these problems have not improved despite many hundreds of management hours being invested by several station and group managers. The establishment of, and the continued progression of, an appropriate management structure has also been challenging and is not yet complete. The requirement is for the RDS section to have one watch manager and two crew managers. However we currently do not have a watch manager, one crew manager is on development and one that is in a temporary.
- 3.7 Despite carrying out recruitment events recently, and implementing a plan aimed at up-skilling supervisory managers with day-to-day support by line managers, the current situation is expected to remain unchanged in the foreseeable future.
- 3.8 St Mary's retained section status has been 'risk critical' 82% of the time since being wholly retained (without the support of additional whole-time supporting crewing levels). Additional risk to the organisation comes from the continuing low operational experience levels and the high numbers of people being developed (90% of all staff on the section).

## **4 Matching resource to risk**

- 4.1 An analysis of the disposition of resources within the Southampton Group has been carried out using data from Community Risk Intelligence (CRI) and an analysis of the risk identified within the Group. The first outcome was the reallocation of the special appliances within the Group, principally the aerial ladder platform (ALP) and small fires vehicle (SFV) from Redbridge to St Mary's and the special equipment unit (SEU) from St Mary's relocated to Redbridge (completed 8 May 2013).
- 4.2 Southampton Group currently has a total of seven front line appliances, five crewed by wholetime firefighters and two crewed by retained firefighters. Three appliances are located at St Mary's (one RDS), two at Hightown, one at Redbridge and one at Hamble fire stations (RDS).
- 4.3 The movement of the SFV to St Mary's has led to a greater operational resilience across the Group. The SFV is being mobilised to all small fires across the Group, leaving the front line appliances at Redbridge, St Mary's and Hightown operationally ready for critical incidents. Currently the SFV is meeting the response standard of attendance within 15 minutes 100% of the time (15/100).
- 4.4 Additional research via CRI has confirmed that no increase in performance or other benefits would be achieved by reallocating any of the Southampton Group wholetime resources.
- 4.5 All of the evidence referenced within this report is available upon request but due to its length and complexity has not been included as an appendix.

## **5 Statistics**

- 5.1 The Service sets an expectation of attending 80% of incidents within 8 minutes (8/80). St Mary's achieved a response of eight minutes to 98% of incidents in 2012 with a four year average of 96.25%, demonstrating that the station's response to critical incidents is consistent and improving.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.2 The CRI report states that removing the RDS appliance from St Mary's will only decrease this performance by 0.2%. This decrease will still allow St Mary's and HFRS to continue to perform well against the 8/80 response standard.
- 5.3 The availability of the section is currently the lowest in the Service. Using a block of time of 15 minutes, it experienced 5156 blocks of unavailability during the period of April – July 2013, compared to just four blocks of unavailability by Fordingbridge.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics taken from Scorecard 2009-2012 inclusive.

## **6 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives**

- 6.1 The introduction of the RDS water tender at St Mary's has not increased the resilience within the city centre with three frontline appliances. Since its introduction the tender has been consistently unavailable due to low crewing levels and skills base (trained in breathing apparatus, incident command and driving). The section was unavailable for operational calls for 42% of 2012-2013.
- 6.2 The provision of the RDS water tender has also not significantly reduced the number of times a fire appliance from a surrounding station has had to be mobilised into St Mary's fire ground for standby duties. So it has not increased the operational resilience in these areas.
- 6.3 The recommendations made within this report support the corporate aims of the Service detailed within the Service plan 2013-2018 in the two significant areas of "Responding to incidents" and "Assets and Money".
- 6.4 The recommendations in this report are made following a thorough evaluation of the risks within Southampton and Hampshire.

## **7 Risk analysis**

- 7.1 The recommendations made are supported by a report from CRI using a simulation model. This report evaluates the effect on performance, both across the county and for individual stations grounds if the RDS appliance from St Mary's were to be removed.
- 7.2 The CRI report analysed three financial years of HFRS incident data from 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2012. The simulation model assigns each incident a risk category based on the information.
- 7.3 Although there was no significant impact on the overall performance of the county the performance of some individual stations did vary. The performance for non-emergency incidents decreased by 0.5% with three fewer incidents.
- 7.4 Using computer modelling and notionally removing the RDS appliance from St Mary's resulted in an overall countywide decrease in performance of 0.2% and two fewer incidents within target for St Mary's station ground.
- 7.5 Currently the St Mary's RDS section has eleven personnel who, in the event of any decision to close the section, would be made redundant or redeployed as an retained firefighter. There would be opposition from the representative bodies and possibly the general public.
- 7.6 There is also a corporate risk to the Service in continuing with the RDS section at St Mary's where there have been, and continue to be, problems with recruitment, retention and competency of the section. This will affect the Service both financially and in respect to operational effectiveness.

7.7 Due to the high turn over of personnel it is predicted that the staffing numbers and the competencies of the retained section will remain unchanged at this concerning low level.

## **8 People impact assessment**

8.1 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the equality and human rights legislation.

## **9 Environmental and sustainability impact assessment**

9.1 No issues have been identified through an impact assessment

## **10 Resource implications if the RDS section at St Mary's were to be closed**

### **10.1 Human Resources**

If any decision were made to close the RDS section there would be eleven compulsory redundancies associated with this proposal as there is no scope to redeploy personnel on a retained contract at St Mary's fire station. RDS employees will be able to redeploy to other retained fire stations, however this would be based on availability of vacancies at alternative fire stations at the time and the individual's ability to respond to that new fire station in four minutes from their work or home address.

Other re deployment opportunities would need to be looked into, such as redeployment to the incident command unit based at Service Headquarters. Given St Mary's proximity to SHQ, this is a viable alternative if vacancies are available.

### **10.2 Physical Resources**

A water tender main pumping appliance and associated equipment would be returned to the Service fleet. All fire kit will be returned and where applicable recycled within the Service stores department following testing by Bristol Uniforms.

### **10.3 Information and Communications Technology Resources**

None

### **10.4 Financial Implications**

This would make a direct saving of £92,304 per year.

## **11 Consultation**

11.1 The guiding principle in deciding how extensively consultation is completed is that any person or organisation that might have a legitimate interest in the

proposals under consideration, or who may be affected by those proposals, should have the opportunity to express their views.

11.2 The scope of the consultation undertaken will be proportionate to the nature and extent of any changes proposed. The public is clearly most interested in those aspects that impinge directly on the service provided to them, and their perception of its impact upon their safety. Staffing and related issues are usually of lesser importance to the public, but of course are of great importance to employees and their representatives.

11.3 The following groups will need to be consulted;

- The general public, council tax payers, households, etc.,
- Community organisations, including specific community groups, such as ethnic minority and other often excluded groups,
- Public representatives and Councillors,
- Local businesses,
- Local authorities, public agencies, and other emergency services,
- Employees (uniformed and non-uniformed) and their representatives.

11.4 At this time the only recommendation is to include the future of the RDS section at St Mary's in the wider Risk Cover Review which is about to commence. That project will develop its own consultation strategy.

## **12 Conclusion**

12.1 Despite considerable management effort it is obvious that the RDS section at St Mary's is not meeting expectations and can be considered not to be viable. Its future should be considered as part of the wider risk cover review that HFRS is about to commence.

## **13 Background papers**

13.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

- CRI Report No 12-208
- CRI Report No 13-016 (addendum to commissioned work 12-208)
- Appliance unavailability frequency report

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.