

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MEETING

**Audit, Governance & Review
Committee**

AGENDA ITEM

11

MEETING DATE

22 April 2015

REPORT NUMBER

EFA/043/15

SUBJECT

Electronic Rota Book

REPORT BY

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PRESENTED BY

Lindsey Stafford-Scott, Director of HR & Organisational Development

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the implementation and development of the Electronic Rota Book (ERB) System along with the next steps required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Audit, Governance and Review Committee are asked to note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND

The implementation of ERB, delivered the Service with an integrated system to manage all operational personnel within one application. The software allows for the pre-population of future availability allowing deficiencies to be highlighted and managed. Fire Stations that are over resourced on given shifts are re-located to provide greater availability of appliances County wide.

Members will be aware that the Service implemented ERB in November 2013 (EFA/005/14 refers).

All attendance management along with leave and training schedules are captured within the ERB application providing a central view for all operational personnel.

The identified benefits of the ERB application are:

- Improved accuracy, availability and use of availability and shift information, leading to more efficient crewing and scheduling of training;
- Provides a link between clocking systems, shift information and payroll reducing the need for manual analysis and input to pay systems;
- Removes the requirement for personnel information to be recorded in multiple systems;
- Will improve accuracy in sickness recording;
- Reduces the administrative burden resulting from the double keying of information in HR and Training departments;
- Will improve reporting capability; and
- Enables the Service to more efficiently utilise its Station based firefighters to maximise efficiency.

At this point in time, although not completely refined and work is ongoing, all of the above benefits, accept for the transition of Flexi-Duty Officers, have been achieved or planned to be achieved within the ERB project. Flexi-Duty Officers are not yet in a position to move onto the ERB system with further development and testing required.

Continual Service improvement activities include responding to user feedback from all operational workgroups along with development by IT and our 3rd party supplier.

Availability Forecasting

Both Whole-Time (WT) and Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel are required to populate pre planned shifts within ERB. An added benefit for RDS is that instant updates to their live availability can be sent via text messaging, effectively texting 'available' or 'unavailable' throughout the day and night. This system is not without its challenges and continues to be developed. A key development step for installation at all RDS sites will be Electronic Tally Boards, which will provide further flexibility for RDS staff in populating their availability due to the dynamic nature in being an on call firefighter. The tally board is a touch screen which will provide a much faster way in which information can be up-loaded to ERB in comparison to the current system whereby staff have to log on to a terminal at the Station.

The texting facility was introduced as a backup to providing availability but has become the main method in which RDS personnel notify the Service of their availability. Recent data has shown that the ability to text availability is being heavily relied on with over 30,000 texts received in one month. Further work is still required to improve accuracy of texts being sent by personnel to the system as time required investigating and rectifying issues is proving demanding on resources.

The Electronic Tally Board solution will be the opportunity to simplify options available for texting along with the ability to book shift patterns without the need for logging onto a terminal at the Station, which can be an onerous task for this work group.

The ERB system was integrated with the new Control System on 14th January 2015. However since 29th January 2015, the integration software was switched off due to operating problems with a number of issues affecting the main 4i mobilising system. ERB has not as yet been returned to live updating but continues to be maintained by personnel across the Service with appliance availability communicated by telephone to Service Control. When initially switched on, ERB was successfully providing live data however accuracy of information was an issue for both Whole Time and RDS Fire Stations.

Of particular concern in relation to Whole Time resources, is the accuracy of information being populated on ERB and the number of changes that occur due to short notice leave being taken by personnel. In addition, issues have been identified where the use of pre-arranged out duties has not been exhausted and the Service has incurred a greater financial burden by using the dynamic out duty process. To further compound this issue, appliances requiring firefighters from these out duties have had extended unavailability times. When switched back to live, this is a key area that will require attention in order for the systems to run effectively and deliver all associated benefits.

Direct influences to the above are:

- The need for changes to the Service's Leave Policy;
- Delays in the adoption of Additional Shift Working;
- Barriers to the introduction of Mixed Crewing; and
- Managers appetite for managing robustly.

To address some of these barriers, the Service is considering the creation of an interim central resourcing team to ensure that personnel attached to Whole Time Fire Stations are in the right place at the right time and that the systems are being updated appropriately. If approved, a pilot will be delivered with the central team managing all personnel movements within one watch across all Whole Time Fire Stations.

The aim of the pilot will be to deliver clear measurable outcomes that will ensure the Service is able to fully exploit the benefits of the ERB System. If successful, a short-term option will be to permanently manage all operational personnel movements through a central team with the long-term view of Service Control taking responsibility for this function in future.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Failing to implement and fully utilise the ERB system will prevent the Service realising the identified benefits and result in a less efficient means of utilising our workforce.

Failing to implement the ERB system effectively could impact on appliance availability and our ability to accurately mobilise resources.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications associated with this paper.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant legal implications from this paper.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant equality implications from this paper.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant environmental implications from this paper.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of appendices attached to this paper:	
List of background documents (not attached):	
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