

Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities of the meeting held on 3 September 2014

1. THOBY LANE INCIDENT

On the 18 August 2014, at 07.00hrs Essex Fire Control received a call to a wood pile alight in Thoby Lane, Mountnessing.

On arrival the Officer in Charge found a deep seated fire which was at risk of spreading to adjoining businesses. The huge pile of scrap wood and general refuse was estimated to be approximately half the size of a football pitch and about 15m – 20m high. The wood pile consisted of scrap wood that had been collected from building sites and also other unknown items including general scrap and possibly motor vehicles; disused buildings on the site also had asbestos cement sheeting in place.

During the first day fire appliances were increased to 8 due to the distances involved in acquiring water supplies, this included the laying of over 300m of hose connecting into pressure fed hydrants and obtaining water from local ponds. All fire crews worked extremely hard to secure water supplies quickly and to prevent fire spread to adjacent buildings.

It was clear from the preplanning that had taken place that this fire could not be extinguished easily, and so in conjunction with partner agencies such as the Environment Agency, Brentwood Borough Council and the Police, a strategy of controlled burning was adopted with the following guidance:

- Prevent escalation of the fire
- Protect all surrounding risks
- Reduce the impact on the environment
- Consider the impact on local businesses

Environment

One of the main challenges with this fire is the impact of any water run-off from fire hoses on the environment, including local fish ponds, lakes and streams running into Chelmsford and the negative affect on the biological balance of the local sewage works.

As such, joint operations with the Environment Agency have meant the damming of local water streams and the pumping out ponds and sumps on a daily basis to reduce and mitigate damage.

Community

A key Service priority is to ensure that the local communities are kept informed of the strategy that has been adopted. The Fire Community Safety teams have been active in reassuring local residents and we have delivered in excess of 2000 leaflets explaining the strategy of a controlled burn and also where advice can be obtained if residents have any concerns.

Technical Fire safety

The site had been identified by Operational officers in advance of this fire and, though contact with the business owner was achieved, little progress was made mitigating the risk from fire. Operational and Technical Fire Safety officers developed an operational response plan for the crews of the surrounding stations, to ensure they were aware of the risk and pre planned tactics that could be adopted in the event of a fire. It was however, always realised that in the event of a fire at this site, we would have to adopt a controlled burn strategy due to its location and structure, and limited access.

Other sites within Essex have also been identified and any response plans that had been developed have been amended where necessary as a result of lessons learned by this incident.

Long term strategy

This fire has been burning for just over a month and the resources in place have now been reduced to 2 pumping appliances and 1 Officer on a 24 hour basis. The control of this incident has been passed back to the local operational command and SDO Wahl. The site is also assessed on a daily basis.

Good progress has been made and about 50% of the piles have now burnt down. However huge piles still exist and smoke and flames are still present with deep hot burning present in the piles. It is now much clearer to see that the content of the piles contain wood, soil, metal, general household waste and other items that would be a hazard to crews.

Local businesses are still affected by the smoke from the plies but this does not seem to be travelling far enough to affect local residents.

An assessment will take place later this week to see if it is possible to move some of the remaining piles away from adjacent buildings and to consider if spreading the piles out may accelerate burning. There are however, disadvantages with any action;

- Increased burning will create more smoke affecting local business and possibly the community.
- Cost of hire of mechanical machinery.
- Risk to fire crews and machinery operators.
- Increase of resources and personnel.
- Crews will have to wear BA sets due to the nature of the products burning.
- Any water run-off will have to be controlled to prevent environment damage.
- Any intervention will require agreement with Environment Agency and Brentwood Council.
- Limited access to the site through one entry point.

The alternative will be to employ security guards to monitor the incident releasing fire crews. The cost of this would need to be balanced against the cost of retained crews attending the incident, or we will continue with crews being on site on a 24/7 basis.

Many other sites have been identified in the county and work is taking place with our partner agencies to reduce the size of the wood piles and to put in access routes and reduce the effect on any surrounding risks in the vent of a fire.

SDO Wahl is continuing to engage with local press and interviews have been given to local radio station providing updates and reassurance.

2. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT.

The report provided Essex Fire Authority with a summary of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's health and safety plans and performance for 2013/14.

During 2013/14 there were 464 safety events reported via the Service's Health and Safety software, OSHENS. These included 'Attacks on Fire Service Personnel'. This was an overall reduction of safety events of 1% compared to 2012/13. Minor accidents increased by 22% in the same period while the percentage of RIDDOR reportable accidents (Report of Injury, Disease or Dangerous Occurrence Regulations) has continued to decline and is now 50% less than it was in 2010.

Due to staff turnover within the department in 2013 both the Risk Assessment Advisor position and 1 Area Advisor position were vacant for much of 2013. These posts were supported by agency staff. However, this has led to the final 2 outstanding actions from the 2010 RoSPA audit action plan being rescheduled for year-end 2014.

Throughout this period the department managed to maintain day to day business whilst also making significant improvements to the Service's Online Safety and Health Notification System (OSHENS) and continually updating the Service health and safety framework. The aim of the department is to integrate health and safety into the heart of the organisation. The Health and Safety advisors work closely with the managers from the East and West Area Commands and provide valuable support to the local health and safety forums.

The Service has reviewed and re-published its Health and Safety Statement of Intent. This statement forms a critical part of the Service's health and safety framework as it clearly states the commitment of both the Authority and the Service to fulfilling their legal, moral and ethical duties to all uniformed and non-uniformed employees and all who are affected by the organisation's working activities.

In 2013 the HSE closed their investigation into the significant dangerous occurrence that occurred at Canvey Island on the 17th September 2012. In relation to this the HSE requested to undertake an audit of the Service's Training framework, namely the TASK system (Technical Assessment Knowledge and Skills). The Health and Safety, and Learning and Development departments worked closely to produce an extensive report and action plan which was presented to the HSE in October and as a result, the HSE closed the matter.

A benchmark exercise was carried between the Service health and safety framework and that of another Fire and Rescue Service. This identified 13 points of commonality in key framework areas and 11 areas for improvement. These included amendments to the Service's health and safety policy and production of additional supporting documents in order to increase the robustness of the Service's health and safety framework.

The Health and Safety department undertook major reviews of safety event classifications and definitions. These were published with supporting guidance and communicated to the Service in order to ensure that all accidents are reported, correctly classified and assigned the correct level of investigation. All safety events undergo a 2 stage review process to ensure that not only are they classified correctly, but also that any remedial or corrective measures are suitable and completed.

Arrangements for FBU health and Safety representatives undertaking safety representative's functions was clarified and agreed. The resultant document ensures that the Service is fully compliant with regulation 4 (2) of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee regulations 1977.

3. RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM REPORT.

The Authority employs the majority of its Firefighters under two Duty Systems and associated Terms and Conditions. These are the Wholetime Duty System (WTDS) and the Retained Duty System (RDS).

The Service has 50 Fire Stations 34 of which are Retained and employs in the region of 481 RDS Firefighters (382.5 full time equivalent). RDS Firefighters are paid a retainer for providing full cover (120 hours per week) of 10% of the equivalent annual full time basic pay. This can be reduced where an employee can only provide reduced cover, however National Terms and Conditions stipulate that this reduction cannot be less than 75% of the full cover rate (90 hours). When called to respond to the Station the RDS Firefighter is entitled to a disturbance payment and is then paid the hourly pay rate for their role for all hours worked at the incident. These rates are agreed by the National Joint Council (NJC).

The RDS model of employment is also often referred to as 'On-Call'. It is a less costly response model in comparison to the wholetime system, the average crewing cost of an RDS Station in Essex is £130K compared to a wholetime at £1,540k. The RDS model can however present some disadvantages in relation to slower response times and as the report covered, difficulties in recruiting enough staff to provide consistent availability, particularly during the day.

In 2013 the outgoing Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, Sir Ken Knight was asked by the Government to undertake a review of the Fire and Rescue Service and in June 2013 his report 'Facing the Future' was published. In this report, Sir Ken highlighted the 40% reduction in incidents across the UK Fire and Rescue Services in the last 10 years and noted that a corresponding reduction in resources had not been realised. The report placed much emphasis on the use of the 'On-Call' model and called for UK Fire and Rescue Services to increase the number of on-call firefighters by 10% which according to the report could realise savings of £123 million nationally, a call recently echoed by the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles in his July 2014 Statement to Parliament on the Fire and Rescue Service.

Against this backdrop the Retained Duty System (RDS) Review Project was identified as a work stream under the Service's Workforce Transformation Programme (WTP). The scope of the project was comprehensive and focussed on current policies, procedures and practices regarding the Retained Duty System, primarily related to:

- Recruitment;
- Retention and Support; and
- Training and Operational Assurance.

Project activity included:

- Review of National and ECFRS related reports;
- ECFRS RDS staff survey;
- Review of other practice within UK Fire & Rescue Services;
- Themed workshops; and

- Stakeholder consultation (including representative bodies)

Many aspects of the review had direct and indirect links to other WTP projects and these are highlighted within the Action Plan.

The project made 36 recommendations, some of which are 'quick wins' and require little resource in both time and money, whereas some others require a change in existing employment contracts and working practices. The Service's Strategic Management Board have considered all of the recommendations within the report and, as can be seen from the Action Plan, accepted the majority of them either fully or in part.

The Action Plan sets out each of the recommendations grouped into five key work streams:

- Employer Engagement;
- Recruitment and Selection;
- Training;
- Contracts & Terms and Conditions; and
- Miscellaneous.

Each of the recommendations and associated activity has been assigned to an existing project or defined activity and therefore will not require significant additional resources to implement.

Summary Findings

The requirement for RDS firefighters to live within five minutes of the Station presents challenges in recruitment and limits the pool of available candidates. Traditionally many people worked locally and therefore there was a pool of people to draw from. Increasingly people travel to work and work in towns and cities away from their home and therefore this pool is diminished. This results in a difficulty to recruit staff to provide day time cover and is demonstrated in the increase in RDS availability seen in the evening and overnight when RDS employees are available having returned home from work. Unfortunately this provides an increase in available resource at a time when it is least needed. To address this issue the Service needs to consider recruiting from a different pool of people who work in the vicinity of stations during the day or do not work during the day, e.g. non-working parents.

Another challenge to recruitment is the traditional recruitment methods employed by the Service; this includes expecting candidates to attend a Station on a drill night where local Station Managers are responsible for initiating the recruitment process. This can be daunting particularly for female candidates and allow for 'word of mouth' recruitment, limiting diversity and creating the potential for discrimination. Leaving recruitment to local management does not allow best use of innovative campaigns or targeted initiatives, as many RDS Managers do not have the time to devote to this activity or the necessary skills and experience. There is also a lack of engagement with local employers to seek to encourage them to release their staff to provide retained cover. Incentivising this and encouraging large local employers to release staff during the day presents significant opportunity to improve recruitment and day time availability.

Another barrier to recruitment is the tests that RDS firefighters were required to meet. These were, within the Service, higher than those set nationally and as a result led to higher failure rates in particular for women who struggled to meet strength tests. This practice once identified, has immediately been addressed and national tests and standards are now in operation.

The final significant barrier to recruitment is the restrictive contract bandings available. The Service has traditionally made use of the national bands described above which require an RDS employee to provide 120 or 90 hours availability per week. This is a significant commitment and can deter interested parties who would be willing to provide fewer hours cover but where needed. Current practice sees the Service struggling to maintain appliance availability during the day and over resourced at night where most people are able to offer hours to meet their banded requirement. This is inefficient and needs to be addressed to offer more flexibility, increase the pool of candidates and provide cover where it is most needed. Alongside recruitment challenges the Service also faces problems in the retention of RDS employees with 52.3% of retained personnel reporting they have considered leaving the Service in the past 12 months. Nationally the Fire and Rescue Service has seen a reduction in the number of incidents attended of 46% in the last 10 years; this decline has been mirrored in Essex and is currently at approximately 50% fewer incidents. This in turn means that RDS employees are being called out less often and as a result their earnings are significantly reduced and the attractiveness of the role has diminished. The Fire Service increasingly has to compete with other employers who are recruiting a flexible workforce, most notably the Army reservists who are running nationwide recruitment campaigns drawing from the same labour pool as the Fire Service. The Service needs to consider innovative ways to expand the role of RDS personnel, maximising earning potential and in turn retention and morale whilst ensuring a value for money service is maintained. At a time of reduced funding for the Authority it is recognised that this will need to be a transfer of work, rather than new, unfunded initiatives.

The reduction of incidents and the resultant reduction in operational experience and exposure for firefighters is a significant issue with regards maintaining competence. The safety of employees is the Service's primary concern and where 'on the job' training is reduced, formal training must increase if we are to maintain competence. Currently RDS employees attend 2 hours training per week supplemented by some annual provision such as the Breathing Apparatus Verification and Development sessions. An additional third hour has been budgeted for but many RDS employees struggle or are reluctant to provide additional availability over and above what is already required of them. The Service must consider what the minimum training requirement is and find ways of delivering that in a flexible and accessible way in order to ensure all RDS employees can access sufficient training and development to do their job safely. This may require an additional contractual requirement such as the reservist Armed Forces who attend a dedicated two weeks of training per annum and is also likely to involve a change to the contracts of our operational training employees to allow the Service to deliver training over evenings and weekends without incurring significant extra cost.

Taken together, the recommendations within the Action Plan will assist the Service in recruiting and retaining more RDS Firefighters, ensuring RDS Firefighter competence and safety, delivering a more flexible RDS service whilst ensuring increased efficiency and availability and ensuring equality in terms and conditions of employment.

4. FIRE CONTROL PROGRESS REPORT.

In June 2011 Essex Fire Authority Members approved a business case for the development of the Kelvedon Park site. This included the centralisation of training facilities and the relocation of the Service's Control facility from the previous Headquarters site at Hutton. Members agreed to progress with the tender later in 2011. After discussion with Lead Members a paper was presented that separated construction of independent training facilities and the delivery of an extension to the existing Headquarters building, including Service Control and Operational Command and Assessment Training (OCAT).

Application for funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government (Control Service Resilience and Efficiency Grant Bid) to support a shared system with Bedfordshire Fire

and Rescue Service was made on 2 Nov 2011. Notification of the success of the bid was officially received on 1 March 2012.

The final business case included a detailed list of procurement and implementation activities and included a date for exit from Hutton of June 2014. In line with the original timeframe the procurement exercise began in early January 2013. Following the initial stage it was clear that a number of factors would result in a delay to the process which would then result in award of contract to the eventual successful bidder towards the latter part of 2013. The revised procurement timeline and award of contract details were presented to Members in 2013. This included a delay in completion as December 2014.

People Workstream (on time and on budget)

This workstream includes a review of crewing provision for the new data led (the old system was voice led) system. This includes working practice, operator numbers, numbers of ranks and shift pattern. The review is supported by external partners (Process Evolution) who have delivered a report on existing and potential Control resources matched against operational need. We are currently waiting for a response to the suggested solution from representative bodies. The suggested solution includes a reduction in numbers of Ranks on each Watch and the addition of 2 watches that only work on days (4 days on 4 days off - 12 hours per shift) and a change in shift start and finish times.

This project placed Control staff at risk of redundancy as a result of the change in work place, working practice, shift pattern and the reduction in numbers and ranks. The Service has explored Early Voluntary Retirement, Voluntary Redundancy and Redeployment opportunities with all staff in Control. Decisions already made by some Members of Control mean that we do not currently expect there to be any need for any compulsory redundancies. The Training Plan for the new system is complete. Training content is being developed as part of the normal process of system installation and integration with other Service systems (e.g. systems that support incident command, geographical mapping, mobile data terminals, availability etc.).

The Shared Services Agreement between Bedfordshire and Essex Fire and Rescue Services is in draft and will reflect the new supplier contracts and detail the business as usual state for the relationship. It covers respective responsibilities, cost allocation and obligations.

We are working with the Service Communications team with an agreed Communications Strategy and Stakeholder Management Plan. This ensures key messages are communicated when appropriate, with regular Bulletins issued via e-mail and internet as appropriate.

The new extension at Kelvedon Park is complete and suppliers are currently in the process of installing hardware in the server room and control room. The new Secondary Control will be at Ongar Fire Station and work is progressing on plan there as well.

Systems Workstream (on time and on budget)

The procurement exercise is complete and the main suppliers of systems are:

- Remsdaq – Mobilising System;
- Frequentis – The Integrated Command and Control Systems; and
- Airwave – Voice and Data Communications network.

Remsdaq and Frequentis have provided a satisfactory Functional Design Specification, and are matching milestones articulated in the project plan.

Mobilising System:

- Remsdaq have ordered the majority of their equipment ahead of an imminent factory build stage;
- Factory Acceptance Testing dates have been agreed for 11 to 15 August 2014;
- Planned design work around infrastructure design is on-going;
- Remsdaq participated in a 'Resilience' meeting on 11 June where all significant points of failure were discussed to ensure where necessary appropriate resilience had been designed in to the overall solution;
- At the same meeting initial elements of Testing, Training and Transition (go-live strategy) were also discussed;
- The development of interfaces with other systems is on-going; and
- A training schedule which includes both Fire Services rolling out operator training courses is being developed.

ICCS:

- Frequentis attended the Resilience and Transition meetings on 11th June (with Remsdaq as mentioned above);
- System Administrator training course has been brought forward to ensure appropriate staff could then configure the system. (26 to 28 August);
- Factory Acceptance Testing (FAT) planned for July 22 to 24 on track;
- Training schedule which includes both Fire Services operator training on track; and
- System build has commenced in Vienna with pre-FAT testing to be complete before FAT 22-24 July.

Airwave:

- A fleet mapping workshop took place on 26 June with no major issues;
- Two further meetings are being planned to discuss IP Addressing Schema and the test procedures / test scripts;
- Two out of the three Airwave racks are due for imminent delivery;
- Airwave has delayed testing by two weeks, now due 26 August. This has no material effect on the remainder of Project Plan;
- Code of Connection – ICT have been through a rigorous internal review process which included CFOA National Resilience (CNR), and have issued documentation for the

Accreditor as planned on 30 June 2014. Included within this work was a successful Penetration Test of the Service's mobile data terminal; and

- Work is on-going to ensure Airwave can install relevant circuits on the KP site – currently there appears to be a problem with their subcontractor BT Openreach which needs resolution to ensure no further delays to witness testing.

Essex and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Systems and Integration:

- Essex availability systems interface (SAP/Clicksoftware Electronic Rota Book) requires some development (on track);
- Infrastructure design – Essex County Fire & Rescue Service presented their design to Remsdaq and Frequentis on 11 June. No adverse Contractor comment. The Service has progressed to detailed design and Firewalls and switches have already been ordered. WAN circuit costs have been received from DUCL with the link to Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (Kempston) proving to be the most costly. Essex County Fire & Rescue Service ICT / DUCL (their WAN service provider) are looking at alternatives to reduce costs through a trial across their existing network (Kelvedon Park to DUCL HQ in Reigate. It is of note that Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service operator positions are reliant on the resilience of the WAN;
- Vector (Incident Command) interface – discussions still on-going;
- Incident Recording System Interface – Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Data and Performance team are in discussion with supplier to upgrade the existing system. This may have a cost impact;
- Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service interfaces – Head of ICT at Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service leading work – currently on track; and
- Design of the Essex County Fire & Rescue Service provided Active Directory Environment (the system that provides geographical locations to the system) for use by Remsdaq and Frequentis is on track.

**Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman**