

Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

15 September 2023

Retained Duty System Member Champion Report

Report of Director of Emergency Response

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to give the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) members an update and insight into the business areas and performance of the Retained Duty System (RDS) within County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).

Background

2. As part of the approach to developing services and improving engagement with stakeholders, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority (CDDFRA) has sought to 'champion' particular areas of work through the CFA Member Champion roles.
3. The CFA Member Champion roles provide CDDFRS with an opportunity to work closely with individual members to help develop the services provided and to engage with all stakeholders through a closely aligned officer and member relationship.
4. Councillor John Shuttleworth has been supported by the Director of Emergency Response in her capacity as strategic lead to support the RDS across the organisation. The RDS is also referred to as the On Call Duty System.

The National Picture

5. The challenges linked to the recruitment and retention of RDS firefighters is recognised nationally within the fire sector. This has been analysed and reported on numerous times by the Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA), Fire Brigades Union (FBU), National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and various Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) across the UK.
6. Despite these detailed reports and subsequent recommendations, the HMICFRS noted within their annual State of Fire report that almost every FRS with RDS firefighters faces problems linked to recruitment, retention and availability which confirms that these challenges are still prevalent nationally across FRS.

The RDS Project

7. In March 2023 the Service launched its new RDS project, planned to run for 12 months with objectives aligned to the strategic objectives set out in the Emergency Response and Resilience Strategy 2023/26, detailed below:
 - Improve the availability of the RDS appliances.
 - Analyse, understand and implement measures to improve the recruitment of new RDS Firefighters (FF).
 - Engage, understand and implement measures to improve the retention of current RDS FF.
 - Improve overall management of our RDS staff across the service.
8. Each objective has an accompanying action plan, with some of this work detailed in this report.

RDS Firefighter Recruitment

9. The recruitment of RDS FF has remained consistent over the previous 4 years with a variance of 3 as outlined in Figure 1 below.

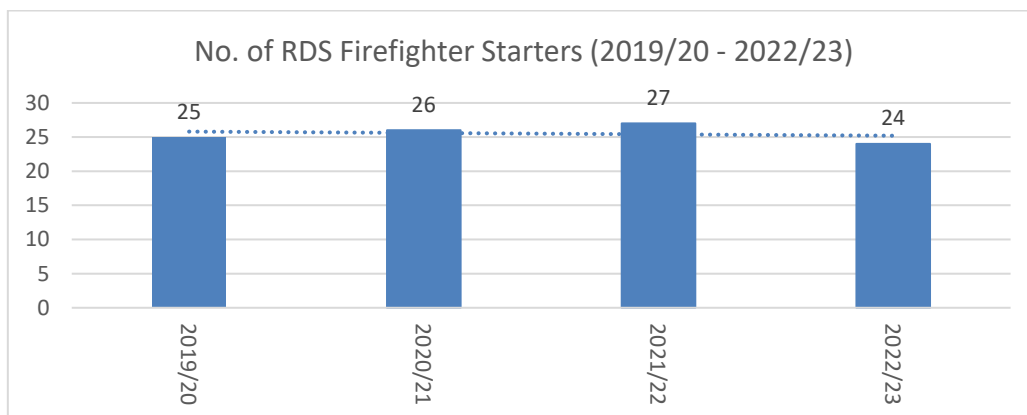


Figure 1 – Total RDS FF recruited during 2019/20 – 2023/24

10. As part of the RDS project, there has been a full review of the recruitment process to ensure that it is fit for purpose. The work which has been completed since March 2023 includes:
 - CDDFRS website recruitment section has been re-designed to streamline the process to make it easier to apply to be an RDS FF.
 - The design and purchase of bespoke recruitment banners for each fire station aimed at promoting the recruitment of RDS FF.
 - New recruitment videos describing what candidates can expect whilst progressing through the different stages of recruitment.
 - The creation of a SharePoint workflow(s) to manage candidates through the recruitment stages more effectively.
 - A more detailed approach to identifying candidates who will provide availability which will maximise the availability of the appliances.
 - A new booking system for fitness tests, to enable greater flexibility for candidates.
11. The work completed since March 2023 has resulted in 15 RDS FF recruited during quarter 1, a significant increase over previous years, and 114% greater than the next highest figure during the previous four years outlined in Table below.

	2019/20 Quarter 1	2020/21 Quarter 1	2021/22 Quarter 1	2022/23 Quarter 1	2023/24 Quarter 1
Number of RDS FF starters	7	2	6	4	15

Table 1 – Total RDS FF starters during quarter 1 (2019/20 – 2023/24)

The Retention of RDS Firefighters

12. The retention of RDS FF can be quantified in various ways, for the purpose of this report, retention will be broken down into the average time an RDS FF serves before leaving and the total number of leavers each year.
13. The average time served by RDS FF increased in 2021/22 but has remained relatively consistent over the previous 4 years as depicted in Figure 2 below. The average time an RDS FF will work for CDDFRS is 8 years.

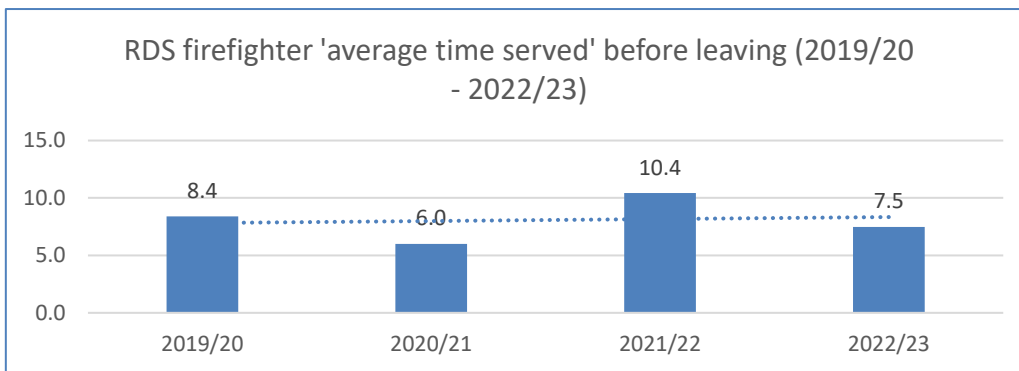


Figure 2 – Average time served for RDS FF broken down by year 2019/20 – 2023/24

14. 2022/23 recorded the highest number of RDS firefighter leavers over the previous 4 years demonstrated in Figure 3.

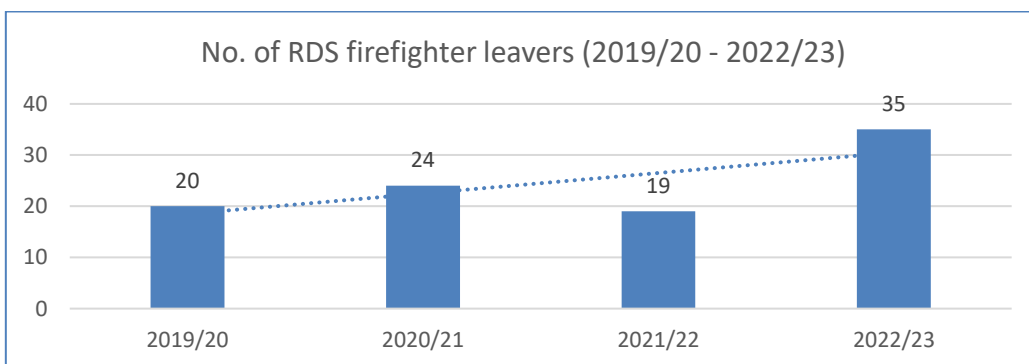


Figure 3 – Total RDS FF leavers during 2019/20 – 2023/24

15. When looking at the reasons given by RDS firefighters for leaving, the majority state 'personal reasons' which are predominantly out of the control of the Service, for example, changes to full time employment, family circumstances and moving home and in some instances no further information is obtainable to understand this further. There were also small numbers which stated 'retirement', 'alternative employment' and 'transfer to another FRS'.

16. The RDS project is reviewing the current measures in place to improve retention. Some of the work which has been completed since March 2023 includes:
- A full review of the exit interview process and the implementation of an improved exit interview to enable greater detail to be captured to assist the Service to understand reasons for leaving and to identify any trends.
 - Engagement with staff to better understand ways to improve retention via the monthly RDS Liaison meetings.
 - The introduction of flexible additional development sessions at Service Training Centre on a bi-monthly basis.
17. The work completed since March 2023, has culminated in the Service recording 6 RDS FF leavers during quarter 1, a significant decrease over the previous year (Table. 2).

	2019/20 Quarter 1	2020/21 Quarter 1	2021/22 Quarter 1	2022/23 Quarter 1	2023/24 Quarter 1
Number of RDS FF leavers	7	4	3	9	6

Table 2 – Total RDS FF leavers during quarter 1 (2019/20 – 2023/24)

RDS Station Establishments

18. The number of RDS FF on each RDS watch has varied over the previous 12 months with 4 watches maintaining, 7 watches increasing and 2 watches decreasing (Table. 3).

Station	Establishment 1 Aug 2022	Establishment 1 Aug 2023	Variation
Consett	10	16	↑
High Handenhold	14	13	↓
Seaham	14	14	↔
Wheatley Hill	13	14	↑
Durham	9	11	↑
Stanhope	15	13	↓
Crook	14	18	↑
Spennymoor	16	19	↑
Sedgefield	12	12	↔
Newton Aycliffe	16	13	↑
Bishop Auckland	14	18	↑
Middleton In-Teesdale	13	13	↔
Barnard Castle	15	15	↔
Total	175	189	+14

Table 3 – RDS watch establishments for 1 Aug 2022 and 1 Aug 2023

19. Whilst these numbers are positive, losing fully qualified RDS FF has a significant impact on the availability due to the timescales of training a newly recruited RDS FF.

The Availability of Fire Appliances Crewed by RDS Firefighters

20. The availability of fire appliances which are crewed by RDS FF is monitored through the Performance Board via performance indicator 'PI 16a Availability of on call appliances – 1st pump'.
21. RDS availability has marginally decreased each year over the previous 4 years as shown in Figure 4.

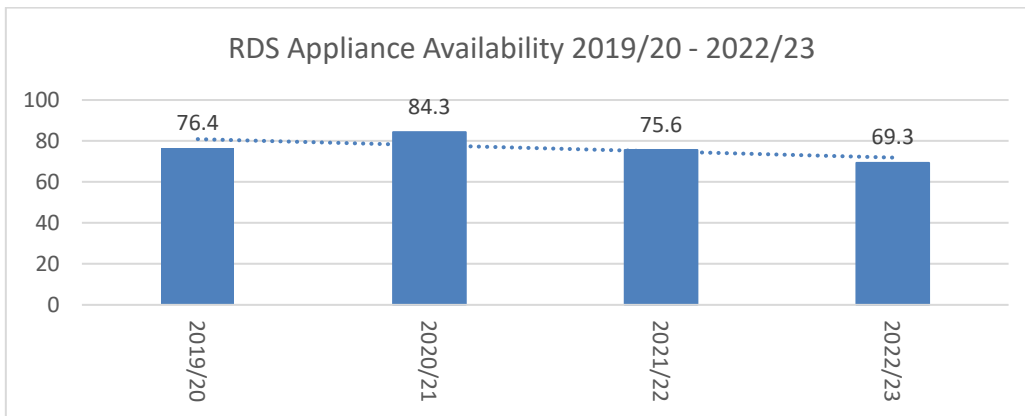


Figure 4 – PI 16a Availability percentage of RDS appliances – 1st pump (2019/20 – 2023/24)

22. As part of the RDS project, there is an action plan to assist with improving the availability of RDS fire appliances. Some of the work conducted since March 2023 which has assisted to improve RDS appliance availability includes:
- Utilisation of the Special Rescue Unit (SRU) and Targeted Response Vehicle (TRV) crews to staff RDS fire appliances.
 - Utilisation of Flexible Duty Officers (FDO) and Day Duty staff to staff RDS fire appliances.
 - Introduction of an electronic reporting system to measure RDS fire appliance availability with and without the use of additional staffing controls.
 - Creation of RDS Watch dashboards which provide information to help RDS Crew / Watch Managers and Station Managers manage RDS FF.
 - Review of the current procedures and practices for booking on / off call.
 - Review of RDS policies and procedures to ensure RDS Firefighters are fulfilling their contract.
23. It is envisaged that the RDS availability will continue to increase in the short and long term as a result of these actions.

Recommendation

24. Members are requested to:
- a) Note the content of the report.

Sarah Nattrass, Director Emergency Response, Ext. 5587