

Closedown and Evaluation Report



Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service

Department: Service Improvement, Service Delivery

Project Number on CPS: 1606

Project Manager: Peter Hayes

Project Sponsor: Neil Griffiths

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Project title and brief description	<p>Wilmslow Duty System Transition</p> <p>As part of the IRMP 2020-2024, Members of the Fire Authority took the decision to transition Wilmslow Fire Station from a Nucleus duty system (Full time staff in the day and on-call staff at night) to a Day Crewed System (DC1). To operate a DC1 model there was a requirement for accommodation to be provided for the DC1 firefighters to ensure response times can be met.</p> <p>The project was split into 2 workstreams:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Purchase of houses within 3.5-5 minute travel time2) Redeployment of staff to the new DC1 system.
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Achievement of Project Outputs and Outcomes

Project Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing options and specification for purchase of houses helping to establish potential costs and viability of securing houses appropriately situated – this was completed successfully and a specification for houses was produced to aid in the purchase of houses. This specification document also provided further details, required condition of property and a
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	<p>method through which sign-off and approval was to be agreed. This method worked well in general and allowed for an informed decision to be made. It's worth noting that the original per house budget ceiling provided was, in some circumstances, raised to allow for better quality houses to be sourced. House offers and purchases were approved via the Project board, Director of Governance and Commissioning, Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the CFA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 houses purchased – 3 bedroom properties, with the option of buying a 10th if required – 9 houses were procured in to ensure the date deadline for implementation within the 2024 IRMP timescale was met. This project actually realised the benefits a full year earlier than required.• A new DC1 duty system to incorporate Wilmslow and the staff redeployment procedure – The DC1 agreement has been temporarily amended to include Wilmslow. A clear staff deployment procedure was created and successfully implemented together with formal consultation involving the Trade Union.• Temporarily amended the existing Nucleus system agreement to recognise that Wilmslow is no longer part of the Nucleus arrangements – this has been successfully updated
Project Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a guaranteed 100% availability of the fire engine 24/7 without the need to recruit and retain On-Call firefighters or bring in supplementary resources – This has been achieved. The DC1 system was implemented on 31st March 2023.• The new DC1 duty system will cost £253K less to run per annum – This saving has not yet been realised fully as the project has not run for a whole year and the PIR will allow the Service to evaluate the costs savings from this• Increased income from rent – The firefighters are now occupying the new houses. All DC1 firefighters have signed up to the terms and conditions of the DC1 system and are paying appropriate fees (pay and recognition policy).• Provision of a sustainable and proportionate level of cover for the risk and activity levels in the area – the Service will no longer need to provide backfill to support the On Call duty system on a regular basis – this has been achieved as the station no longer has an On Call duty system team.• Authority still able to meet its 10 minute life risk response standard on 80% of occasions. This will include a 5 minute delay for firefighters to respond from home outside of core hours (during evenings and some weekends) – this will be captured by the PIR which is planned to be completed In June 2024.

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- **Reduced environmental impact due to less travel required from firefighters supporting the On Call at night from other fire stations in Cheshire** – achieved. Some estimates can be provided as to the environmental benefits this will have reaped for the station. As part of the PIR the number of movements for firefighters cover/out staffing will be looked at and an average CO2 impact for each journey will be established.
- **The Service will own 9 houses which over time will continue to increase in value** – a review of house prices/property value is conducted every 2 years by the Estates team.

Benefits

Project Benefits	Benefit	Description of Financial Saving (if applicable)	Evaluation Method	Closedown comments	
	Improved availability of appliances – immediate benefits to the organisation to the local public.	None		Review of appliance availability – by the Staffing team	This will be reviewed as part of the PIR in 2024.
	Reduced salary costs of Fire Fighters	Immediate benefit to the organisation - £253K p.a		Review salary costs following completion of the transition - Finance	This will be reviewed as part of the PIR in 2024 It will be worth reviewing this against any increased costs related to maintenance of the properties and for any increases in Council Tax the Service will have to pay.

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	<p>New houses will become an asset for the Service. Wilmslow is a highly sought after area and as a result the houses will rise in value significantly making them a financial investment.</p>	None	2 yearly valuation of houses - Estates	This will be reviewed in 2025 – 2 years following purchase of the houses
	<p>Increased rental income from accommodation</p>	£20,489.04 per year.	Review rent received against estimates	This will be reviewed as part of the PIR in 2024.
	<p>Improved reputation and image with local residents from the implementation of a duty system that guarantees 24/7 cover.</p>	None	Local survey of perceptions of the new duty system	<p>As part of project commencement, the local authority and town council and local residents were consulted regarding the changes and the benefits that this would bring. Following the implementation of the new duty system a similar consultation was completed to let the key stakeholders know that the changes are now in place.</p> <p>The annual IRMP update covers what has been completed and will be available to local parties of interest to help communicate the changes in Wilmslow.</p>
	<p>Improved operational efficiency of Wilmslow fire station – no requirements to have to arrange backfill cover for the On Call duty system on a regular basis</p>	<p>Increased efficiency and effectiveness – anticipated to be lower costs from less staff PAS and less appliance movements.</p>	<p>The staffing hub will ascertain the impact of the changes.</p> <p>Explore the savings made from no backfill requirements – Finance team</p>	<p>Savings to be reviewed as part of the PIR</p>

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	Reduced environmental impact due to less travel required from firefighters supporting the On Call at night from other fire stations in Cheshire	Lower fuel bills for both the Red and Grey fleet.	<p>Estimates of fuel savings to be provided by the Fleet manager within the OPA team.</p> <p>Review of the Fleet Management System (Chevin) will highlight reduction in miles and thus cost savings from less fuel used.</p>	This will be reviewed as part of the PIR and all movements that have been reduced will be used as a measure of the potential reduction in emissions achieved via the duty system transition.
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Performance against forecast time, cost and resources

<p>Review of performance against forecast time, cost and resources</p>	<p><u>Time</u></p> <p>The project delivered ahead of schedule as the IRMP highlighted an end date of April 2024 and it was actually delivered in March 2023, a year early.</p> <p>Originally the project team set a very ambitious completion date for December 2022 and the project did not complete until March 2023. The root cause for not completing in December 2022 was because we were reliant on the availability of suitable houses within a defined distance and travel time to the station and also from delays in house completion. Looking back at the original plan, and despite the overall project finishing a year early, it is clear that the project team were overly optimistic on the time involved with the conveyancing process and did not necessarily take into account the seasonality of the housing market and property availability.</p> <p><u>Costs</u></p> <p>The project completed comfortably within budgetary constraints. Whilst the ceiling budget for houses was raised to secure some of the more desirable properties other suitable properties were purchased well under the expected budget.</p> <p><u>Resources</u></p> <p>The project was well resourced and all parties performed their roles well, once involved and engaged.</p>
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	<p>The Joint Organisational Services of Procurement, Payroll and Legal resources were not engaged early enough in the process and also not regularly enough which led to some delays when starting the house buying process. To improve a project of this type for the future, representatives from all teams need to be involved in update meetings and at project inception/kick-off to ensure they are aware of requirements and understand the project fully.</p> <p>The initial engagement of the conveyancing solicitor was slow due to lack of Procurement team involvement. This led to some delays in the purchase of properties.</p> <p>Clear delineation of roles for Procurement and Legal resources were not established at the project outset and should be involved at inception to ensure availability when required.</p> <p>A new resource was brought into the Estates team mid project which meant they had to get up to speed quickly with the processes in place and with the condition of the houses.</p> <p>The project team has now been disbanded.</p>
<u>Lessons Learned</u>	
Review of what worked well and what could have been done differently.	<p><u>House search and selection</u></p> <p>Establishing an early working relationship and keeping regular contact with the local Estate Agents in Wilmslow and ensuring they knew both our requirements and constraints worked well. A range of houses were sent our way in good time.</p> <p>A daily review of the online Estate Agent app Rightmove was essential to ensure the project team saw new houses coming onto the market quickly – resourcing was key to this to ensure the Services finger remained alert to new postings.</p> <p>GIS mapping was utilised to establish a response/travel time perimeter in which to look for houses was a good start; however it did not reflect reality. Therefore, it was essential for those with local knowledge to drive the routes from prospective properties to the station to ensure they were viable. If a project of this nature is conducted again it will be important to ensure that those tasked with reviewing runs times do not have vested interests in the properties as this could potentially affect their views on them.</p> <p>A list of minimum requirements/specification for houses was essential and worked well. This enabled the creation of a checklist which allowed for easy challenge on properties which may have not met all the criteria and enabled an informed decision to be made prior to viewing and prior to making an offer.</p>

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Viewing of properties – The process worked well, although some houses were only available to view at weekends which made viewing difficult. The Estates team were responsive to getting viewings booked in good time.

The Project Management team delegated the responsibility of visiting the houses under offer to the Estates team – Given the varying condition of the nine properties it could have helped with the moving in process and understanding the licensees issues more clearly if members of the Project team had visited the properties.

Offer process – Estates led the offer process which worked well. However, the proforma detailed a number of Senior/Principal officers which had to provide approval to make an offer – 4 in total. This occasionally slowed the decision-making process and added the risk of delay to offers which could have resulted in the loss of a viable property. The number of decision makers also elongated the process when having to determine whether the Project Team could make a counteroffer if required.

House Purchase Process

The house purchase process was slow – This linked directly to the fact that the Procurement team were not engaged from project outset which contributed to the slow procurement of conveyancing solicitors took some time, which resulted in some frustration raised by the Estates agents and vendors.

The house purchasing process was handled between the Estates, Procurement and Legal joint corporate teams. At times it was unclear who had responsibility for managing the progress of individual instructions, so next time it would be useful to ensure a defined process is agreed prior to entering into the procurement process.

Moving in

The usual process for VOID properties was not followed once the new houses were handed over to the Service and this did result in damage to one new property on Cumber Drive. The tanks in the loft were not drained down and a period of cold weather caused pipes to freeze and then flood the kitchen area.

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Not acting early enough to rectify issues prior to accommodation – it is important to understand that the Service properties are, in some cases becoming the staff members family homes so even minor issues should be given a greater emphasis to be completed. If another project of this nature is conducted the Service needs to make sure that the houses are up to standard prior to any future occupation.

It is worth noting that it is important to set the new residents expectations accordingly as to who is responsible for what elements of upkeep and what responsibilities Estates have to bring the houses up to liveable standards. Therefore a review of the current residents handbook is recommended.

On reflection, some remedial and decorative work could have done been completed on houses once they were purchased, rather than leaving it until all the properties were purchased. Whilst remedial works etc should be commenced upon ownership, sufficient time should be included in any future projects to enable necessary works to be completed ahead of occupation. (Last completions were in February and March 2023).

Constraints linked to the partial VAT exemption (connected to our wider capital build programme) restricted what work could be completed on the houses purchased. This meant that any large items of work could not be completed prior to April 2023. The Service will need to consider prioritising the work on the newly purchased houses, over existing stock, if another set of houses are obtained.

Allowing occupants into the new houses a month in advance of the new duty system go-live worked well and gave them (and families) an opportunity to get more settled prior to the new duty system going live.

Upon occupation of houses or just prior a number of the new tenants got in touch with the local Council themselves to work out what reductions they were eligible for if the houses weren't going to be their primary residence. This caused a lot of confusion and delay. Staff should be directed towards the Service house resident handbook early on. This identifies that the Estates team are responsible for council tax arrangements and that if the residents have any questions they should go via the Estates team.

There was not a lot of time between house allocation and the residents moving into the properties. Consideration should be given to the Estates team resources which are required to meet tenant's needs and expectations. This is in regards to required maintenance and those properties when they transition to a new tenant (to cover areas such as licence, Council Tax and utility bills) as this can take some time. It is worth noting that this point applies to future planned moves of staff into any Service accommodation. If there is minimal notice given to the Estates team then they may not be able to complete the necessary works prior to occupation.

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It was difficult to gather all the required information from the residents prior to their occupation due to the multiple ways of communicating with the Estates team. To combat this a Proforma is required for tenants to complete to cover their occupancy details, i.e. single/multiple, full time/part time current, residency address etc. Applicable to all new occupancy changes going forward.

Redeployment

Staff engagement

Communications throughout the project were carried out face to face with staff at Wilmslow and worked well.

House allocation

This was achieved by setting clear criteria, a questionnaire was produced, an equality impact assessment and Data Protection Impact Assessment was also produced to ensure the questionnaires were as inclusive as possible. All staff were pleased with the outcomes and were allocated the houses requested. The detailed and robust questionnaire and process has helped to protect the Service enabling compliance with responsibilities under the Equality Act.

HR elements

Consultation with On-call staff – the consultation took much longer than anticipated and was very labour intensive as it involved firefighters on different contracts with different notice periods etc. Engagement earlier with stakeholders, Payroll, Finance and Legal may have improved the situation.

Key HR lessons:

Ideally sufficient time should be factored into the project timeline and task completion dates to allow final consultation and administration with impacted staff to take place prior to the scheduled go live date. As described in this case it was not possible due to the short time

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window from taking possession of the final house required to go live and the scheduled go live date. This did not cause any issues but resulted in On-call staff still contracted in Service after the date which they were theoretically no longer required to provide fire cover as part on an On-call duty system at Wilmslow.

Due to delays purchasing the remaining house required to implement the DC 1 system at Wilmslow, this made it difficult to identify a go live date that gave sufficient notice to On-call staff in advance of their individual notice periods to be worked for those staff choosing to leave the organisation. This resulted in a payment in lieu of notice (PILON) in addition to their individually calculated severance payments on voluntary termination of contracts.

The redeployment process including consultation with impacted teams worked well with no issues recruiting the correct mix of staff with the required skills to implement the DC1 duty system at Wilmslow. No wholetime member of the nucleus team was required to be compulsory redeployed to another location not of their preference. Of the remaining five On-call staff, two were redeployed into wholetime positions and the remaining three all chose to leave the organisation as they were all dual role wholetime and On-call firefighters in GMCFRS or CFRS.

On-call staff redeploying into wholetime positions needed to attend a 4-week migration course. This could have impacted the redeployment dates for those staff. In this case the two On-call members of staff redeploying attended a bespoke course that was being delivered to a unique group of apprentices who were already On-call members of staff. Following this they were posted to station and detached back to OATT for elements of the migration course that was being delivered to new recruits on the wholetime recruits course.

Production of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) in relation to the reorganisation and redeployment process worked well in supporting impacted teams in advance of the formal consultation period.

What were the opportunities that had the biggest impact on success?

Delivery of the project a year earlier than required – prior to end of IRMP 2020-2024. Helping the Service to begin realising benefits a full year earlier than expected.

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	<p>Partial VAT exemption limits meant that work on the houses could not be completed until after March 2023. This meant that work on houses, such as the one on Sylvan Avenue, had to wait until after the licensee moved in.</p> <p>The project team initially looked at a new development for 9 new houses (which would have ensured a good standard of property in the right condition for each member of staff and a simple allocation process) however the timescales and costs of the new builds were prohibitive and would have delayed realisation of benefits.</p>
<u>Future requirements</u>	
Progression into business as usual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that CPS has been updated, risks closed and or reassigned, and key documents uploaded to the system• Close out of all work required on houses – ensuring that all issues are captured on the Estates issue/defect log for rectification
Post implementation review	<p>A post implementation review is required in twelve months' time (June 2024) to review the benefits of the new operating model and to establish if the intended benefits have been realised.</p>
<u>Project Managers Commentary</u>	
<p>Whilst the project was in the main very successful there are a lot of useful lessons learnt that will should be considered when embarking on other similar projects.</p> <p>Key take aways as the Project Manager include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Earlier engagement with Payroll, Procurement and Legal – help to streamline the conveyancing process and ensure better internal communication.• Begin rectification work on the houses as soon as we own them – budget allowing of course. This would need to be carefully managed alongside the house modernisation programme.• Visit the properties under offer to get a good feel for the condition of them – provides a reality check on what the member of staff will be moving into• Streamline the offer decision making process to ensure timely decisions.	

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- Ensure expectations of staff moving into properties are set accordingly.
- Ensure a clear process for dealing with conveyancers and estates agents regarding the purchases is established.

Key actions arising from this review are:

- Review the Residents handbook to ensure it is up to date and clearly highlights responsibilities, especially around Council tax
- Produce a proforma to complete for residents moving in which details their personal circumstances so the council can be informed appropriately.
- Determine and agree a reasonable timeframe which should be given to Estates, prior to occupation of a property, to enable them to complete necessary work on a house.

Approval of Closedown and Evaluation Report

	Name	Approval Date
Project Manager	Peter Hayes	17/10/23
Project Sponsor	Neil Griffiths	30/10/23
Relevant Board / Committee	Performance and Programme Board	