

**EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

Panel: **Policy & Resources**

Date: **10 January 2008**

Title: **2008/09 IRMP Consultation – Overview**

By: **Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive**

Purpose of Briefing Note: **To advise the Group of the results of the 2008/09 IRMP Consultation Process.**

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**RECOMMENDATION:** The Panel is asked to consider the results of the consultation exercise relating to the Integrated Risk Management Annual Action Plan for 2008/09 and advise officers of the appropriate actions they wish to be taken with regard to the IRMP proposals.

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**MAIN ISSUES**

1. One of the proposals in the Integrated Risk Management Annual Action Plan agreed for 2007/08 was to examine the effectiveness of alternative duty systems.
2. The Fire Authority agreed at its meeting in September 2007 to consult on 4 options which could be adopted in relation to duty systems.
3. The following report summarises the results of that consultation process for the Fire Authority to consider its agreed course of action.

**Des Prichard**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

3 January 2008

Previous Reports  
September 2007 Fire Authority Agenda Item 150

## 1. **CONSULTATION OVERVIEW**

1.1 The consultation included the collection of opinions from stakeholders and the public using the following methods:

- Distribution of the consultation draft Plan to all employees of ESFRS.
- Distribution of (and/or the introduction to) the consultation draft Plan to over 400 LSP partners and other stakeholders (inc. parish councils).
- A postal survey of 5,000 (randomly selected) homes in the City of Brighton & Hove and East Sussex.
- A series of staff meetings & focus groups in Brighton, Eastbourne & Hastings.
- Public focus groups in Brighton & Hastings.

## 2. **INDEX OF REPORTS available for scrutiny**

2.1 A number of detailed summaries are available on request from the Clerk to the Fire Authority.

- A. Report of 5 independent focus groups (2 public groups & 3 staff groups)
- B. Report of independent questionnaire to 5,000 homes
- C. Cross-tabulated report of independent questionnaire to 5,000 homes
- D. Text comments from independent questionnaire to 5,000 homes
- E. Text comments from responses to Service questionnaire
- F. Text comments from staff meetings

## 3. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

3.1 In broad, terms the outcomes of the Authority's consultation can be summarised in two groups:

- a) Independent (Opinion Research Services)
  - a. Focus Groups
  - b. Questionnaire
- b) Service
  - a. Questionnaire (Staff & staff related returns)
  - b. Questionnaire (Partner organisation returns)
  - c. Staff meetings

### 3.2 **Summary of Independent Focus Groups**

#### 3.2.1 **Public Groups**

- Participants recognised that reviews to examine more flexible shift and organisational work patterns are required to facilitate service developments.
- Participants at both public focus groups were unanimously in favour of the potential change towards more flexible working.
- When the current night-shift arrangements were explained neutrally, the focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that reviews to consider more flexible and more productive night-shift patterns should be introduced in order to increase the productivity of firefighters.

- Across the 2 focus groups, only 2 people opposed the conclusion that ESFRS should conduct reviews with a view to more flexible working (on the grounds that the firefighters would dislike the changes. Participants at both focus groups were generally ready to accept that the level of night-time fire cover in the City of Brighton & Hove and Hastings might be reviewed with a view to reducing the number of appliances.
- The possible implications of the proposed reviews were clearly explained to the participants, but they were impressed by the variations in demand and risk at different times of the day and night. This led them to conclude that it may be possible to adjust night-time cover without endangering people.

### 3.2.2 Staff Groups

- The participants were generally opposed to option A (Variable Crewing) and option B (Annualised Hours) for ESFRS – mainly because they appeared to believe that any form of flexibility was bound to lead to a reduction in emergency cover levels.
- Members of the staff forum at Eastbourne were concerned that removal of the current crewing levels may jeopardise training and development opportunities.
- All the respondents, but the firefighters especially, resisted the idea of adjusting the current whole-time shift system – at least partly because, in their opinion, it is impossible to predict demand for the emergency services.
- Firefighters again were very concerned about a possible reduction in emergency cover at night in the City of Brighton & Hove and Hastings. They opposed the principle for a multitude of reasons.
- The firefighters described risk levels as varying and unpredictable by night; and there was a sense that reducing the number of available engines at certain times and/or changing crewing from 24-hour to 12-hours would increase the potential dangers to the public (e.g. seasonal population increases, incidents can happen at any time, there are times when all the pumps are out together).
- Staff believed that variable crewing would lead to the compromising of firefighter health and safety - particularly with regard to support at incidents (e.g. responding with fewer pumps may be a health and safety issue, injuries to firefighters may increase if there is less back up available immediately).
- The desire for more and/or better information was expressed by staff when discussing the issue of variable emergency cover. Indeed, several firefighters felt that the information provided misrepresents about the amount of work they actually undertake and is too general across the Service's area.
- A change towards annualised hours was perhaps the most strongly opposed proposal - particularly in the case of firefighters. The prime concern was the effect such a change would have on firefighters' morale by worsening their work-life balance – especially with regard to childcare arrangements for 'grey days' or hours owed.

A copy of the full report relating to the ORS Focus Groups is available, if required, from the Clerk to the Fire Authority.

### 3.3 Summary of Independent Questionnaires

3.3.1 East Sussex IRMP had 377 postal returns and 12 online responses, giving a total of 389 cases, a response rate of almost 8%. This is lower than in the previous 2 years, which were 13% and 16%.

3.3.2 A summary of responses and full reports are available, if required, on request.

### 3.4 Summary of IRMP document Questionnaires

3.4.1 137 questionnaire responses were received, many of which were identified as from staff.

3.4.2 There is generally a strong feeling expressed that the Plan is worded in such a way as to mislead people in order to elicit a preferred response. Also that the figures shown were misleading or false and intended to discourage any counter arguments.

3.4.3 94% preferred Option C, 'to continue to operate the current duty system' and there was a reluctance to consider or rank any of the other options, as they were considered to contain insufficient detail. This is especially relevant to Option D, which was viewed as an option with no detail, rather than an opportunity to discuss other possible changes, as was intended.

3.4.4 There is a genuine concern regarding the detail in any of the options and what those details would mean on a day-to-day basis.

3.4.5 These views are influenced by a great deal of mistrust in the process as a whole and a strong belief that the decision has already been made and the consultation is a waste of time. They stated that previous IRM consultation processes had contributed to this feeling of mistrust.

3.4.6 Only 4 returns were received from partner organisations, but those that did reply were broadly supportive of the intention to review the system.

3.4.7 Below are the average ratings received for each question (from all 137 responses).

Note that a score of 1 is 'strongly disagree' – a score of 5 is 'strongly agree'.

Q1 - The action plan is clear and easy to understand - **2** disagree

Q2 - I support the general proposal to closer match resources to demand by changing the current duty system at shift stations – **1** strongly disagree

Q3 - I support the proposal to adopt Option A – a variable crewing duty system – **1** strongly disagree

Q4 - I support the proposal to adopt Option B – an annualised hours duty system – **1** strongly disagree

Q5 - I support the proposal to adopt Option C – to continue to operate the current duty system – **5** strongly agree

Q6 - I support the proposal to adopt Option D – a combination of options A, B and C – **1** strongly disagree

For Q7, the options were ranked in order of preference with 1 being the most preferred. It should be noted that 64% of responses were not fully or correctly completed for this question. In overall terms, there was an overwhelming preference for Option C. However, with very few expressed orders of preference for the other options, A, B and D, the results were very low and with no clear preference between them.

Q7	Option A	<b>3</b>
	Option B	<b>3</b>
	Option C	<b>1</b>
	Option D	<b>3</b>

3.4.8 A full transcript of all text responses on the questionnaires is available if required.

### 3.5 **Summary Of Views Expressed At Staff Meetings**

3.5.1 The concerns raised at the meetings consistently reflect the responses recorded on the questionnaires from staff, given above.

3.5.2 There is a widely held view that this and all other IRM plans are aimed at making cuts to the Service and that Integrated Risk Management is solely about saving money.

3.5.3 There is a widely held view that front line Services are always being looked at to make savings and there seems to be little focus on other areas of the organisation.

3.5.4 At most meetings, there was 100% support for not changing the system at all and at the others there was a limited view that some improvements could be made to the current system, but that they were mainly management issues working around the current duty system.

3.5.5 A small sample of staff agreed that changing the start times and length of shifts may help and would provide efficiency benefits, but stated that changes, in general, were not necessary as the current system is seen to work very well.

3.5.6 There was genuine support for more flexibility in the current duty system to ensure appliances were available throughout the service.

3.5.7 Staff were very strongly against any system with 'grey days' or 'hours owed' and were very concerned that this system would be extremely hard to manage with family commitments if people were required to come into work at short notice.

3.5.8 A full transcript of all comments made at the staff meetings is available, if required.

### 3.6 **Summary Of Separate Letters & Emails Received**

3.6.1 23 letters or email responses were received.

3.6.2 Letters from staff can be broken down as follows:

<b>Broadly against</b> the proposals	2
<b>Strongly against</b> the proposals	6
Detailing an alternative duty system proposal	1
Regarding matters other than shift patterns	1

3.6.3 Letters from partner organisations can be broken down as follows:

<b>Broadly for</b> the proposals	1
Unable to comment	2
Regarding matters other than shift patterns	10

Copies of these communications are available on request.

## 4 **CONSULTATION SUMMARY**

4.1 Overall, there is 100% support for option C amongst staff. Staff consulted indicated clearly that they are not convinced by the merits of option A (Variable Crewing) and option B (Annualised Hours) for ESFRS.

4.2 There is some acknowledgement by staff that improvements can be made to the current system without changing its basic 2, 2, 4 structure.

4.3 Partner organisations and the public are more supportive of the proposal to closer match resource to demand but are reluctant to offer opinions on how this should be achieved as this is felt to be a management issue.

4.4 A further, more comprehensive presentation of staff comments and feelings will be provided at the meeting.

## **Appendix A**

Formal FBU response to IRMP consultation