

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: STAFFING COMMITTEE
DATE: 7TH MARCH 2018
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: PAUL HANCOCK

SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISIONS MADE IN
RESPECT OF THE DUTY SYSTEMS FOR THE
SECOND FIRE ENGINES AT CREWE AND
ELLESMERE PORT

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members in relation to the existing cohorts of on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port following the decisions made in respect of the duty systems for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port at the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 14th February 2018.
2. To present information about the potential redeployment of the existing cohorts of on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port within the Service.
3. To present information about the potential redundancy of those on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port who do not wish to be redeployed within the Service.

Recommendation: That Members:

- [1] Note the position of the existing cohorts of on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port;
- [2] Endorse the proposal to redeploy the on-call firefighters in the existing cohorts at Crewe and Ellesmere Port elsewhere within the Service; and
- [3] Endorse the proposal to facilitate the redundancy of the on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port who do not wish to be redeployed elsewhere within the Service.

Background

4. At the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 14th February 2018 Members considered a report on the review of the duty systems for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port Fire Stations.
5. Having considered the report and following some lengthy discussion and debate Members resolved (extract from Draft Minutes) that:

- [2] the future duty system for the second fire engine at Crewe Fire Station remains wholetime 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; and
- [3] officers be instructed to determine if the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port could be relocated to another area or station in order to satisfy the sustainability question and value for money challenge presented by the review.

Note: Resolution [3] followed a vote intended to secure the continuation of the existing wholetime duty system for the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port. The vote was lost.

Information

Crewe

6. In view of the decision to maintain the wholetime duty system for the second fire engine, there is no longer a requirement for an on-call firefighter cohort at Crewe.
7. As part of the original plan to move to an on-call duty system for the second fire engine at Crewe (an element of the Emergency Response Programme approved by the Fire Authority in 2013) a number (seven) of on-call firefighters were recruited and employed by the Fire Authority. These on-call firefighters continued with their training during the course of the review into the duty system for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port, and are at different stages in their development to become competent firefighters.
8. Following the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 14th February the Station Manager with responsibility for Crewe Fire Station contacted all of the on-call firefighters to inform them of the decision and to establish what their preferences would be regarding their future with the Service. They were provided with information about the possibility of redeployment within the Service, or the potential of securing redundancy should the offer of redeployment be unacceptable because of their full-time employment status and/or personal circumstances.
9. The Station Manager has since advised the Head of Service Delivery that of the seven on-call firefighters at Crewe, six would like to be considered for redeployment within the Service, and one would like to be considered for redundancy.
10. Accordingly, officers are seeking Members endorsement for the redeployment of the six on-call firefighters via the Service's established on-call to wholetime migration process, and the redundancy of the one remaining on-call firefighter via the appropriate mechanism.
11. The six on-call firefighters who have indicated their preference to be considered for redeployment would have to meet the required standards and pass the relevant assessments to be successful in their migration from on-call to wholetime. Consequently, there is the potential some of the on-call firefighters may be unsuccessful in their migration to wholetime.

Ellesmere Port

12. The decision to consider whether the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port could be relocated to another station or location within the Service (coupled with the rejection of a proposal to secure the continuation of the existing wholetime duty system for the second fire engine) means that there is significant uncertainty about the requirement for an on-call firefighter cohort at Ellesmere Port.
13. Proposals for the relocation of the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port are likely to be formally considered by Members in February 2020 (following a period of consultation during the autumn of 2019). The decision, coupled with the timescales associated with the Fire Authority's integrated risk management planning cycle will therefore present a significant challenge in sustaining and retaining the existing on-call firefighter cohort.
14. At the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 14th February 2018 Members also agreed to fund the existing wholetime duty system for the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port from reserves until proposals for the relocation of the second fire engine are considered (February 2020). This is another factor that negates the immediate short term need for an on-call firefighter cohort at Ellesmere Port.
15. Taking account of the above, officers are of the opinion that it would be in the best interests of both the Fire Authority and the on-call firefighters at Ellesmere Port to consider the same opportunities outlined for the on-call firefighters at Crewe.
16. As part of the original plan to move to an on-call duty system for the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port (an element of the Emergency Response Programme approved by the Fire Authority in 2013) a number (five) of on-call firefighters were recruited and employed by the Fire Authority. These on-call firefighters continued with their training during the course of the review into the duty system for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port, and are at different stages in their development to become competent firefighters.
17. Following the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 14th February the Station Manager with responsibility for Ellesmere Fire Station contacted all of the on-call firefighters to inform them of the decision and to establish what their preferences would be regarding their future with the Service. They were provided with information about the possibility of redeployment within the Service, or the potential of securing redundancy should the offer of redeployment be unacceptable because of their full-time employment status and/or personal circumstances.
18. The Station Manager has since advised the Head of Service Delivery that all five of the on-call firefighters at Ellesmere Port would like to be considered for redeployment within the Service.
19. Accordingly, officers are seeking Members endorsement for the redeployment of the five on-call firefighters via the Service's established on-call to wholetime migration process.

20. The five on-call firefighters who have indicated that they would like to be considered for redeployment would have to meet the required standards and pass the relevant assessments to be successful in their migration from on-call to wholetime. Consequently, there is the potential that some of the on-call firefighters may be unsuccessful in their migration to wholetime.

Financial Implications

21. Normally when an individual is made redundant they are entitled to a redundancy payment. However, in this instance the individuals have not reached the qualification threshold of two years. In the circumstances, the intention is to treat them as though they have and make a suitable payment to them.

Legal Implications

22. It will be important that the Service provides appropriate information and support to the on-call firefighters. As with any individual deciding to pursue a career as a wholetime firefighter they will need to fully appreciate the Service's requirements and expectations. There is a possibility that some individuals seeking to migrate may not make the grade. As they will need to give up their existing main employment they will need to appreciate this risk.

23. Whilst the Authority has a policy that it will not make operational staff redundant, those on-call firefighters who do not wish to be redeployed will effectively be redundant. The process is likely to be treated as a voluntary redundancy if the individuals decide that they do not wish to take up the option of redeployment.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. It is recognised that the redeployment of the existing cohorts of on-call firefighters at Crewe and Ellesmere Port is from a relatively small group of individuals already employed by the Fire Authority and may not provide the same diversity of applicants that could be expected from a new targeted wholetime recruitment campaign.

Environmental Implications

25. None