Rialtas na hÉireann
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Retained Fire Services in Ireland

A Review of Recruitment and Retention and the Future Sustainability of Service Delivery

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

Contents

Preface by Minister O'Brien **1**

Glossary of Terms/Acronyms **2**

Executive Summary **3**

1. Introduction **5**

1.1 Background to the Review 5

1.2 Methodology 6

1.3 Overview of the Service 6

2. Project Inputs **9**

2.1 NDFEM 9

2.2 Keeping Communities Safe 9

2.3 Local Authority 9

2.4 Composite Agreement 9

2.5 European Court of Justice 10

3. Research **11**

3.1 International 11

3.2 Northern Ireland Fire Service 11

3.3 UK Fire & Rescue Services 12

3.4 Defence Forces 13

3.5 Fire Authorities - Survey 14

3.6 Survey - Fire Service Senior Managers 14

3.7 Survey - Retained Firefighters 14

4. Recruitment and Retention **15**

4.1 Recruitment 15

4.1.1 Recruitment Process 15

4.1.2 Cost of recruitment 16

4.1.3 Primary Employers 16

4.1.4 Public Engagement 17

4.2 Retention 17

4.2.1 Survey Feedback 18

5. Key Issues **20**

5.1 Profile of Firefighter 20

5.1.1 Inclusion and Diversity 20

5.2 Staffing Arrangements 21

5.2.1 Crewing Levels 21

5.2.2 Availability Requirements 22

5.3 Terms and Conditions 23
5.3.1 Remuneration 23
5.4 Organisational Culture 24
5.4.1 Job Satisfaction 24
5.4.2 Staff Recognition 25
6. Delivering Change 26
6.1 Recommendations 26
6.1.1 Policy and Guidance 26
6.1.2 Local Authorities 27
6.1.3 Engagement and Inclusion 28
6.2 Implementation 29
6.3 Further Work 30
References 32
Appendix A 33
Appendix B 34
Appendix C 40
Appendix D 58
Appendix E 76

List of Tables/Figures

Table 1: Retained Incidents Attended (3-year average)

Table 2: Number of Mobilisations for Retained Fire Stations

Table 3: Turnouts for Retained Fire Station (5-yr average)

Table 4: Area Risk Categorisation

Table 5: Additional estimated cost per recruit in Year 1

Table 6: Numbers leaving Retained Fire Service (2016 – 2021)

Table 7: Reason for leaving Retained Fire Service (16 – 21)

Table 8: Number of Personnel that have left by Authority

Table 9: Percentage of Personnel that have left by Authority

Table 10: Age Profile Retained Fire Services

Table 11: Number of Personnel in Retained Fire Stations

Table 12: Availability Requirements

Table 13: Employment Profile of Retained Firefighters

Preface by Minister O'Brien



In 2021 I directed the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) to review the delivery and sustainability of the local authority 'Retained' Fire Services, with particular emphasis on the recruitment and retention of staff. I am delighted to publish "Retained Fire Services in Ireland – A Review of Recruitment and Retention and the Future Sustainability of Service Delivery". This review builds on the progress made implementing the "Keeping Communities Safe" policy, setting the future strategic direction of the Retained Fire Service.

I believe the recommendations in this review will strengthen the delivery of the retained fire services across the country. There is no doubt that the efforts of retained firefighters, and those of their full-time colleagues, first and foremost save lives, prevent damage to residential and commercial property, protect critical infrastructure and safeguard the environment. The work of these brave men and women can be dangerous, physically challenging, and psychologically demanding. Our firefighters are an elite frontline service staffed by very dedicated and selfless people, serving their communities around the clock.

I would like to acknowledge the comprehensive engagement by retained firefighting staff with the contribution of over 900 staff in the research survey conducted during 2021 and also the further direct engagement with staff representatives throughout the process. The scope of the research also included comparative analysis of service delivery models with other EU fire services.

This is a focused review, aiming to maintain the strengths of the retained fire services, while addressing the issues that are acting as a barrier to recruitment and retention. It is clear from the findings of the current review that the work life balance for retained firefighters needs to be addressed to make the retained fire service an attractive employment option. Retained fire services are drawn from the heart of our communities across the country. It is important that as we move to improve recruitment and retention, we also endeavour to prioritise inclusion and diversity within the Fire Service.

The implementation of the recommendations of this review should begin as soon as possible with continued engagement with all stakeholders. Retained firefighters operate in a very demanding environment. This review is intended to support our firefighters, improve working structures within the retained fire service and ultimately ensure the best service possible for communities that are served so well by the retained fire services across the country.

Darragh O'Brien TD

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage



Glossary of Terms/Acronyms

ARC	Area Risk Categorisation
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EVG	External Validation Group
KCS	Keeping Communities Safe
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
NDFEM	National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management
NIFRS	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
PDA	Pre-Determined Attendance

Executive Summary

The Minister requested that the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) undertake a review of the model of local authority 'retained' fire services delivery, with particular emphasis on the recruitment and retention of staff.

A project team was established within the NDFEM to lead the work and sought to explore and understand the issues which are impacting on service delivery, to undertake research and analysis and to propose options towards solutions, which will underpin the continuing provision of efficient, effective and inclusive local authority fire services into the future.

The aim of this review is to prioritise consideration of the issue of recruitment and retention in the sector, and to detail the broader inputs impacting on retained fire services. This report provides an overview of the current arrangements of retained fire services in Ireland and analyses the challenges.

This work reflects on and considers the current circumstances, explores the issues and their impacts, and proposes recommendations for implementation, considered essential to the continued delivery of an effective and efficient retained fire service. The objective is to match the needs of communities with the structure of retained fire services both now and into the future

Research has indicated that 'despite continued efforts to meet mandates to maintain retained fire services availability, the intractable, yet not insurmountable, underlying issues reflect wider social, economic and cultural changes which persist across the sector, nationally and internationally. The challenges faced now and in the future by retained fire services, many of which are related to recruitment and retention, are those faced by other services throughout Europe. The clear solutions to such perennial problems remain elusive for many across the sector. They have, however, recently precipitated exploratory, expert-led, collective, international research into recruitment and retention', and these have been considered in the work of the project team.

Additionally 'factors including social (increased individualism, increasingly non-traditional demographic profiles of local communities), economic (inflationary pressures, cost of living such as accommodation, changes to traditional workplaces and ways of working) or cultural (the extent to which the local and national community values the role of the retained service), indicate that recruitment will continue to prove challenging in the future'[1].

Engagement with key stakeholders has been an integral part of this process, including local authorities and staff working in retained fire services throughout Ireland.

Fire service delivery in recent years has been the subject of scrutiny by the NDFEM through the External Validation[2], Review of Fire Safety (Report of the Fire Safety Task Force)[3] and Capacity Review[4] groups, which produced reports on the broader issues in fire services. This report is particularly focussed on the significant challenges in relation to the delivery model and the recruitment and retention of staff in retained fire services.

This report makes broad recommendations to align the future of retained fire services with the need of the communities they serve. The identification of the key issues and data have informed the findings that will require appropriate national oversight in the period ahead. It will be challenging in the context of ensuring that any emergent issues are effectively progressed.

The work has included the gathering of data from local authorities, who are tasked with managing fire service provision in Ireland. This also included undertaking for the first time, in the retained fire services context, surveys of both management and front-line firefighters working in the sector.

The project team has analysed the collated data, liaised with key stakeholders and makes core

recommendations, which are outlined in Section 6 of this report.

The work has been challenging and an important overarching theme has been that this complex issue has many interconnected and related elements, some of which are not directly within the control of the service managers. The idea of 'one size fits all' solutions are not considered feasible in the context of the evaluation of all the issues explored. This should become self-evident on reading the report.

The report's recommendations are prioritised on the basis of actions that the project team feel will create a more positive environment, encouraging effective recruitment and retention of firefighters in the short to medium term.

The main recommendations in Section 6 relate to:

- Reviewing the remuneration model balancing organisational and individual needs;
- Reviewing area risk categorisation in the context of retained fire services;
- Standardising recruitment processes;
- Reviewing the Occupational Medical Scheme;
- Communicating the role of the retained firefighter to the public more effectively;
- Recognising the contribution of retained firefighters to their communities; and
- Working to both recognise the work of primary employers and seeking to optimise the participation of all employers in the sector.

It is acknowledged that the implementation of this report's recommendations requires more detailed work and further engagement with the key stakeholders. This will include effective negotiations with the staff interest groups for retained firefighters. The recommendations are far reaching and it is important to ensure that those targeted at improving recruitment and retention issues are prioritised.

To support the initial findings and data reviewed in this report, continuing and additional work is needed. This must use a robust, and broader base of evidence and data from across retained services both in Ireland and further afield. It requires simultaneously reviewing progress and also to identify and thereby propagate existing good practice, whilst identifying opportunities for possible future initiatives.

This report is focussed on recruitment and retention, and identifies further work including undertaking targeted research, and gathering evidence and data which supports the sector. The ongoing and planned work will underpin endeavours to afford the retained model appropriate attention and consideration, thus ensuring that it is sustainable and works effectively.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Review

The model for retained services has evolved since its inception in the 1940s as a local authority delivered service. The operational service in large urban areas is primarily provided by full-time firefighters. Outside of these larger urban areas, fire service provision is delivered mainly by retained brigades. There is a total of 201 fire stations with retained personnel, of which 197 are operated by retained staff, and 4 by a mix of full-time and retained crews.

Retained firefighters have traditionally lived, worked and socialised within the area of their fire station, which provides operational cover and availability of fire appliances. Retained firefighters are alerted by personal pagers from their homes or workplaces and are expected to respond to their local fire station immediately. They are required in their fire stations when responding to emergency incidents or attending training. The current model essentially requires a firefighter to have high levels of availability to attend incidents.

The operational call profile has changed over the last twenty years and activity has reduced in certain areas, including structural fires. Community demographics, infrastructure, employment profiles and lifestyle choices have also been evolving. These emerging issues have impacted on retained firefighters, providing challenges such as recruitment and also firefighter availability being more challenging, notwithstanding the conditions of employment, and any national agreements within the sector.

However, Irish society has dramatically changed since the original design of the current retained system, and the way people live is inherently different. Although the Retained Fire Service in Ireland is a paid occupation, traditionally it is embedded in the community and relies on the huge commitment of employees to serve as firefighters within their local community. It is not a volunteer fire service as is generally present in other countries, however there are similar traits around community spirit and motivation to provide an essential service locally. The difficulty to recruit and retain staff within the retained fire services in Ireland may be to some degree related to a societal shift away from participating in community activity. Further exploration of the motivations of individuals to work in areas that assist their community may yield greater insight into this area.

The increased urbanisation of Ireland additionally presents ongoing challenges as employment migrates from villages/town to the larger urban centres. The challenging financial climate has also had an effect on availability, with some primary employers no longer facilitating retained staff to respond during working hours. In addition, staff that are self-employed may also experience difficulty with maintaining availability for the fire service as they may have to seek work further afield, outside of a suitable distance from the station, limiting their ability to respond to incidents.

The significant challenge is balancing the organisational requirement and ability to respond with the life needs of the individual retained firefighters. There is variability noted in relation to staffing arrangements in fire services, which provides for more or less flexible availability requirements depending on location. The research carried out strongly indicates that the current requirements of the role are not easily compatible with the lifestyle choices of the present retained firefighters.

Collectively these contexts, allied to history, suggest that future recruitment will be increasingly challenging across the sector, for all services, despite best endeavours. It is additionally noted that a number of sectors, such as the National Ambulance Service and Defence Forces, have outlined significant recruitment challenges in the current environment. This is traditionally the same demographic from which we would like to be attracting potential recruits. This emphasises that retention will be a key means by which to sustain fire service response capabilities, especially in the short to medium term.

1.2 Methodology

The Management Board of the NDFEM approved the undertaking of a review of the model of local authority 'retained' fire services delivery, and agreed the general terms of reference with particular emphasis on the recruitment and retention of staff. The initial work of the Project team was concerned with the review as outlined in the terms of reference in **Appendix A**.

This report is prepared on the basis of meetings and collaborative discussions and engagement with key stakeholders, such as management and staff in the retained fire services. The project team carried out research, including engaging with work undertaken by the Department of Defence, in relation to recruitment and retention issues in the Permanent Defence Forces.

There was liaison and consultation with the Institute of Public Safety in the Netherlands, which has co-ordinated European-wide work on the recruitment and retention challenges for volunteer firefighters. There were additionally discussions with our colleagues in Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and also with Shropshire Fire Service, who are producing some leading work in the UK, as an organisation with predominantly on-call firefighters.

The NDFEM worked with all local authorities to establish baseline information in relation to the general structures and staffing arrangements of retained fire services. There was considerable work undertaken on seeking the views of personnel working in the sector. Coyne Research were engaged to advise, design and manage online surveys of both senior fire officers and firefighters working in retained fire services. Coyne Research collated all the relevant returns and further analysis was undertaken by the project team, which underpin the consideration of the potential recommendations.

This collaborative process was aided by the pre-existing structures and relationships between local authorities and the NDFEM. The NDFEM also provided updates and consulted with the Fire Services National Oversight and Implementation Group (Retained) under the Chairperson David Begg, facilitated by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA). There were a number of meetings with the group and effective engagement during this review process.

This report identifies the key issues and makes recommendations that will need to be progressed. The implementation process will be essential to action the priority areas, both in improving the current situation and enhancing the environment for future effective recruitment in the sector. These are considered in more detail in Section 6.

1.3 Overview of the Service

There are 2,065 retained firefighters nationally and 17 operational full-time positions, who are expected to ensure the turnout of 255 front-line vehicles, on a 24-hour basis all around the country. The past 20 years has seen an evolution in all incident types attended by the fire services, arising from changes in society, demography, and ongoing technological development.

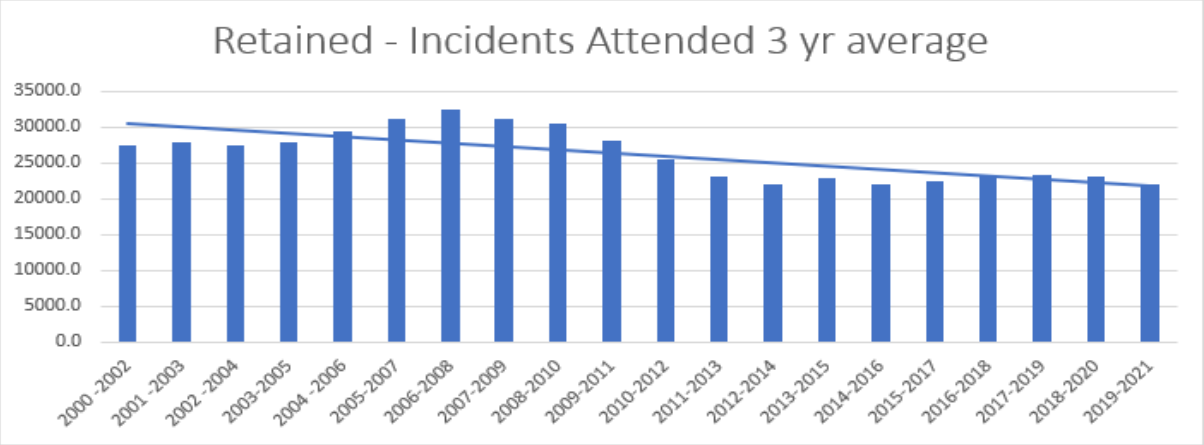


Table 1 provides the 3-year average for retained fire service incidents attended since 2000. The overall trend is reducing, although it has remained relatively steady in the last 5-year period. The profile of incident has changed in the period concerned with the main trends as follows:

- Fires attended has decreased from 62% of all incidents in 2000 to 45% in 2021
- Special Services attended has increased from 19% in 2000 to 35% in 2021

Hence, this changing profile has resulted in ongoing review in fire services of risk assessments, response capability, equipment and training requirements. The retained fire services have developed improved capacity within the local authorities, as the Principal Response Agency and also in building resilience in communities.

This applies in particular to the preparation for, and operational response to, a range of severe weather, influenced by the impacts of climate change, including storms, flooding, wildland fires, snow/ice and heat waves. The retained fire services also assist in a large number of local authority responses, in particular road-based incidents such as trees down, oil spills and dealing with road hazards.

The retained fire stations were mobilised an average of 24,750 times annually over the period of 2016 – 2020[5], including fires, road traffic collisions and special rescue and general services.

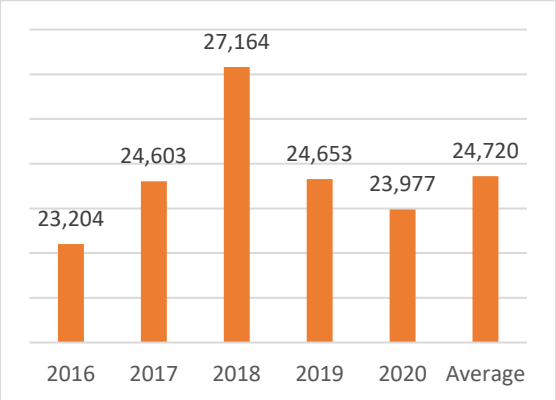


Table 2: Number of Mobilisations for Retained Fire Stations

The number of incidents attended within a given year varies from an average of 8 to 584 per station. 54% of retained firefighters work in stations that attend less than 100 incidents per annum and 76% of stations attend less than 150 incidents. An average of 8 firefighters were mobilised to all incidents in 2020.

Station Turnouts	No. of Stations
Up to 50	32 (16%)
51 – 100	76 (38%)
101 – 150	45 (22%)
151 – 200	17 (8%)
201 – 300	18 (9%)
301 – 400	9 (5%)
400+	4 (2%)

Table 3: Turnouts for Retained Fire Station (5-yr average)

All fire stations in Ireland have an Area Risk Categorisation (ARC), based on an analysis of population in a fire ground area, number of dwellings, incident rates and Individual / special hazards as set-out in national standards. The analysis is carried out locally by the relevant Fire Authority and the ARCs vary from A1 (highest) to E2 (lowest). The current breakdown of risk categories for retained stations is outlined in Table 4.

Area Risk Categorisation	Number of Retained Stations
A2, B	6
C1	22
C2	33
D1	52
D2	63
E1	20
E2	5
Total	**201**

Table 4: Area Risk Categorisation

In order to guarantee the response, an appropriate crew should be available to mobilise to an incident once alerted. Differing arrangements are in place within Fire Authorities to manage the number of available personnel.

Firefighters are currently paid an annual retainer and a significant portion of their pay comes from attending emergency calls, training and special duties. The budgeting for operational work is challenging as the cost of running retained fire services is on a pay-as-used principle, i.e. the more incidents attended the higher the expenditure.

The audit report identified that in 2017, retained personnel made up 62% of the total of firefighters (2,025 retained firefighters, 1,255 full-time firefighters). The total cost of the operation of the fire service in Ireland in 2017 was €269 million (excluding agency services), which is 6.4% of total revenue expenditure (€4,224 million) in local authorities[4].

The exact annual cost of running the retained Fire Services in Ireland on annual basis is difficult to exactly ascertain without more detailed audit figures. The extracted estimate of the payroll element for retained firefighters (including overtime, holidays, pension) in 2017 was approximately €56.5 million[6]. This is relative to expenditure on full-time firefighter payroll costs of approximately €101 million.

The model of retained fire services delivery is considered both effective and efficient, in that the activity element is operated on a 'pay as used principle' for incident mobilisation. While lower activity is beneficial for community safety, the unforeseen consequences of this model is that the take-home pay of retained firefighters is subsequently reduced. This is considered in more detail in the report under remuneration.

2. Project Inputs

2.1 NDFEM

The NDFEM was formed within the then Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in June 2009. The primary role is to create an effective model of integrated leadership, development support and oversight by central government of local authorities' provision of consistently effective, safe and value for money fire and emergency services in Ireland. The NDFEM put in place a management structure at central government level with a clear mandate and visibility to develop national policy and to drive achievement of consistent services by local authorities.

Under this arrangement, responsibility for the day-to-day operation of fire services remains with the local authorities. The NDFEM's mandate includes developing national policies, standards, guidance, and supporting and overseeing their implementation at local level. The successful development of national standards for local authority fire services and the subsequent benchmarking and validations process overseen by the Management Board offers a model for effective collaboration.

2.2 Keeping Communities Safe

Keeping Communities Safe (KCS) was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in March 2013. The KCS Framework addresses the management of risk, public safety improvement, incident reduction, the roles of fire services in society, response standards and service delivery structures based on international good practices.

The document sets out a risk management approach to service provision. The Framework is the current national policy document for the management of risk, defining fire service roles, response standards and service delivery structures.

The KCS policy is based on the internationally used systemic risk management approach and places emphasis on fire prevention and fire protection facilities in buildings, as well as on fire service response.

2.3 Local Authority

Fire services are directly provided by local authorities in Ireland. The Fire Services Act, 1981 and 2003 designates fire authorities, based on the principal local authorities. The fire authorities provide a range of operational and fire safety services through 27 service delivery units currently.

Political accountability for fire service delivery is maintained through the normal local government arrangements and the annual estimates process. The local authority can also adopt an appropriate 'Fire and Emergency Operations Plan', as required by Section 26 of the Fire Services Act, 1981 and 2003. Adoption of the Section 26 Plans is a 'reserved function', meaning that local authority fire service management bring the draft Section 26 Plan before the members of the local authority for their consideration.

2.4 Composite Agreement

The 1999 Composite Agreement between the fire services management and union covers the broad issues of pay and conditions of employment for retained firefighters. It includes information on pay, attendance, annual leave, public holiday payment, sick pay, calculation of fees, training, pensions, grievance and disciplinary, occupational health system, health and safety training, recruitment, turnout time, technology and staff arrangements.

Some areas covered in the 1999 agreement have been the subject of engagement in relation to interpretation, relating to the arrangements in individual authorities. This has included some rulings in formal industrial relations hearings, in specific circumstances in some authorities, such as staff arrangements.

While the intent of the agreement was to enable a consistent approach, there have been differing interpretations and implementation processes over the years in the various authorities. This has

resulted in different structures and working arrangements, which are highlighted in this report.

2.5 European Court of Justice

The ruling of the European Court of Justice in 2018[6] relates to a volunteer firefighter (Mr Rudy Matzak) in the town of Nivelles in Belgium and his seeking of compensation for his stand-by services, which according to Mr Matzak was to be categorised as working time.

The primary ruling of the Court was as follows:

- Member States may not derogate, with regard to certain categories of firefighters recruited by public fire services, from all obligations arising from the provisions of the directive, including the concepts of 'working time' and 'rest periods'.
- The directive also does not permit Member States to maintain/adopt a definition of the concept of 'working time' different from that laid down in the directive.
- Stand-by time which a worker is required to spend at home with the duty to respond to calls from his employer within eight minutes – which very significantly restricts the opportunities to carry out other activities – must be regarded as 'working time'.

There are a number of cases brought by Irish retained firefighters through the Workplace Relations Commission. One particular case in the Labour Court, was referred to the European Court of Justice and their interim ruling was released in November 2021[7]. This interim ruling was provided in relation to the particular set of circumstances presented in this particular case, namely that the stand-by time was not considered working time.

The matter is currently being considered by the Labour Court and final adjudication is awaited. It is probable that there will be further appeals or cases on this matter that will challenge the service provision model in the context of working time arrangements. This is kept under constant review by the LGMA and the DHLGH.

Furthermore, these rulings have been acknowledged in this work, firstly, as they highlight the influences of international, political and economic issues (which themselves reflect other multiple cultures) which make sustaining good availability locally once it has been achieved challenging for any retained fire service. Secondly, that these verdicts, and those which may occur in the future constitute a foreseeable "threat" to the retained fire services' sustainability of the currently defined model. Hence, there is risk and future agreements would have to align with and comply with the Organisation of Working Time legislation.

3. Research

3.1 International

In 2019, the Brandweeracademie (Fire Service Academy) in the Netherlands, part of the Instituut Fysieke Veiligheid (NIPV) presented the first report on the recruitment and retention of on-call volunteer firefighters in Europe[9]. This important report was part of a comprehensive research programme on Volunteer Firefighting in the Netherlands, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Safety and Security.

Fire officers from fifteen fire services throughout Europe, including Ireland, participated in the programme, sharing their experiences of their challenges in their respective countries regarding recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters.

The report determined that Fire Services throughout Europe experience or foresee challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, similar to those challenges experienced in Ireland. A focus group review for the project determined that:

- High medical and physical entry standards, rural exodus, growing reluctance amongst primary employers, availability requirements and low pay were the main challenges to recruiting new on-call firefighters;
- A commitment to the safety of citizens, group spirit, recognition, gratitude and appreciation and personal development opportunities were the main recruitment motivators;
- Incompatibility of the role with other activities or family, too few calls and too many demands regarding training and/or availability and growing reluctance amongst primary employers were the key obstacles to retaining personnel; and
- More gratitude recognition and appreciation by Fire Departments, more calls and a good spirit at local level were cited as the key motivators for retaining on-call firefighters.

Although the report did not provide any specific solutions to the challenge of recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters, the focus group highlighted main themes for considering the challenges:

- **Improved communication**, appreciation and recognition for on-call firefighters from supervising officers;
- **Targeting of specific groups for recruitment** including those underrepresented in the current on-call firefighter population (e.g. women and migrants) and certain professions (e.g. caretakers and youth firefighters);
- Better **engagement with primary employers** through the promotion of corporate social responsibility; and
- **Enhanced campaigns** at national and local level on the role of the retained firefighter through various media platforms.

The work on this project is ongoing and there are tranches of additional research being undertaken. The Project team have engaged with the NIPV staff and will monitor any further outputs from the continuing research.

3.2 Northern Ireland Fire Service

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS), along with all UK Fire & Rescue Services have a similar fire service model to that in the Republic of Ireland. They operate an On-Call Firefighter as part of its service delivery model. The ‘on call’ is the terms used in the UK for firefighters who were previously referred to as the retained duty system This is broadly similar but differs in some fundamental ways, particularly on some core principles on station availability and lower pay and conditions.

The model in the UK overall including Northern Ireland differs in aspects to the model in the Republic of Ireland, most notably by:

- Operating various availability contract bands ranging from 30 hours to a maximum of 120 hours per week,
- An increase in crewing levels per station,
- Much lower remuneration,
- Having a traditional dependency on Whole-time (full-time) firefighters, and
- In terms of demographics profiles and higher density population within urban areas

All of the areas identified can be attributed to some extent to the high attrition rate within the UK Fire Service. The NIFRS offers variable contracts requiring firefighters to be available for a fixed number of hours per week, up to a maximum of 120 hours. Some firefighters will opt to be available on evenings and weekends allowing them to work in a primary employment some distance from their fire station, whilst others may opt to be available during daytime hours due to their personal circumstances.

Such variable hour contracts could be considered with the recruitment and retention of retained firefighter in the Irish context. It would necessitate increasing the established number of retained firefighters in Fire Authorities leading to increased costs primarily in wages, training and equipment.

3.3 UK Fire & Rescue Services

Issues with maintaining and sustaining an on-call service model have been prevalent for some time and exacerbated with the onset of the UK Fire Services migration from a whole-time service delivery model towards an increasing reliance on On-Call Firefighters. Numerous UK reports over many years from Bain (2005)[10], Knight (2013)[11] and Thomas (2015)[12] have identified several influencing factors such as:

- Change in work patterns, where employers are not as willing to release workers.
- Self-employed persons in rural locations having to travel further for work so not being able to respond.
- Cost of housing in certain areas being prohibitive to those persons who may choose to volunteer to be retained firefighters.
- Differing social expectations.
- The relatively poor pay of the work.
- A lack of understanding about the On-Call Service.
- Increase in demands upon the service, e.g. proposals emanating from the White Paper on the Fire Service, particularly in relation to a wider role in rescue.

The On-Call Firefighter model is the principal firefighting response throughout 90% of the UK and crews over 50% of fire appliances.

The service delivery model has challenges in staffing on a 24-hour basis and there may be times where fire stations are not available, due to inadequate numbers of staff being available.

The conditions of service are set out in the "Grey Book" and are similar to the Irish situation with payment of retainer and for drill attendance and attending incidents, albeit at as a much lower level. They also provide an additional payment for completion of certain periods of service (five years).

The project team reviewed recent and impending reports from Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service in the UK. The service delivery model in Shropshire is identified as good practice in the UK context. There has been significant work undertaken to provide an evidence-based approach to seeking solutions to the identified challenge relating to recruitment and retention in 'on-call' fire services. The 'on-call' is the terms used in the UK for firefighters who were previously referred to as the retained duty system.

The research by Shropshire stated 'that seeking to sustain or augment the availability of on-call fire engines is so multifaceted that it has represented a seemingly intractable dilemma for the fire and rescue service for decades. Sir Tom Winsor of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in the latest *State of Fire* report identified that the "the on-call model needs attention to make sure it is more sustainable and works well" (Sadler 2022).

A key finding of this research reviewed thus far has highlighted solutions 'that may seem straightforward as they may first appear (e.g. to make the availability of on call fire engines more sustainable and simply recruiting the requisite number of On-Call Firefighters implied by this 'shortfall'). The problem has evidently endured for many services, partly as the causes that lay behind this perennial problem extend far beyond mere matters of recruitment' (Sadler 2022).

The Shropshire further stated that 'factors involved are myriad and complex and reflect

fluctuating socioeconomic trends, such as changes to employment, to pay, and to places of work, borne in part from financial crisis; they reflect societal changes including 'increased individualism' which adversely affects opportunities for recruitment and social upheavals precipitated by unprecedented pandemics, which adversely affect retention; and they reflect political factors, such as variable levels and sources of funding, profound changes to political structures borne from Brexit, and changes to emergency services governance, nationally and locally' (Sadler 2022).

A key area has been that 'of culture and the complex interactions that make the identification of solutions more challenging. UK fire and rescue services are embedded in their respective local and national cultures. The attempts to recruit, to retain, and the reasons why they resign are significantly influenced by the confluence of these multiple local, regional and national cultural contexts. Hence, the extent to which the local culture supports and values the role of a firefighter exerts a tremendous influence on the success of recruitment campaigns. Such broad items are not within the immediate control of either the fire service or the firefighter, and the relationship between service and local culture, like any good relationship, is that which requires work, should not be taken for granted, and in this on-call context is the primary means by which good retention, good recruitment and low levels of resignation are predicated.' (Sadler 2022)

The recent UK White paper on Fire Service reform (Our Fire & Rescue Service 2022)[13] acknowledges the need to provide a sustainable on-call (retained fire service) with a system of payment that rewards firefighters for this availability rather than for their response to incidents.

In summary, a recurring observation in the UK is that high levels of recruitment are not effective in the absence of adequate robust retention strategy, particularly so if they are not supported by retention of "On-Call Firefighters" for periods long enough for them to obtain additional skills.

3.4 Defence Forces

The Project team engaged with the Department of Defence on work in relation to challenges with recruitment and retention of personnel in the Permanent Defence Forces (PDF). Whilst it covers different roles in another sector, the view is that the issues are very similar at a broader societal level and that lessons could be gleaned from this substantial piece of work.

The Public Service Pay Commission published a report in May 2019 on Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force[14]. It received submissions by the Representative Bodies for military personnel and by Military Management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Defence. The Commission recognised that the PDF was experiencing retention challenges. Turnover in the PDF has increased significantly. In 2018, the overall turnover rate for the PDF was 8.1%, up from 5.1% in 2013.

Further analysis confirmed to the Commission that in excess of 75% of all leavers from the PDF do so voluntarily and these tend to occur over a wider range of service points/ages than generally occur in the public service making workforce planning difficult. The Commission also noted that circa 35% of annual attrition relates to personnel in their first five years of service, with the majority of departures in the first year.

The Commission confirmed that the PDF are devoting significant resources towards increasing recruitment activity levels to maintain personnel numbers at, or near the approved Establishment levels. A range of initiatives have been rolled out over recent years to enhance recruitment outcomes, including improved communications with applicants, bi-annual competitions, streamlining security procedures to reduce waiting time and measures to increase female participation.

The Commission further recommended that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement should consider putting arrangements in place, at an appropriate time, and without compromising

the stability of the public service pay bill, to allow for the adequacy of current pay arrangements more generally to be fully examined.

The Commission recommended that the pay structures in the PDF should be examined as part of any such review and consideration should be given to incentivised long service arrangements.

3.5 Fire Authorities - Survey

The NDFEM circulated a baseline quantitative data questionnaire to all Fire Authorities in September 2021. The data collated forms a key part of the work of this review and is broadly outlined in **Appendix B**. This included the following:

- Area Risk Categorisation of all Fire Stations
- Number of personnel (Retained and Full-time)
- Average Number of Personnel mobilising to incidents
- Number of Vacant Posts
- Number of Personnel that left the retained Fire Service in the period 2016 – 2021, both at retirement age and for other reasons and a breakdown of these reasons
- Number of personnel recruited during the same period
- Service length of personnel and their age profile
- Crewing arrangements within Fire Stations
- Number of Alpha Appliances in stations on a Pre-Determined Attendance

3.6 Survey - Fire Service Senior Managers

The NDFEM engaged Coyne Research to carry out a quantitative survey of Fire Service Managers (Senior Fire Officers). The survey addressed a range of areas but focused on recruitment and retention challenges in retained fire services.

Fieldwork was conducted online in November 2021 and there were 90 survey returns, representing just under half of all senior fire officers in the country. The data and information generated from this survey is referenced and discussed throughout this report and the main findings detailed in **Appendix C**.

3.7 Survey - Retained Firefighters

The NDFEM further engaged Coyne Research to carry out a quantitative survey of firefighters to evaluate their role and opinions of the retained Fire Service. The survey addressed a range of areas in their role but was concentrated on recruitment and retention issues for firefighters.

Fieldwork was conducted in December 2021 via an on-line survey and a total sample of 934 of the Retained Fire Service personnel (representing 42% of the workforce) completed the survey, giving a survey accuracy of +/- 3%. This included both current members (869) and those who recently left (65) the retained fire services. The data and information generated from this survey is referenced and discussed throughout this report, and the main findings detailed in **Appendix D**.

4. Recruitment and Retention

This review has a particular focus on the challenges associated with both the recruitment and retention of retained fire personnel around the country.

75% of Senior Fire Officers surveyed stated that their authority has some difficulty in recruiting retained firefighters, with 20% saying that it is very difficult.

The interim period after a vacancy arises results in higher availability requirements at the relevant station. The burden of a vacancy or a number of vacancies is carried by the remaining crew as they are still required to provide the minimum cover in the station at all times. This may have an impact on an individual's ability to take leave or attend training courses. In stations where vacancies are regularly occurring this becomes a recurring problem and the ability for staff to have time where they are not on call diminishes. This is a significant problem in some stations.

4.1 Recruitment

Retained firefighters have traditionally lived, worked and socialised within close proximity to their Fire Station. However, since the late 80s and early 90s, community demographics, infrastructure, employment profiles and lifestyle choices have been constantly changing, thus increasing the challenge of recruiting retained firefighters.

The current economic situation in Ireland also provides for many alternate employment opportunities for potential firefighter candidates and takes self-employed personnel outside the accepted distance from the Fire Station, thus creating further barriers to the recruitment of potential candidates.

4.1.1 Recruitment Process

There are variations in the recruitment process amongst Local Authorities. Firefighter posts are generally advertised by Local Authorities in local newspapers and an array of social media platforms.

Some local authorities advertise firefighter posts when a vacancy arises and no panel is in place, while others aim to maintain panels for all stations in the event of a vacancy arising. Maintaining panels considerably reduces the time to process a new candidate when a vacancy arises as it typically takes a minimum of 2 months to advertise posts and hold interviews to form panels.

Following receipt of applications for retained firefighter posts, some local authorities will require applicants to attend for work related tests (working at heights, claustrophobia etc.), literacy and numeracy tests. Others may carry out these tests following the formal interview. There are currently no national standard tests in physical, numeracy and literacy skills. The time interval between a retained firefighter leaving and a new person starting is critical for effective service delivery. This is particularly important in the context of the relatively lower complement of staff in certain stations. In the interim period, this means higher availability requirements at the relevant station, until the vacancy is filled.

Firefighters are required to carry out an occupational health medical and be Garda vetted as part of the recruitment process. The current Occupational Health Scheme for Members of the Retained Fire Service was developed in 2005. This covers both minimum entry and ongoing medical requirements after recruitment. Feedback from some authorities noted that a number of personnel placed on panels subsequently do not pass their occupational health medical examination. There have been significant developments in medical practices and testing equipment in the intervening years, since the introduction of the scheme.

When an applicant has been fully processed for a firefighting post, they are typically required to successfully complete induction training of approximately 6 weeks (primarily firefighting skills and using breathing apparatus) in their initial 12-month probationary period. In addition, some Fire Authorities require new entrants to attain a full C (Truck) Driving Licence during this period.

There may be other training undertaken depending on local requirements.

4.1.2 Cost of recruitment

Staff turnover overall necessitated the recruitment of 678 retained firefighters in the review period from 2016 to 2021. There are significant costs and challenges associated with the recruitment of new personnel.

Item	Typical Cost
Medical & Inoculations	€600
Firefighter Specific PPE (Helmet, Boots, Gloves, Anti-Flash hoods)	€800
Training QQI - Fire-fighting Skills (3 weeks), Using Breathing Apparatus (3 weeks) *	€14,100
C Licence Driving Lessons, Truck Hire for Test, payment for time and ancillary costs	€1,700
Estimated Additional Cost per new Recruit Firefighter (Year 1)	**€17,200**

*Cost includes wages, Course cost, Travel & Subsistence (assuming overnight subsistence payments)

Table 5: Additional estimated cost per recruit in Year 1

The core estimate in Table 5 does not include the considerable time and cost in organisational terms, associated with recruiting and training new firefighters. It also does not consider the costs incurred in subsequent initial training, to maintain brigade capabilities in a multitude of specialist activities that have been lost as a consequence of a high turnover of personnel.

Of those who had left the service over the 5-year period, 495 personnel had resigned before reaching retirement age. On the basis of the above cost estimate, for the 5-year period 2016 – 2021, Fire Authorities in Ireland incurred a minimum additional expenditure of €8.5 million associated with the recruitment for these 495 new personnel. This is a significant direct cost to the sector and highlights the financial implications in replacing personnel on an ongoing basis.

4.1.3 Primary Employers

Primary employers must have an arrangement with their employee whereby they release the employee to attend emergency callouts and training. The arrangements in relation to remuneration for the firefighter with their primary employer will vary from one employer to another.

Many businesses are not willing to release employees to the retained Fire Service due to the potential impact on their business. Many of their employees perform a role, which when vacated, has a knock-on effect on their daily business continuity. Analysis of the incident times can help e.g. an analysis of a sample retained fire station, which may be typical, indicated that approximately 55% of callouts occur between the hours of 08:00 to 18:00. 40% of callouts are less than 1 hour in duration and 80% are less than 2 hours in duration.

There are no direct incentives for primary employers to employ retained firefighters. Apart from releasing personnel to attend callouts, the level of training required for retained firefighters to be competent in their role, in particular new retained firefighters, poses a significant challenge to the daily continuity of many businesses, e.g., the majority of new retained firefighters will also have to attend at least 6-weeks training in their first year.

7% of retained firefighters also have a primary employment role within their Local Authority. Many Local Authorities require a retained firefighter to resign from their firefighter post to take up a primary employment role within the Local Authority. The data from Authorities indicates that 37 retained firefighters had to leave their post to take up another role within the Local Authority system in a 5-year period from 2016-2021. More than five in six Fire Service Managers think that a dual employment role within local authorities would help with recruitment and retention.

The overwhelming majority of Senior Fire Officers (70%) do not believe that their Fire Authority actively engages with their firefighters' primary employers or with local Business Representative Groups.

Accordingly, many local businesses are possibly unaware of their corporate social responsibilities

in this area and the benefits of having a retained firefighter in their staff, e.g., the majority of retained firefighters are trained medical first-responders and could very effectively carry out the role of first aider/responder or fire warden in a facility.

Increased proactive engagement at both national and authority levels will highlight the potential benefits of employing a retained firefighter. This could benefit recruitment levels and help businesses to realise their social corporate goals in the community.

4.1.4 Public Engagement

A number of Local Authorities have developed their own social media video footage in an effort to encourage members of the public to apply for a post in the retained Fire Service. Among those that have, more than two in five believe that the current effort in their authority was at least somewhat effective. More than five-sixths of Officers think that a national media campaign would be beneficial.

Four in five Officers think that educating the public would enhance recruitment and retention. Two-thirds of them think that the service needs to become more diverse in order to improve.

Many Civil Defence units traditionally operated an auxiliary Fire Service for volunteers in Local Authorities. This helped to develop both an interest in and a knowledge of Fire Service operations and developed basic fire-fighting skills for the volunteers. Many of these volunteers went on to work in the retained Fire Service. In recent years, the auxiliary Fire Service is no longer a part of most Civil Defence units, hence further reducing possibilities for members of the public to get practical exposure to working in the retained Fire Service. Other countries also operate Fire Service youth academies and provide education to teenagers on a career in the Fire Service.

4.2 Retention

Almost half of Senior Fire Managers say they have some difficulty retaining firefighters within their Fire Authority. This is an essential component of the review process and the overall data from the surveys has helped to identify the primary challenges in retaining firefighters. There was a high response rate of 42% of the eligible cohort, in the national firefighter survey, indicating significant interest amongst those working in the service.

September 2021 (Number of vacancies = 113)			
Numbers Leaving Service (Sep 2016 to Sep 2021)			
Overall	**Number**	**% of workforce**	**Annual (%)**
Resigned	495	24	4.8
At retirement age	221	10.7	2.1
Total	716	34.7	6.9

Table 6: Numbers leaving Retained Fire Service (2016 – 2021)

716 firefighters left the service in the 5-year period up to September 2021, of which 495 left before retirement age.

The returns from Local Authorities are mirrored by the data from the survey e.g. 1-in-3 stating an intention to leave the service to work fulltime with another employer. The average age of the personnel that left the retained fire service (other than retirements) was 39.8 years of age with an average of 9.6 years' experience.

Reason for Leaving	Number of Personnel
Move to another Employment	122
Personal / Family Circumstances	51
Medical Grounds	50
Move to Full-Time Fire Service Post	43
Move to Local Authority Post	37
Demand of 24/7 availability	33
Unsatisfactory Probation	30
Career Enhancement	16
Live in a Different Area	16
Personnel taken outside the area	15
Distance to Primary Employment	13
Primary Employer Restrictions	13
Unknown	13
Other	44

Table 7: Reason for leaving Retained Fire Service (2016 – 2021)

The number and breakdown of personnel that have left individual Fire Authorities (other than retirement) varies from zero to 49 (0% to 58.7%). Please refer to Tables 8 and 9.

The most concerning survey finding is that **58% of the firefighters claim that they are likely to leave the service in the next three years.** This is a figure of significant concern to the project team, one that highlights the current feelings of firefighters and should be a significant catalyst for implementing changes to the operational model of work over the short term.

4.2.1 Survey Feedback

Notwithstanding the necessary improvements identified in this report, it is important to acknowledge the positive feedback received from firefighters. These provide valuable insights into the reasons for personnel staying, as well as potentially leaving the service.

1 in 3 retained firefighters cite enjoying the role of being a firefighter as their top reason for remaining in the service, with over half choosing this as either their top or second biggest reason. 3 in 10 chose income as their top reason.

Over 40% are satisfied with their role as a retained firefighter, with a similar proportion claiming to be dissatisfied in their role.

79% agree that it is difficult to balance their fire service work with other roles and private life. A recurring theme in the overall feedback is that of **time and availability** requirements. Of those likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future, 67% claim it is because of the demand of 24/7 on-call availability.
Finally, 52% disagree that they have adequate structured time off in their current working arrangements to meet their needs.

In relation to **pay**, 65% disagree that they are adequately compensated and 40% would claim they would leave due to the reduction in the amount of calls/reduction in income.

Table 8: Number of Personnel that have left by Fire Authority (1/9/2016 to 31/8/2021)

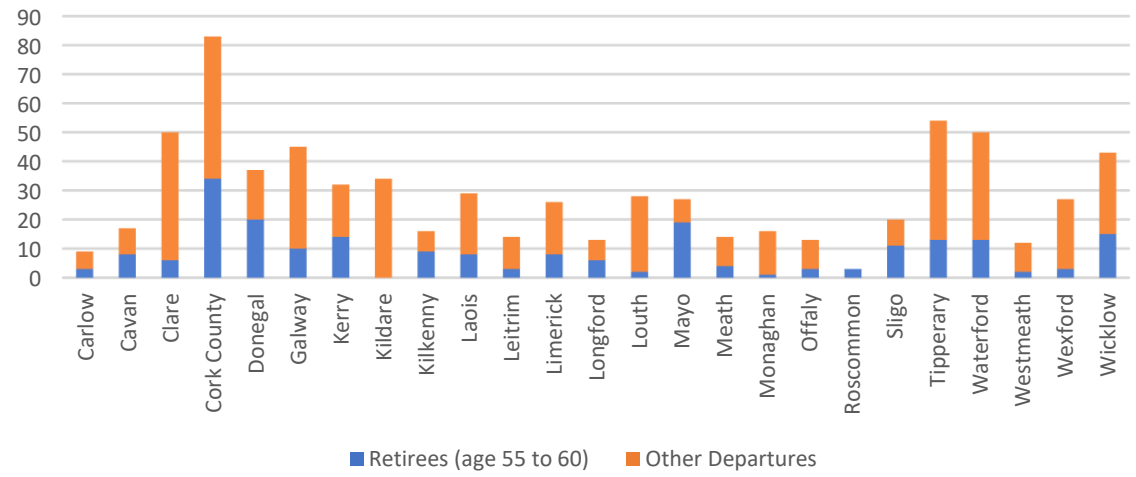
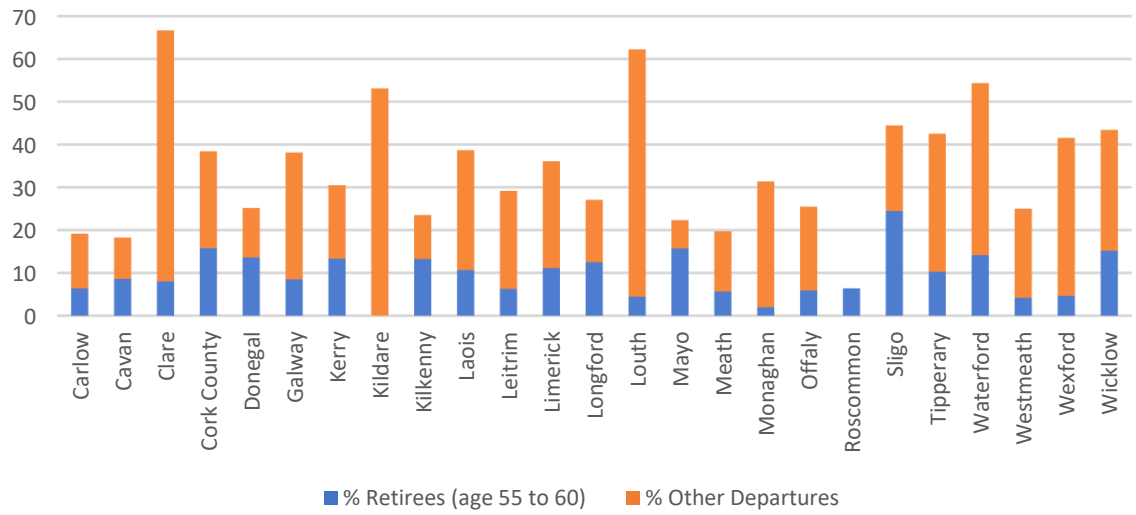


Table 9: Percentage of Personnel that have left by Fire Authority (1/9/2016 to 31/8/2021)



Staff turnover by stations (other than retirement) as a percentage of crew complement varies from 0% to 117%. Interestingly, there is no clear correlation between factors such as risk categorisation, rural or urban, or incident volume in the top 10 retained stations with the highest turnover of personnel (other than retirement).

Hence, it is very challenging to identify common factors or patterns at a national level, to discern critical factors in a person deciding to leave the service. Hence, for example while a station with an increased number of calls subsequently provides more income, helps to some degree, it does not necessarily result in better retention. This indicates that the solutions are probably found in the analysis of the specific local characteristics in the relevant fire station.

5. Key Issues

5.1 Profile of Firefighter

201 fire stations have 2,065 retained fire-fighting personnel (and 16 full-time Station Officers and 1 Sub Station Officer), of which 1,394 would be available at any time to respond. Every fire station has a Station Officer, with responsibility for the management of the fire station.

Retained firefighters must be over 18 years of age and normal retirement age is at 55. However, the retirement age can currently be extended to 60 years of age following the successful completion of ongoing Occupational Health Medicals.

The current age profile is detailed in Table 10. 70% are between the ages of 40 and 55 and the average age is 43 years old and have 12.1 years' experience.

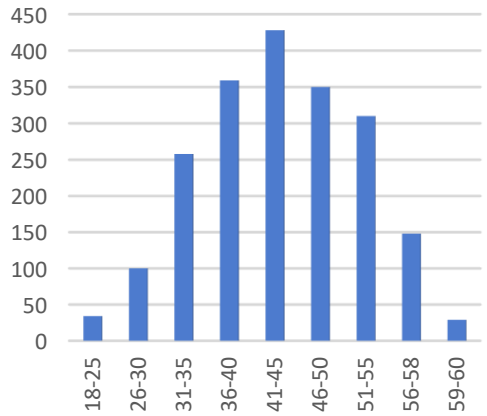


Table 10: Age Profile Retained Fire Services (Sep 2021)

A key component of fire service operations is having appropriately experienced firefighters to ensure the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the relevant intervention. The average experience in stations varies from 3 to 24.5 years. The current profile with approximately 175 retirements due alone over the next three years. This along with those in the 51 to 55 profile (over 300) will result in further diminution of experience levels in the coming years.

There are 69 stations with less than 10 years average experience. Traditionally the effective activity carried out by the fire service is very dependent on experience and learning that is gained from attending incidents. This will present challenges as the average experience profile reduces, with impact on competencies and skillsets available, potentially putting pressure on the effective and safe management of some incidents.

5.1.1 Inclusion and Diversity

The retained fire services should be committed to championing a workforce that reflects modern Ireland and the people they serve. Services must strive to create a culture where all have equal access to opportunity and feel comfortable and confident to be themselves at work. The retained workforce is overwhelmingly male (98.4%) with just 1.6% of retained firefighters being females. This is significantly below other sectors and the reasons were not fully explored for this project. It is essential to review why 50% of the population does not realistically consider the retained fire service as a viable option. There needs to be further work and research conducted on the factors and barriers for the effective participation of females in retained fire services.

The issue of diversity and the service reflecting society was not explored. However, 38% of firefighters agreed that the retained service needs to actively increase the diversity of the people it employs. This is considered a relatively low figure and further research is also needed to look at inputs, and factors that can maximise broader participation in the retained workforce.

The Shropshire research found 'underlying characteristics, such as the stereotypical view of the nature of fire service work and the perception of particular physical requirements to undertake the role. The imagery and language in the public domain depicting firefighters remains broadly traditional and quite possibly not reflective of the reality or potential that working with the fire service can offer' (Sadler 2022).

Additionally, the research stated that 'a service can only diversify according to the demographic profiles of its prospective recruits. Fire services can recruit from a pool of prospects located

immediately around each station that are willing to provide the availability and can only ever be as diverse as these local demographics allow. Retained fire stations are predominantly located in rural locations and cannot consist of a workforce, which reflects national profiles, which are invariably skewed by the populations that congregate within the major urban areas. Moreover, long term, good retention measured by long tenure reduces the need for recruitment and yet it is recruitment that is required to increase diversity' (Sadler 2022).

Further work is needed in the broader diversity area to optimise participation. Increased inclusion and diversity are directly linked to a positive and progressive fire service culture. Building on a positive culture will facilitate a robust and resilient fire service; optimise staff support, and service delivery.

5.2 Staffing Arrangements

The overarching arrangements are provided in general terms in the 1999 Composite Agreement. Operational standards in KCS provides details on the ARC and the relative response requirements e.g. 1-pump, 2-pump. There is no consistent application in authorities around the country.

Station Staffing Level	No of Stations
18	1
16	1
15	10
14	7
13	7
12	36
11	4
10	33
9	77
8	21

Table 11: Number of Firefighters in Retained Stations

There is no discernible pattern in relation to numbers or availability requirements relative to activity figures. The numbers in each station evolved historically in authorities, due to local circumstances and agreements. The particular challenge in this important area is that delivering a single solution may not be possible to meet the individual needs of all 201 stations. However, it is important that a framework is established, within which the solutions to the issues identified, can be effectively put into place.

5.2.1 Crewing Levels

The numbers of staff in retained stations is detailed in Table 10. The nominal number of established posts in retained fire stations throughout the country varies from 8 to 18 personnel, with an average of 10.2 personnel per station.

The number of personnel in stations does not correlate in a consistent manner with the relevant ARC, e.g., the number of established posts in Category C1 stations varies from 10 to 15 personnel, and there are Category E2 stations that have the same number of established posts (10) as some Category C1 stations.

The NDFEM circulated a draft 'Management of Attendance of Retained Crews' (Good Practice Note 2.6) to all authorities in 2014. This provided a framework to consider the management of staff levels in retained fire services with reference to the KCS document. KCS recommends a minimum attendance of 5 personnel on a front-line appliance. This draft document GPN 2.6 recommended linking optimal staffing levels to the ARC of the station. This was collated in terms of the existing staffing levels and was intended to provide for enhanced flexibility for the retained fire service. There needs to be further review of all potential inputs. The aim should be to provide an agreed framework which authorities could use to enable effective decision-making on staffing numbers, relative to the individual fire station characteristics and risks.

5.2.2 Availability Requirements

The majority of stations do not have formal rostered time off. A smaller number of Fire Stations operate a week-on/week-off arrangement. Some of these have rostered time-off, whilst other Fire Authorities allow personnel to work during their designated week-off.

153 fire stations (76.1%) operate a minimum staffing arrangement, e.g., 6 of the 9 personnel in a station must be available for a call-out at any given time. In general, a minimum staffing crewing arrangement allows all personnel in the crew to turn up for a call-out if they wish to do so, regardless of the incident type. The taking of time off is managed in different ways throughout the country and generally at an individual's discretion. The general availability requirements are detailed in Table 11. The number of personnel expected to turn out to a station when alerted varies from 4 to 12 personnel, with an average of 6.9 personnel guaranteed. There is significant variation in the level of commitment expected by retained personnel working in different Fire Authorities e.g. 11 stations expect a commitment of 5 personnel from 9, with 53 stations expecting 7 from 9. This creates a higher burden of availability in some authorities and hence less access to structured time-off in different stations.

F/F Complement	Availability Requirements
15	9 to 12
14	7 to 10
13	9
12	5 to 9
11	9
10	5 to 7
9	4 to 6
8	5 to 6

Note - One station each with 16 & 18 personnel
Table 12: Availability Requirements

Over 80 % of fire service managers agree that higher crewing levels with more structured time off would help with recruitment. Additionally, 9-in-10 agree that rostered time off without loss of income would make it easier to recruit and retain firefighters. The key element here is the structured and formally rostered time-off enabling firefighters to take appropriate rest time.

Some current crewing arrangements provide retained firefighters with limited opportunities to take time-off or leave. Some of the 'slots' for taking time off or leave may be unavailable as a consequence of vacant posts, sick leave, training courses, maternity / paternity leave etc.

There is also inconsistent application in authorities for the various types of leave, which is highlighted in the data collated as part of this project. This includes certified and uncertified sick leave, parental, maternity, paternity & bereavement leave, force majeure, leave of absence etc. In feedback received, there are challenges in the clear terms of such leave types for retained firefighters relative to other local authority employees. Circa 3-in-4 fire service managers agree that national guidance is required for the retained fire service in terms of various leave types.

These factors illustrate the challenge of structuring time-off, which is a very strong theme in the returns from the surveys undertaken. The solution is also simply not a matter of providing time-off, due to the existing culture amongst a significant number of existing firefighters who value their fuller time commitment to the community as a firefighter.

These cultural norms from the basis of an individual firefighter wanting to attend as many incidents as possible, considering the 'vocational' aspect of doing a public good, or additional income for attending an incident, or gaining job satisfaction/experience in attending, or a mixture of all three.

Overall, the availability requirements for a retained firefighter in their local fire service has a significant impact on their own family and social life, regularly restricting their lifestyle choices and their potential to successfully maintain other employment.

5.3 Terms and Conditions

One of the key conditions of the role is to reside and/or work within a defined geographical area, bounded by time or distance, depending on the Fire Authority. Typically, retained firefighters are required to reside and work within 3 kilometers (average is 2.6 km) or 5 minutes of their fire station but again there are variations around the country.

58% of Senior Fire Officers agree that increasing the time/distance constraint would help with recruiting new firefighters. This could provide a larger catchment area for recruiting firefighters and would allow existing firefighters to travel further from their Fire Station to work/home. It would be predicated upon review of the risk profile and the response requirements outlined in the relevant ARC for the station.

5.3.1 Remuneration

The current model is the payment of an annual retainer, bonus double-hour payment for prompt attendance at the station and a per-hourly payment thereafter. Firefighters are also paid the relevant hourly rate when attending the station or training. The retainer and training payments are the only guaranteed earnings for retained firefighters (currently circa. €10,500 per annum for new entrants).

The annual earnings for a retained firefighter can typically vary from €18,000 to €45,000. The retainer increases in terms of time in the role and there are higher rates for officers such as Sub Officer and Station Officer. The base hourly rate is the same for all firefighting staff and the system provides more pay for higher levels of operational activity. Hence, the busier the station, the higher the level of pay.

The model of pay has the benefit of incentivising attendance but makes it more challenging for firefighters to take time off, with the potential loss of income. The situation may also develop in the busier stations (i.e. 200+), where the number of incidents increase, and where perhaps the desired level of income has been achieved and the impetus to attend calls may be adversely affected.

In the evolution of the retained services, firefighter earnings were historically viewed as supplementing other income. National agreements from the late 1990s, improved the levels of pay and earnings would form the significant portion of the overall individual income for a large number of retained firefighters. 67% of retained firefighters are in employment, on a full or part time basis, with 7% having an employment role within their Local Authority. A third of all retained firefighters have no other employment.

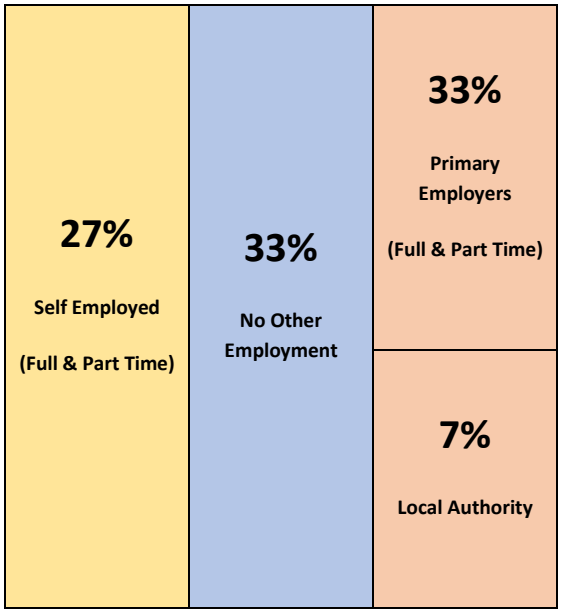


Table 13: Employment Profile for Retained Firefighters

The relative uncertainty in relation to earnings combined with the actual portion of fixed income pose challenges for firefighters in financial planning. This is particularly true of for those who do not have a regular income from another source.

There is strong correlation between the two staff surveys in relation to pay, with 80% of retained firefighters feeling that a guaranteed fixed income would help them to stay in the service. 80% of the fire service managers surveyed also agree that a revised remuneration model with more fixed elements of pay would help with retention.

There is also the possibility of considering contracting people for less or variable hours on a given week. This would require less commitment in hourly terms and in principle, variable hour

contract is considered a possible solution for four-out-of-five senior officers surveyed. While this option is in use in a small number of stations, it is not a panacea. There would be significant change and challenges relating to partial availability, with training and equipment for the potential additional personnel.

This again highlights the need to consider an overall remuneration model, to effectively balance the contrasting requirements of availability, activity and associated income.

5.4 Organisational Culture

Work has been referenced from the Netherlands[8] and the UK[1] as part of ongoing review on the challenges in recruitment and retention of volunteer and retained fire services. There are many differences between our respective jurisdictions, particularly on their relatively lower levels of pay, culture of volunteerism and numbers of personnel available.

However, the areas that influence positive sustainability, effectively resonate with the Irish situation. The factors can be challenging in that they may not be discernible in terms of objective measurement. The findings of some of the work establishes some principles of good practice that is felt enhances the level of retention as follows:

- Maintain atmosphere - the loyalty, the positive team/group feeling;
- Support from above at station and authority level;
- Professional satisfaction; and
- Perceived appreciation by the community.

The issue of 'positive culture' is considered very important by the project team and the Shropshire work states that 'it incorporates consideration of the local factors including the demographic profiles of the local communities, that each fire station serves, and significantly, from which they recruit. Further work is required to facilitate more sophisticated ways to measure its effects, in part the use of appropriate case studies that draw out what criteria form the "right" cultural conditions at the retained services core which are conducive to effective and sustainable availability' (Sadler 2022).

More precisely, the Shropshire wok argues that 'multiple cultures that necessarily exist within the various fire services, and the underpinning local cultures which exist without it'. At this stage, there is insufficient research in the Irish context. The evidence in the UK confirms that 'a service and station culture, which consists of flexibility, inclusivity, responsiveness, & recognition, empathy and support (FIRES) in conjunction with a supportive local culture, actively and frequently engaged, can co-create very high levels of goodwill which results in sustainable availability. Recognition, in particular locally, both from the community and fire service management, leads to increased workforce engagement and commitment, all of which are an essential part of maintaining the goodwill upon which good availability is predicated' (Sadler 2022).

5.4.1 Job Satisfaction

The firefighter survey found areas of very positive responses relating to having good working relationships with their colleagues (90%) and that they felt motivated to do the best job they can (80%).

Circa half agree that the fire service in their county or city feels like a positive place to work. 89% agree that their job makes an important contribution to their community.

Importantly, 89% responded that they understand what is expected from them as a retained firefighter and 70% agree that the job makes good use of their skills and abilities. Over 80% agree that their station has the right equipment to allow their crew to carry out the role effectively. Circa 2-in-3 agree that the service gives them good work experience and skills that can transfer to other employment.

Coyne Research confirmed that the results of the job satisfaction elements of the survey compare favourably to other sectors, where they have undertaken work. This positive feedback seems counter-intuitive relative to the identified challenges of retention in this report. The project team feel that these positive aspects on job satisfaction strongly emphasise how big a factor the availability and time commitment elements are for the role.

It is clear that the impact of the main reasons identified by retained firefighters as to why they may leave the fire service in the near future significantly outweigh the benefits that they feel from performing in the role.

There is correlation between the firefighter survey responses to 'the fire service in my county/city feels like a good place to work' and 'I receive regular feedback from my line manager'. In both cases, approximately one third of firefighters disagreed and this emphasises the importance of effective management. Another finding is that 1-in-5 firefighters felt that the supervisors they report to are not considerate of their needs. Local management is a significant factor in creating a positive team-orientated working atmosphere.

The station management has a significant influence on morale and can provide an environment that either enhances or inhibits the potential for both recruiting new personnel and retaining existing, particularly within smaller communities. The provision of appropriate supports is key to this, including officers having appropriate people management skills. These must be enhanced through effective training, support and guidance from senior management.

5.4.2 Staff Recognition

Much of the feedback and commentary from the survey reflected firefighters feeling a lack of recognition for the role they play in the community and the commitment they and their families give to the retained Fire Service.

There are formal long-service awards (20, 30 and 40-years' service), presented by the Minister from the DHLGH at a national ceremony, every two years. There are additionally 10-year awards available for presentation locally.

Good practice should be considered, examined and communicated within the sector, leading to initiatives that are put in place at local level to recognise the important contribution of firefighters, including their families and also employers, where applicable.

6. Delivering Change

This report is the first step in identifying the key strategic pillars that need consideration and implementation over the coming months and years. The conclusions are drawn from the research and literature review, analysis of the data from authorities, survey feedback from all levels of staff working in retained fire services and engagement with key stakeholders.

6.1 Recommendations

The conclusions are viewed as non-exhaustive but are considered the priority areas for current action. These core recommendations will require further development and effective engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The aim is to enhance the current model(s) of service delivery in retained fire services in Ireland.

6.1.1 Policy and Guidance

Central government, through primarily the DHLGH, provides development support and oversight of local authorities' provision of consistently effective, safe and value for money fire & emergency services in Local Authorities. The NDFEM has in place a management structure at central government level with a clear mandate and visibility to develop national policy and to drive achievement of consistent services by local authorities.

The existing national guidance in KCS provides a framework for consideration of some of the factors, in particular the ARC, which is the fundamental building block for assessing risk at station level. This needs some review in the context of the significant factors discussed in this report.

Recommendation 1

A review of the existing guidance should be undertaken in the context of the Area Risk Categorisation of a fire station, in particular considering the following:

- **operational resources including minimum staffing levels relative to the risk; and**
- **the distance / time constraint criteria for firefighters relating to their residential and working arrangements.**

In the context of government policy, pay is part of overall public sector agreements. The existing sectoral arrangements are broadly contained in the 1999 Composite agreement. The overall model of remuneration and the broad terms and conditions need to be reviewed, in particular balancing the service requirements with the individual needs and rights of the individual.

The most significant feedback in this review from the firefighter perspective was the overall remuneration model, including the pay in terms of the requisite commitment required in terms of availability to respond promptly to incidents. The existing model is not considered sufficient by staff, in terms of both the delivery of an effective service and ensuring an adequate work/life balance for retained firefighters.

The feedback overall from both management and staff within the sector, was that a revised model is needed to incorporate more fixed elements of pay and access to planned and structured time off. In line with the wider working population, retained firefighters want to be able to balance domestic, leisure and work time according to their own needs.

Recommendation 2

A new framework for service delivery is required that:

- **provides remuneration, which effectively balances the availability requirements with the varying activity levels of firefighters in the retained fire services in Ireland; and**
- **considers structured availability and leave arrangements, providing both an effective service delivery, and a suitable work / life balance for retained firefighters, including structured time off.**

There is inconsistency around the country relating to the application of overall public sector agreements, particularly relating to the various leave arrangements and entitlements. This has been the subject of engagements between staff interest groups and management and appropriate guidance needs to be developed.

Recommendation 3
Guidance should be provided on the arrangements for retained firefighters taking the various types of leave including annual, certified and uncertified sick leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, force majeure, leave of absence etc.

There was considerable feedback in the surveys relating to the occupational medical scheme for retained firefighters. The current system was introduced in the mid-2000s and the purpose was to review the physical capacity to undertake the work required of a retained firefighter, with an appropriate medical assessment on an ongoing basis depending on age profile. This includes an annual review of those who wish to extend beyond the normal retirement age of 55 to the extended age of 58.

There have been medical reviews resulting in personnel not being deemed eligible to either join or continue in the service. This is considered important and there needs to be a review to consider the medical developments in the intervening period, that may both consider the eligibility requirements for joining and also support people in the role.

Recommendation 4
The current Occupational Health Medical scheme for members of the retained fire services should be reviewed and updated considering current medical science.

There are differing processes for the recruitment of retained firefighter personnel in local authorities. This includes consideration of the areas such as literacy, numeracy and physical tests as requirements for the role. Standard requirements should be developed for the recruitment of retained personnel, including standardised physical and suitability tests.

Recommendation 5
Guidance should be provided nationally on a standardised process for the recruitment of a retained firefighter.

The work and response profile of the retained fire services has evolved over the years and includes supporting the local authority in various response scenarios related to areas such as weather extremes. There has also been increased supporting front-line work, in assisting other principal emergency services such as the National Ambulance Service and An Garda Síochána. The scope of such work needs further consideration as necessary in areas such as medical assists, cardiac first responder, special rescues and support.

Recommendation 6
A review should be completed for any potential areas of response work that could be undertaken by the retained fire services for other agencies.

6.1.2 Local Authorities

The reality of the retained fire services, like any employment, is that people leave for a variety of reasons, sometimes at short notice. Considering the numbers in retained fire stations, this can sometimes have a disproportionate effect on the existing staff. It would be beneficial to minimise where possible the time from a person leaving to finding a replacement.

Recommendation 7
Local Authorities should aim to maintain ongoing employment panels in place for retained fire stations to expedite the process of filling vacancies, as they arise.

Further work is needed on scrutinising the primary reasons as to why people are leaving the service prematurely and the local authority should gather such information on a formal structured basis.

This will help inform ongoing initiatives in enhancing the environment for retention. It is noted that what will work for one may not work for another but sharing realistic data and emerging thoughts will help to make better decisions.

Recommendation 8
Local Authorities should consider holding appropriate exit interviews with retained firefighters, to determine reasons for leaving the service.

The contributions that retained firefighters make to their communities is recognised as very important in the research undertaken. It is important that consideration is taken of recognising such contributions in both a formal and informal sense at local level. The gathering and sharing of good practice in this area should be encouraged for development throughout the country.

Recommendation 9
Local Authorities should put in place initiatives and events to recognise the contribution retained firefighters and their families make to their communities.

The benefits of employing a retained firefighter have been outlined in the report. However, the numbers of retained firefighters in local authorities has reduced over the last 10 years. There have been 37 personnel that left the retained service for another role in the Local Authority over the 5-year survey period. The Local Authority sector should lead by example by giving consideration to, both retaining existing firefighters and also the provision of opportunities, where possible for the recruitment of new staff.

Recommendation 10
Local Authorities should examine how they can effectively support retained fire services, for both the retention of existing and the recruitment of retained firefighters from within its own workforces, where appropriate, reflecting demands on staff in their existing roles and work location.

6.1.3 Engagement and Inclusion

A key area identified in this review is the matter of the public knowledge and perception of the role of a retained firefighter. The service is predominately male with 98.4% of the workforce and there is little evidence of a fully inclusive environment. This project has not engaged with the public and this can be explored in future work. A number of authorities have used social media for recruitment and this can sometimes inadvertently reinforce the stereotype view of the attributes that a firefighter needs.

Recommendation 11
Communications and public relations should be developed, to include national and local programmes and campaigns to both inform the public of the role of a retained firefighter, and to encourage them to apply for a career in the fire service.

There is a particular challenge with female participation in the retained fire services. The current figure of 1.6% nationally is very low and the underlying reasons are worthy of more significant research and work. There are elements of inclusion and diversity, which also need to be included in aspects of further communications and research.

Increased inclusion and diversity are directly linked to a positive and progressive fire service culture. Building on this positive culture will facilitate a robust and resilient fire service and optimise staff support and service delivery.

Recommendation 12

The action plans for recruitment and retention in retained fire services, should focus on enhancing inclusion and diversity in the workforce, in particular female participation, and reflecting modern Irish society.

There is a large cohort of firefighters (40%), whose primary employers agree to release the person during work hours, to undertake their duties as a retained firefighter. This makes a significant contribution to service delivery and should be recognised locally and nationally. Additionally, there should be campaigns to communicate to employers who do not currently facilitate their staff. This will need both local and national action and would be championed under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility, emphasising the contribution to public safety.

Recommendation 13

There should be local and national engagement with both existing primary employers and relevant business representative groups, to proactively promote the role and benefits of employing a retained firefighter in their organisation.

6.2 Implementation

This Report, with its recommendations, provides an opportunity to undertake ongoing review and oversight, where additional resources may be needed. It will also require a strategic drive as to where available resources can be used more effectively for the objective of public safety.

The NDFEM is the driver of national standards to try and ensure a uniform policy for consistency within fire authorities in Ireland. This is very challenging and can have the opposite effect in restricting innovation and solutions at local level. The aim is to follow the framework of principles established under KCS, whilst allowing for diversity and some local differences within these limitations.

The project team have concluded that there is a great diversity of challenges and possible solutions, but that at the same time a number of these have been known for a period of time, and with minimal change in a number of areas. That begs the question of how this is possible and why?

The answer probably lies in that our approach traditionally thinks in terms of uniform policies, while the reality is multi-faceted and dealing with differences is the difficult part of the current system. The search for opportunities to create room for diversity of solutions within an appropriate framework of a uniform agreement is therefore the greatest challenge.

The project team firmly concludes that it is not a matter of detailing further the challenges and that there are still opportunities for the retention of personnel within retained fire services. The key driver economically will be the cost of improvements and there will be a need for additional expenditure to implement identified solutions and the issues around retention. It will not necessarily be universally solved by simply increasing pay, and needs consideration of the overall remuneration package that factors in the balance of pay with the time commitment and availability requirements, along with implementing a number of the other recommendations.

The retained fire services are considered to be providing a cost-effective and efficient service in principle and there is an urgent requirement to develop and evolve the model, in the context of the current drivers and influences outlined in this report. The implementation process should be commenced as soon as practicable, at both national and local levels, and include effective engagement with all the key stakeholders. The primary concern of the project team is the sustainability of the existing model of service delivery.

Hence, priority action should be progressed on Recommendations 1 and 2 relating to the review of ARC methodology and the remuneration model. This will require work and significant engagement at national and local levels to determine the particular inputs in enhancing the environment for the effective retention of firefighters.

The Shropshire research noted that 'the broader factors involved in recruitment are myriad and complex. They reflect fluctuating societal and economic trends, such as changes to employment, to pay, and to places of work, borne in part from the financial crisis; they reflect societal changes including increased urbanisation and also increased 'individualism' which adversely affects opportunities for recruitment. Finally, the social upheavals precipitated by the recent and ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, adversely affect retention' (Sadler 2022).

There are significant drivers for change such as overall policy, quality of service provision, costs, staffing interests and logistics. The main context in drafting the recommendations is that there is no single solution to cover all aspects of service delivery. Barriers and difficulties can be anticipated at the implementation stage, but the project team believes that it is essential to action the recommendations in this report, in a timely manner.

The implementation phase will contain a number of significant issues, financial, human resources, unions, changes to employment contracts, reviews of area risk categorisation, elements of KCS, equality and diversity, together with demands on the capital programme, in relation to adaptations of existing buildings. This will also raise issues about the roles performed by retained firefighters and the requirement for increasing investment, against a backdrop of reduced activity relative to the past.

The recommendations are tabulated in **Appendix E**, with the broad milestone actions identified to mark progress. The key factor will be effective engagement, firstly in assessing alternative models of service delivery and then agreeing an overall framework. The new model of service delivery will require a national framework for consistency in relation to core principles such as public safety, working conditions and remuneration, with delivery arrangements depending on the local risk. This process of change will require significant communication strategies at national and local levels.

Finally, given that our firefighters, officers, and management in the services, have articulated the problems, and offered solutions, there is a responsibility placed on key stakeholders, to convert that willingness to change, into meaningful action on the ground. This will require a costed framework of proposals when developing the service delivery model. The question should be one of investment in keeping communities safe rather than simply cost, in securing effective, affordable and inclusive retained fire services into the future.

Hence, this review provides the opportunity to ensure that the retained fire services in Ireland can maintain, develop and continue to evolve to meet current and future needs, in the interests of effective service provision and enhanced public safety.

6.3 Further Work

It is important to acknowledge that the model of retained fire service delivery has served the public very well over the past 70 years. The high availability of retained fire station response is clearly due to a very positive culture at its core.

The work in this report is intended to outline and understand overall issues impacting on such availability and sustainability over the years ahead. Hence, the report is to be viewed strategically and recognises that significant further work is required, with the aim of seeking to at least sustain or stabilise the availability levels and enhance recruitment and retention within the sector.

This will need collation of further relevant data and empirical evidence from other jurisdictions and our own retained fire services. The use of such robust base evidence and data, will be part of future methodology to inform good practice, and further findings will enable key decision makers to take measured, smart and most importantly prudent approaches to the sustainability of retained fire services.

Consider further work such as:

- The NDFEM data request for retained fire services will be repeated on a two-yearly cycle, similar to that completed in 2021, to review progress;
- Research into effective stations and understanding the key success factors and motivators;
- Monitor the European work;
- Monitor the implications of the ECJ rulings;
- Public Surveys;
- Research into equality, diversity and inclusion in retained fire services;

References

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10. Bain, G. (2002) *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives.* (UK Government).
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12. Thomas, Adrian (2015) *Independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England* (UK Government)
13. *White Paper 'Our Fire & Rescue Service'* (UK Government 2022)
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This final print version has some corrected citations and references.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management has approved the undertaking of a review of the model of local authority 'retained' fire services delivery, with particular emphasis on the recruitment and retention of staff.

2. Objective

2.1 The objective is to explore and understand the issues which are impacting on service delivery, to undertake research and analysis and to propose options towards solutions, which will underpin the continuing provision of effective and inclusive local authority fire services into the future

3. Methodology

3.1 A project team within will be established within the NDFEM to undertake the Review.

3.2 The Project team will work with and report to the NDFEM Fire Service Operations Committee.

3.3 The Project team may, subject to appropriate approval, seek additional resources or set up relevant sub-group(s) to provide advice or to assist it in the performance of its functions.

4. Approach

4.1 The primary approach of the project team will be to:

a) Consider and take cognisance of all current national policy and guidance;

b) Collect, collate and consider available data/ information relating to the existing staffing structures, practices and numbers in retained fire services;

c) Identify and review the challenges facing fire authorities in relation to both the recruitment and the retention of existing retained firefighters;

d) Identify and review the barriers to recruitment in the context of equality and diversity issues;

e) Review the current arrangements relating to availability and turnout requirements in retained fire services;

f) Consider all arrangements in the context of national policy (as set out in Keeping Communities Safe), and particularly in the context of the Area Risk Categorisations undertaken by fire authorities;

g) Review the existing models against similar structured services in other jurisdictions;

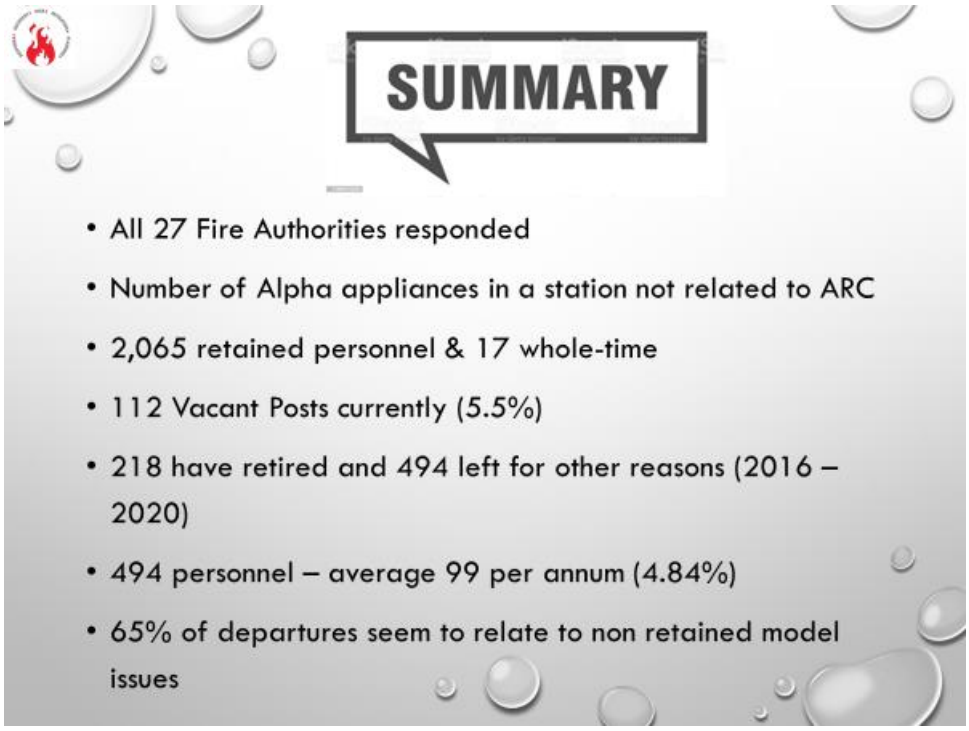
h) Undertake a needs analysis, explore options and make recommendations in relation to future models of delivery to secure effective, affordable and inclusive retained fire services;

i) Arrange consultation at appropriate stages with all key stakeholders during the review process, including central and local government, the public, fire service management/staff, and the staffing interest groups.

j) Prepare a final report for the consideration of the NDFEM Management Board.

Appendix B

Overview of the Local Authority Data





PRIMARY REASONS FOR DEPARTURE

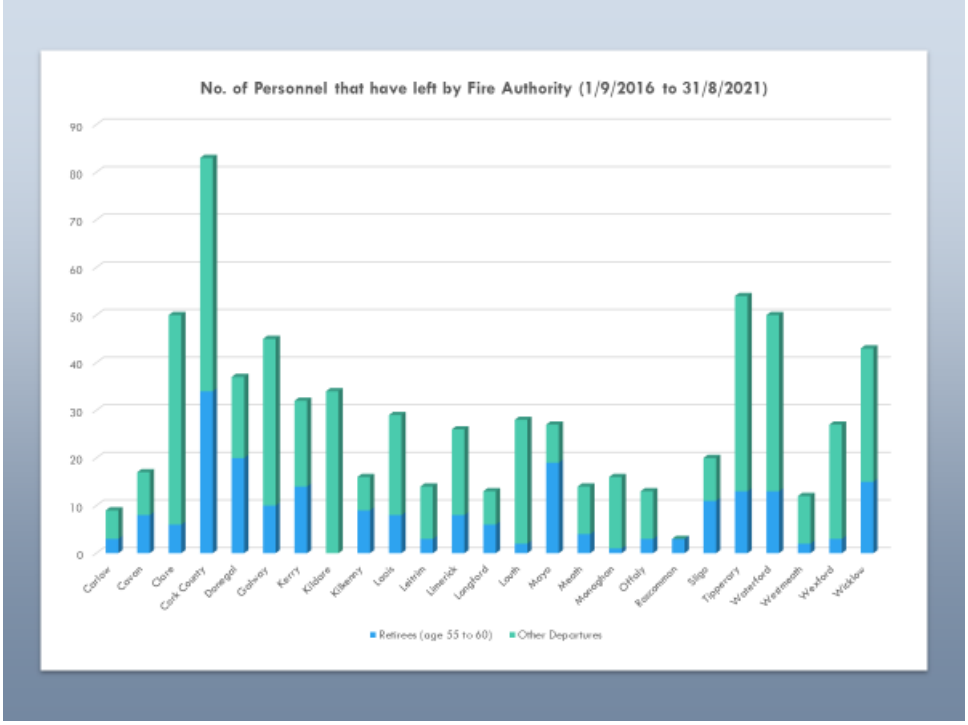
Reason for Leaving	Number of Personnel	Reason for Leaving	Number of Personnel
Move to another Employment	122	Unsatisfactory Probation	30
Personal / Family Circumstances	51	Career Enhancement	16
Medical Grounds	50	Live in a Different Area	16
Full-Time Fire Service Post	43	Personnel taken outside the area	15
Move to Local Authority Post	37	Distance to Primary Employment	13
Demand of 24/7 availability	33	Primary Employer Restrictions	13
Unsatisfactory Probation	30	Unknown	13
Career Enhancement	16	Other	49

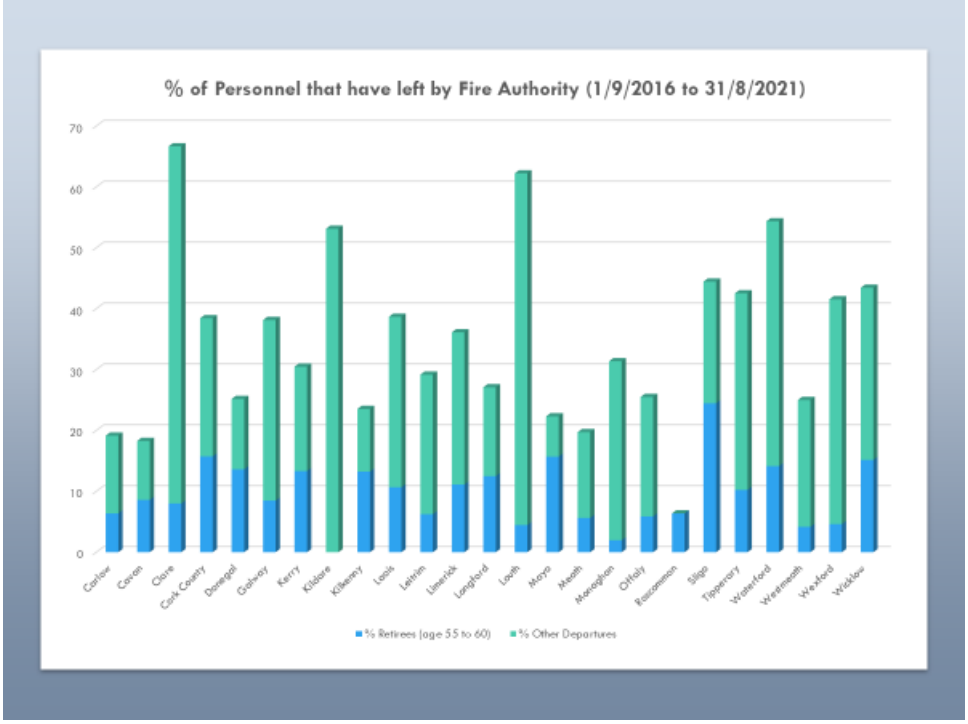
GUARANTEED CREWING AVAILABILITY

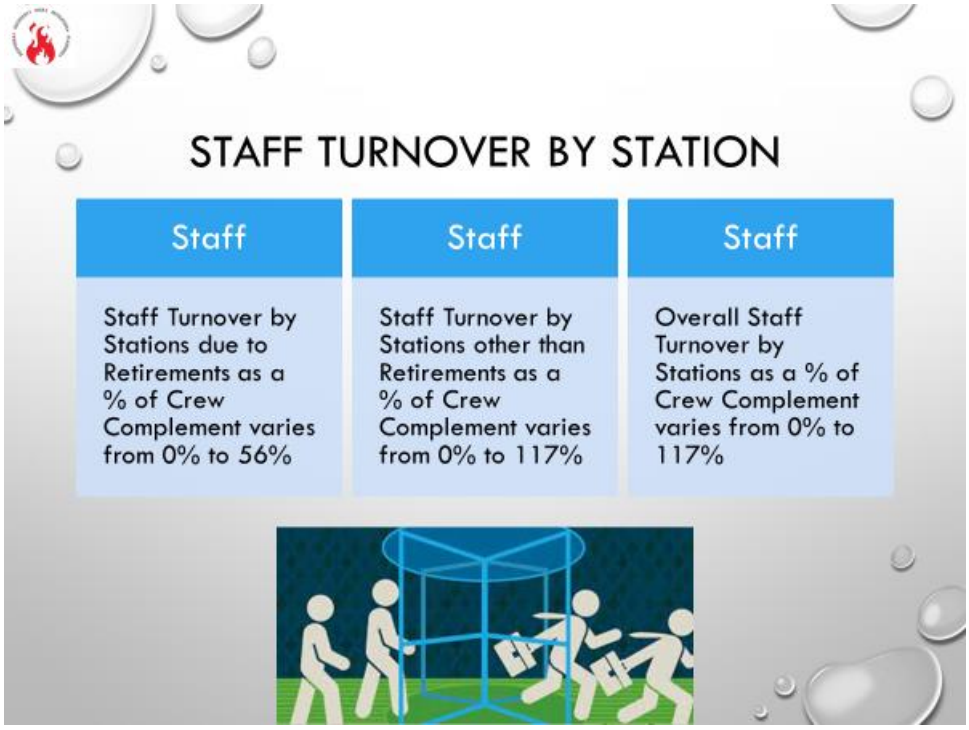
- Stations with 18 Personnel – Unknown
- Stations with 15 Personnel – Varies from 9 to 12
- Stations with 14 Personnel – Varies from 7 to 10
- Stations with 13 Personnel – 9
- Stations with 12 Personnel – Varies from 5 to 9
- Stations with 11 Personnel – 9
- Stations with 10 Personnel – Varies from 5 to 7
- Stations with 9 Personnel – Varies from 4 to 6
- Stations with 8 Personnel – Varies from 5 to 6

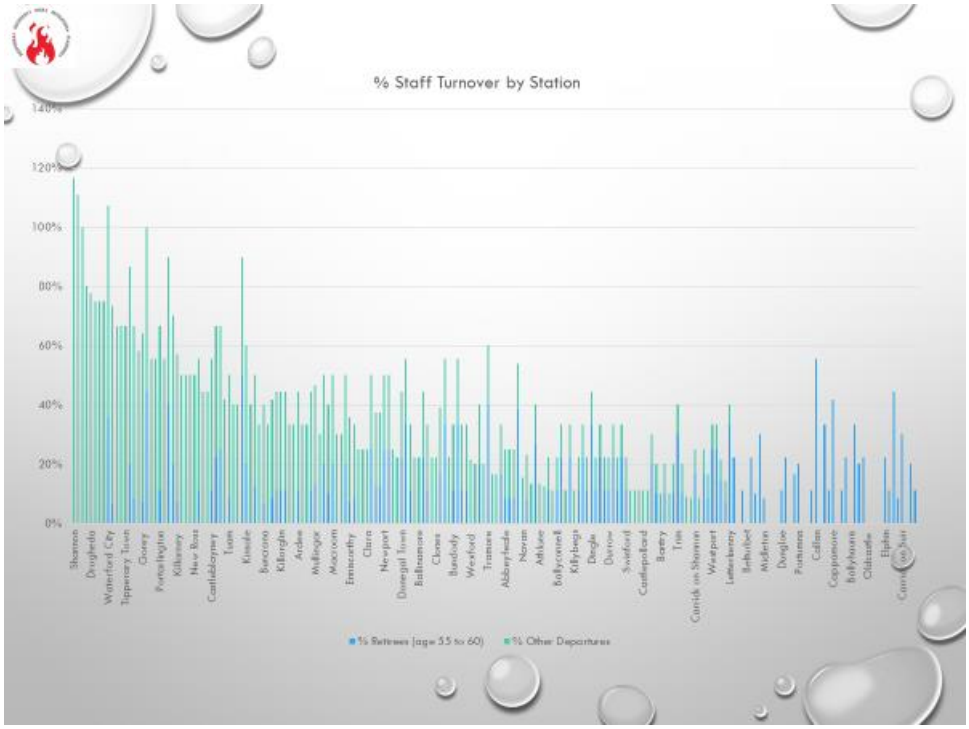
CREW COMPLEMENTS

- Average crew complement nationally is 10.24 personnel
- Crew complements by ARC Categories are as follows:
  - A2 – 1 No. – 12 personnel
  - B1 – 1 No. – 14 personnel
  - B2 – 4 No. – 9 to 13 personnel
  - C1 – Average 12.95 personnel – varies from 10 to 18
  - C2 – Average 12.24 personnel – varies from 10 to 15
  - D1 – Average 9.75 personnel – varies from 8 to 15
  - D2 – Average 9.31 personnel – varies from 8 to 12
  - E1 – Average 8.7 personnel – varies from 8 to 9
  - E2 – Average 9.4 personnel – varies from 9 to 10
  - Unknown – Average 10.14 personnel – varies from 9 to 13




% of Personnel that have left by Fire Authority (1/9/2016 to 31/8/2021)
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Carlow
Cavan
Clare
Cork County
Donegal
Galway
Kerry
Kildare
Kilkenny
Laois
Leitrim
Limerick
Longford
Louth
Mayo
Meath
Monaghan
Offaly
Roscommon
Sligo
Tipperary
Waterford
Westmeath
Wexford
Wicklow
% Retirees (age 55 to 60)
% Other Departures

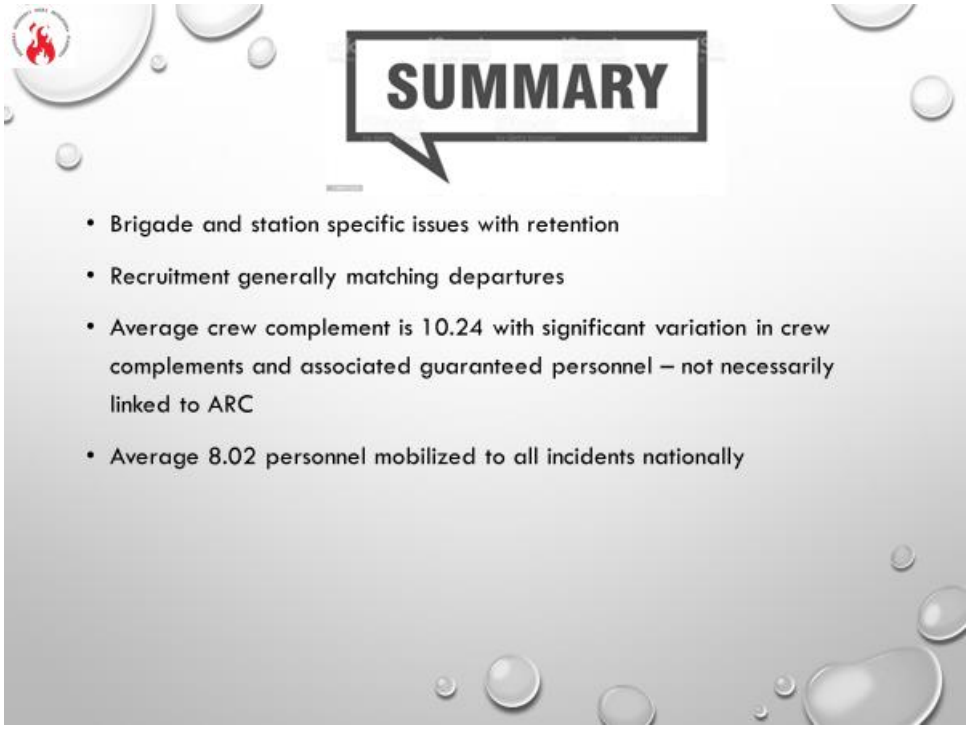

STAFF TURNOVER BY STATION
Staff
Staff Turnover by Stations due to Retirements as a % of Crew Complement varies from 0% to 56%
Staff
Staff Turnover by Stations other than Retirements as a % of Crew Complement varies from 0% to 117%
Staff
Overall Staff Turnover by Stations as a % of Crew Complement varies from 0% to 117%



TOP 10 STATIONS WITH TURNOVER (OTHER THAN RETIREMENTS)

1. Shannon – C2 – Average 190 Calls – Crewing 8 from 12
2. Carlingford – E1 – Average 74 Calls – Crewing 5 from 9
3. Leixlip – C2 – Average 231 Calls – Crewing 6 from 10
4. Maynooth – D1 – Average 305 Calls – Crewing 6 from 10
5. Drogheda – B2 – Average 622 Calls – Crewing 5 from 9
6. Nenagh – C2 – Average 161 Calls – Crewing 9 from 12
7. Lismore – E1 – Average 57 Calls – Crewing 5 from 8
8. Portlaw – E1 – Average 73 Calls – Crewing 5 from 8
9. Waterford City – B1 – Average 734 Calls – Crewing 7 from 14
10. Ennis – C1 – Average 304 Calls – Crewing 9 from 15


PERSONNEL RECRUITED 2016 – 2020
• 661Personnel Recruits as follows:
• 2016 – 105
• 2017 – 146
• 2018 – 150
• 2019 – 143
• 2020 - 117


SUMMARY
• Brigade and station specific issues with retention
• Recruitment generally matching departures
• Average crew complement is 10.24 with significant variation in crew complements and associated guaranteed personnel – not necessarily linked to ARC
• Average 8.02 personnel mobilized to all incidents nationally

Appendix C

Coyne Report on Senior Fire Officers Survey

coyne RESEARCH

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management: Senior Officers – Recruitment & Retention in the Fire Service

Presented to: National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

(December 2021)

C21-209



Research Background, Objectives & Methodology

- The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management at the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage supports the fire service by updating work and safety guidelines for firefighters.
- Research was required to carry out a recruitment review among Senior Fire Officers to address the recruitment and retention of personnel process of the Retained Fire Service in Ireland.
- Coyne Research on behalf of the Department conducted a Quantitative survey of all Senior Fire Officers with the main objective being:

> *"To evaluate the recruitment and retention of personnel process of the Retained Fire Service in Ireland."*

Fieldwork was conducted from the 10th to the 26th of November 2021. A total sample of 90 Senior Fire Officers completed the survey, representing just under half of all Senior Fire Officers in the country.

Profile of Senior Officers

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



A regionally balanced sample with a representative range of service lengths was achieved.

Q.1/2/3



Section 1: Challenges to Recruitment & Retention

5

Difficulty in Fire Authority Recruiting Fire-Fighters

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

	Total %
Very Difficult (7)	19
(6)	29
(5)	26
Neither/Nor (4)	21
(3)	2
(2)	2
Not at All Difficult (1)	1
NET Difference:	**+69%**

74% Difficult (5-7)

5% Not Difficult (1-3)

% Difficult Highest Amongst:

89% - in Midlands

88% - in Mid West

"Getting the right candidate with ability and suitable to perform the task."



"The 24/7 nature of the current contract does not appeal to potential candidates, with the requirement to live and work within 5 minutes of the fire station a major issue."

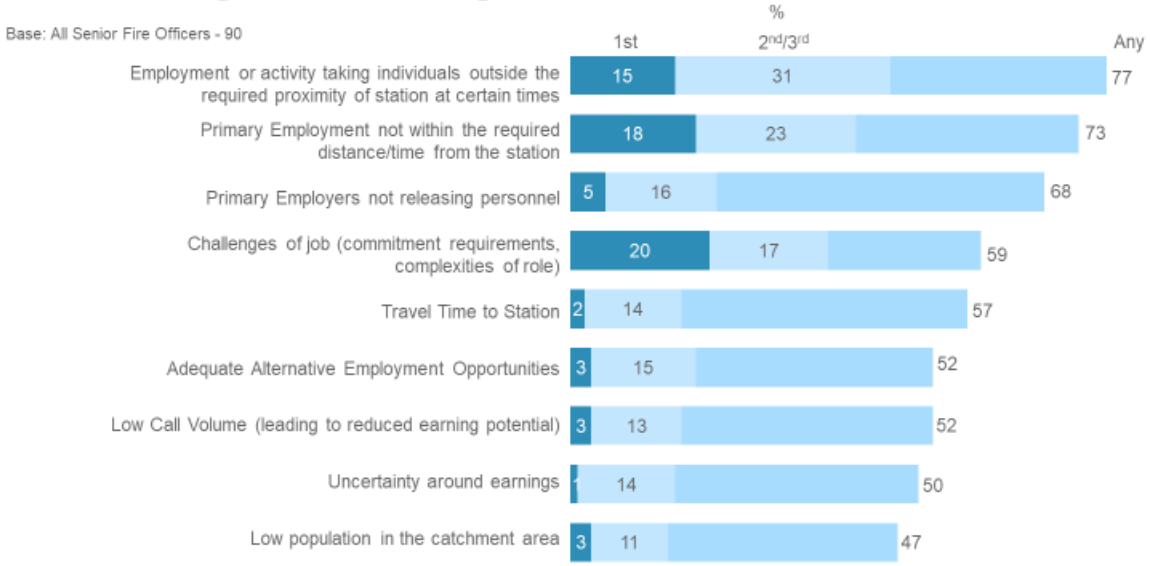
"Both the number and calibre of person presenting for an interview has dropped in recent years. We've also failed to attract females and ethnic members of our community."

Three out of four Senior Fire Officers say they have some difficulty in recruiting Fire-Fighters. One in five say that it is *very difficult*.

Q.4a

6

Challenges in Recruiting Personnel in the Retained Fire Service – I

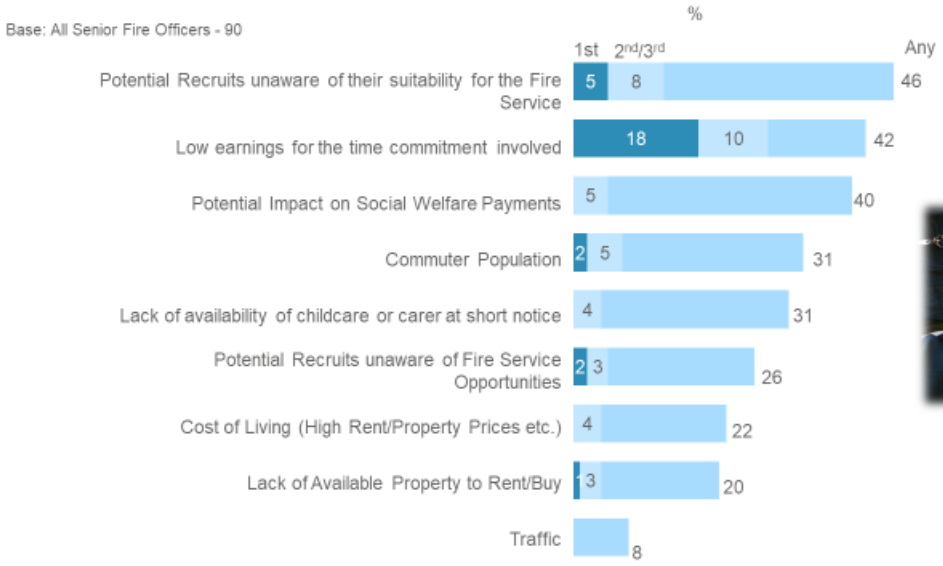


Some of the greatest challenges to recruitment include employment taking potential recruits outside the required proximity to the station, employers not releasing personnel, and the challenges of the job.

Q.5/6

7

Challenges in Recruiting Personnel in the Retained Fire Service – II

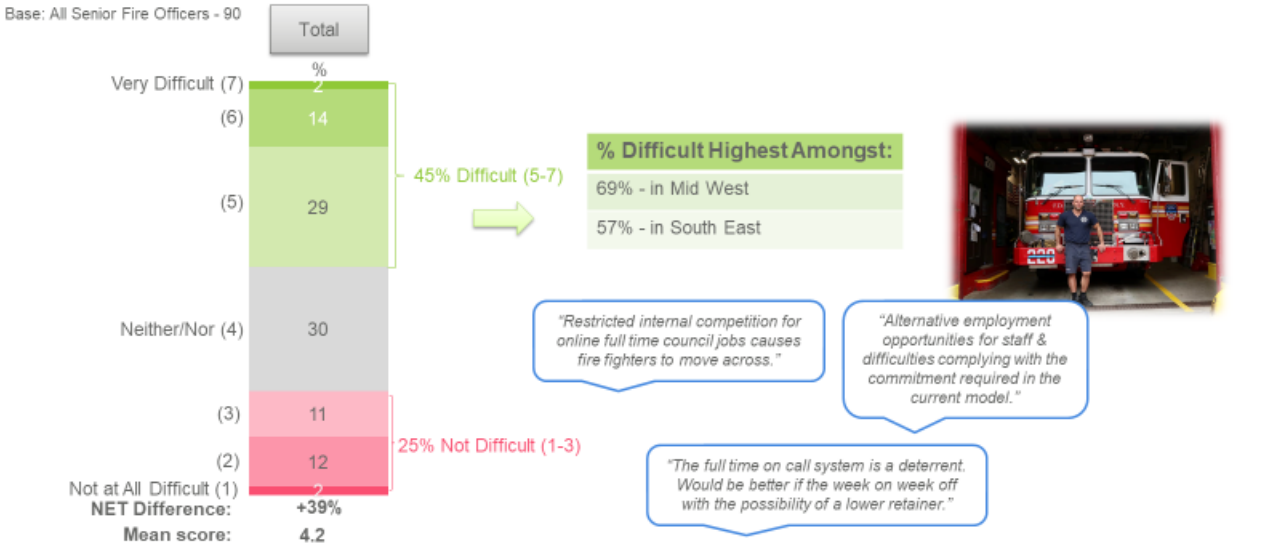




However, almost one in five say that the low earnings for the time commitment involved is their number one challenge in recruiting new Fire-Fighters.

Q.5/6

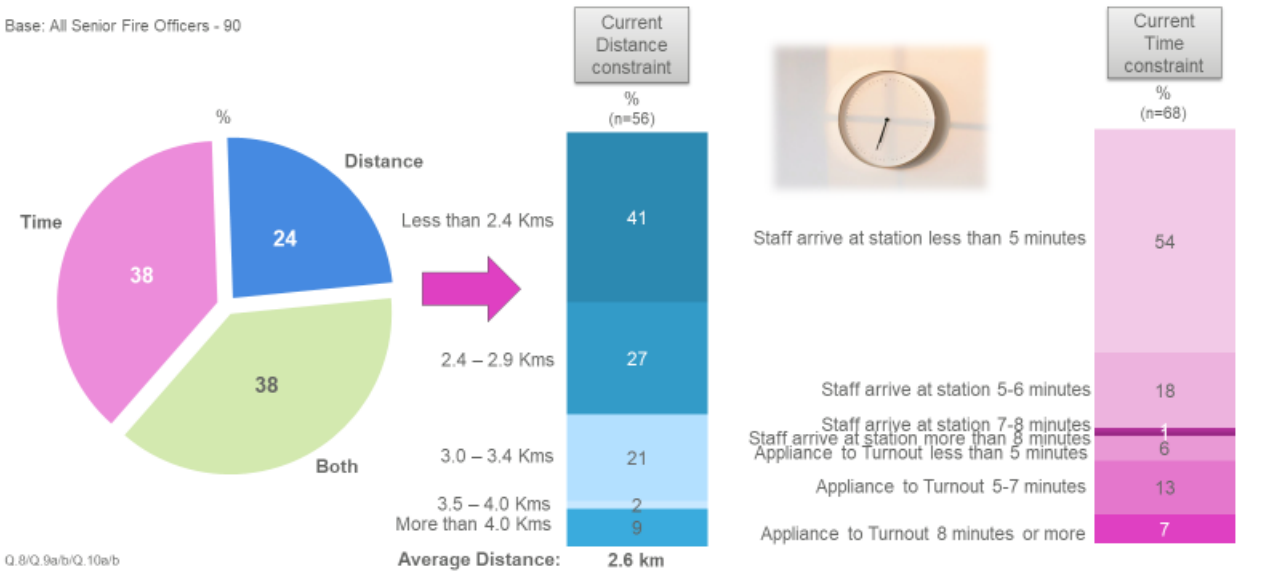
Difficulty in Fire Authority Retaining Fire-Fighters



Almost half of Senior Fire Officers say they have some difficulty retaining Fire-Fighters within their Fire Authority. However, 1 in 4 claim it is not difficult.

Q.7

Criteria Used for Arriving at Station For An Incident

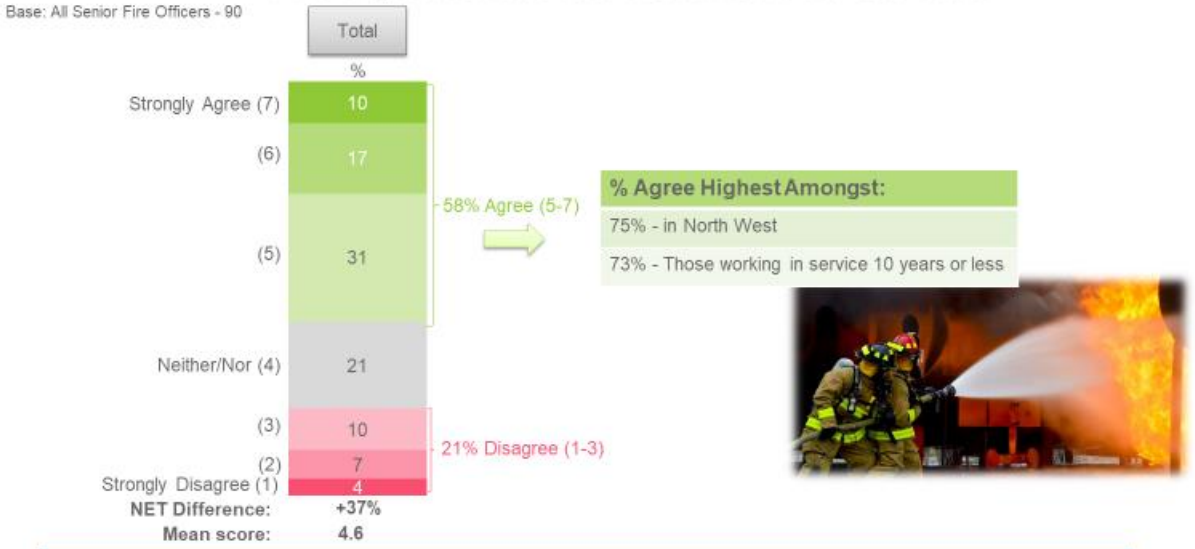


Q.8/Q.9a/b/Q.10a/b

Among Fire Stations using a distance constraint, most use a distance of under 3km, with the average distance being 2.6 km. Among those which use a time constraint, most have a time constraint of under 5 minutes.

"Increasing the time/distance constraint would help with recruiting new Fire-Fighters into the Retained Fire Service."

10

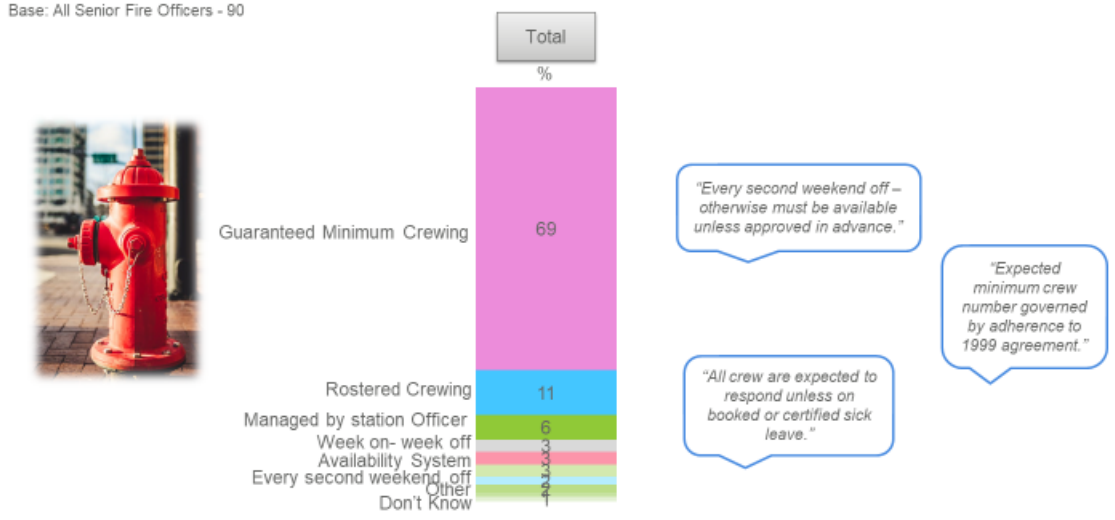


Almost three in five Senior Fire Officers agree that increasing the time/distance constraint would help with recruiting new Fire-Fighters. Just over a fifth disagree however.

Q.11

System Currently in Place for Managing Number of Personnel Available in Retained Stations

12



More than two-thirds of retained fire stations use a system of guaranteed minimum crewing in order to manage the number of personnel available.

Q.12

13

Appropriate Crewing Level & Personnel for Stations

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



Crewing Level – 1 Pump Stations	
5	4%
6	4%
7	3%
8	3%
9	30%
10	32%
11	3%
12	16%
14	2%
15	1%
16	2%
Average:	9.7

Minimum Available Personnel – 1 Pump Stations	
4	1%
5	42%
6	32%
7	13%
8	6%
9	2%
10	2%
12	2%
Average:	6.0

Crewing Level – 2 Pump Stations	
5	1%
8	2%
9	6%
10	1%
11	1%
12	11%
13	2%
14	9%
15	39%
16	4%
17	3%
18	11%
20	7%
24	3%
Average:	14.9

Minimum Available Personnel – 2 Pump Stations	
5	1%
7	6%
8	6%
9	17%
10	36%
11	2%
12	22%
13	2%
14	3%
15	3%
16	1%
18	1%
Average:	10.5

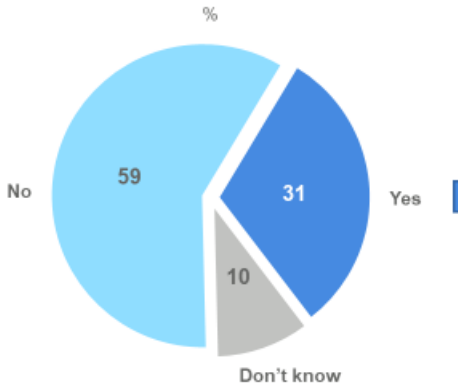
Q.13a/b/Q14a/b

Most Senior Fire Fighters think that a 1 pump station requires 9-10 Fire Fighters, whilst a 2 pump station requires 15. At a minimum, 1 pump stations should have 5 available whilst a 2 pump station should have 10.

14

Whether Fire Authority Carries out Exit Interviews When Retained Personnel Leave the Brigade

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



% Highest Amongst
75% - in North West
42% - in South



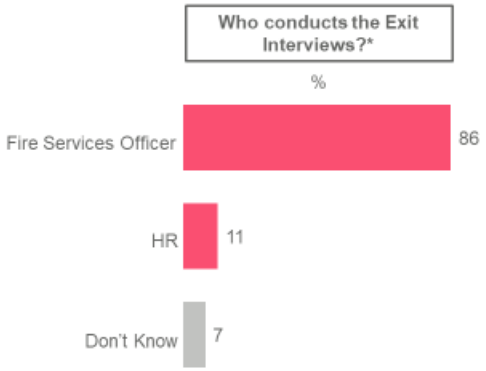
Q.15a

Less than a third of Fire Authorities carry out an exit interview when a retained Fire Fighter leaves the brigade.

Exit Interviews When Retained Personnel Leave the Brigade

Base: All those whose fire authority carries out Exit Interviews when Retained Personnel leave the brigade – 28*





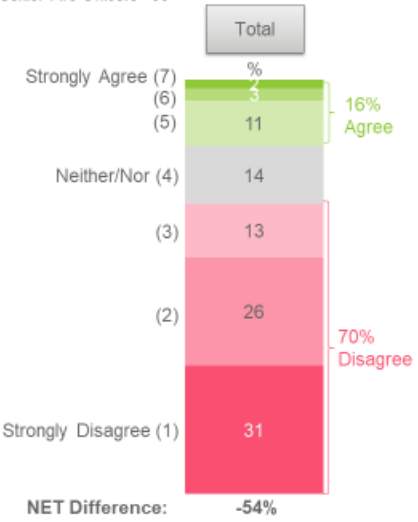
** Note small base size*

Amongst those Fire Authorities which do conduct an exit interview, in the vast majority of cases the Fire Services Officer conducts the interview informally with no written record.

Q.15b/c

"Our Fire Authority actively engages with the Primary Employers of our Fire-fighters and with local Business Representative Groups" – I

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



% Agree Highest Amongst
33% - in North East
25% - North West



The overwhelming majority of Senior Fire Officers don't believe that their Fire Authority actively engages with their Fire-Fighters' primary employers or with local Business Representative Groups.

Q.16a

"Our Fire Authority actively engages with the Primary Employers of our Fire-fighters and with local Business Representative Groups" – II

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

"We've developed strong relationships with larger employers, which has enabled the employer communicate directly with fire officers on deployment matter. This has created and fostered a healthy/productive working relations between both employers."

"Local factory that didn't allow personnel to join fire service, approached informally by station officer to outline recruitment difficulties, importance of staffing levels, likely levels of calls and community need for fire cover. Resulted in staff being released."

"Majority of fire fighters organise their own employment arrangements and are asked to provide a letter from their employer re: release for calls. One fire fighter employed by an agricultural co-op due to having a fire fighter on the premises with fire fighting know-how."

"(I) wrote a letter to the firefighter's employer, thanking them and explaining the benefits of having a firefighter in their organisation. They were very appreciative of same."

"Open days at fire stations. Radio interviews by Station Officers. Adverts in local papers. Flyers delivered to premises within towns."

"Early engagement with employers is hugely beneficial to detail amount of calls a firefighter may expect to attend and the times that they could be expected to attend calls (the majority between 17:00 and 06:00) indicating that the effect on time lost to a primary employer is a minimum."

"Community Fire Safety – Halloween Messages to the general public, media campaigns etc."

"Some employers value having medically trained staff in their workforce."

"When I joined the fire service the senior officer would engage with the employer to demonstrate the benefits of employing a firefighter."

Q.16b

coyne RESEARCH

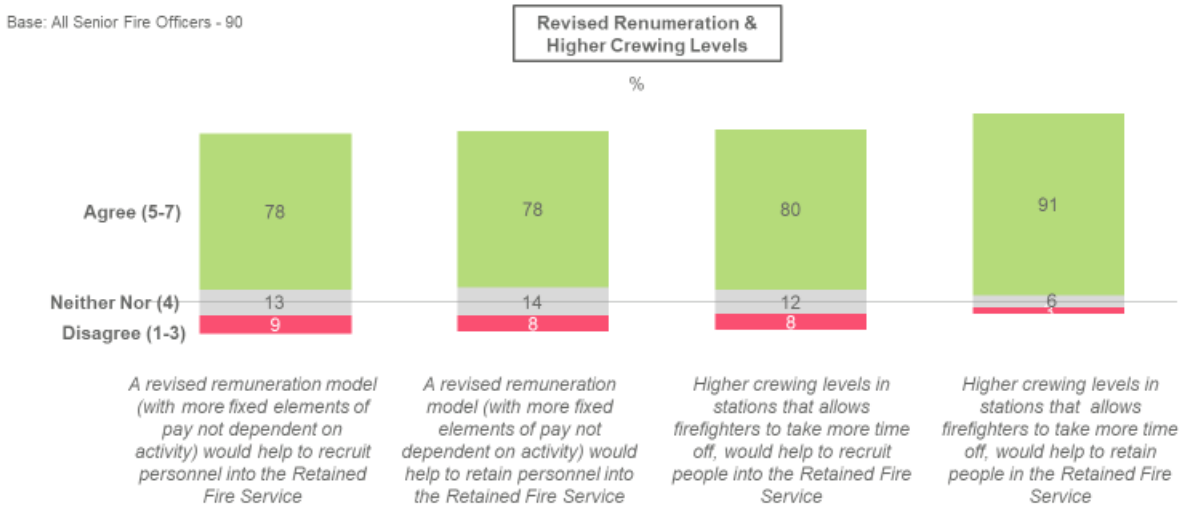


Section 3: Encouraging Recruitment & Retention

19

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – I

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



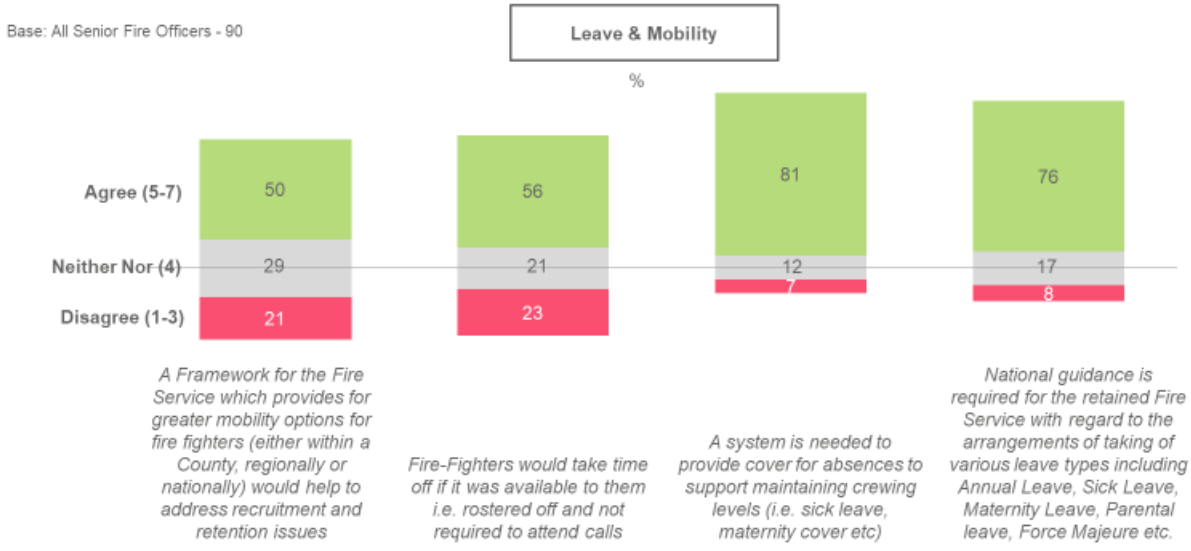
Four-fifths agree that a revised remuneration model with more fixed elements of pay would help with recruitment and retention. A similar number agree that higher crewing levels with more time off would help with recruitment.

Q.17

20

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – I

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



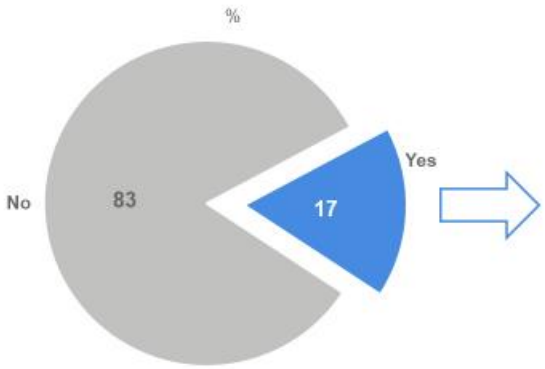
8 in 10 agree that a system is needed to provide cover for absences to support maintaining crewing levels. Circa 3 in 4 agree that national guidance is required for the retained fire service in terms of various leave types.

Q.17

Whether Fire Authority covers Fire-Fighter posts within the station on a temporary basis

21

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90





Average minimum period a Fire Authority would generate a temporary post for: 10.5 months*

*Caution Low Base Size

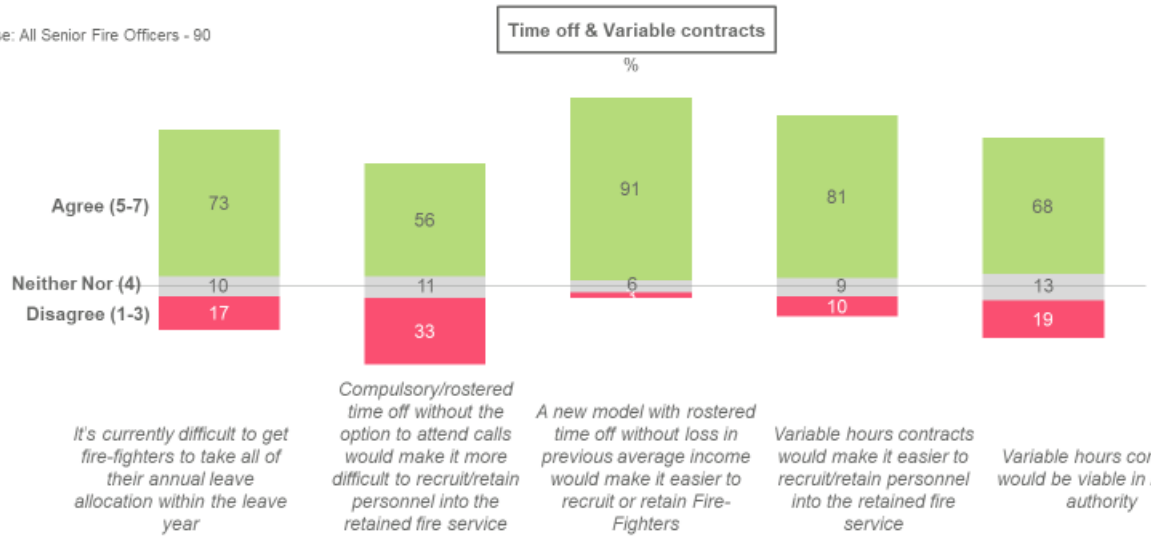
Less than one in five Senior Fire Officers say that their Fire Authority covers Fire-Fighter posts on a temporary basis. Among those that do, the average minimum period would be over ten months.

Q.18a/b

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – I

22

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90



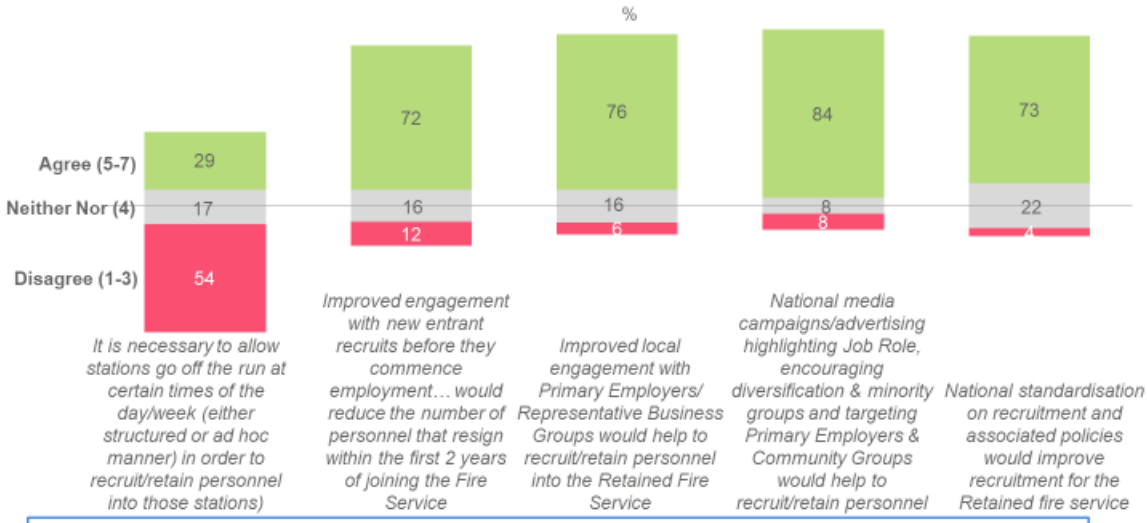
Nine in ten Senior Fire Officers agree that rostered time off without loss of income would make it easier to recruit and retain Fire-Fighters. Variable hour contracts also have the support of four out of five senior officers, although one in five think that such contracts wouldn't be suitable in their Fire Authority.

Q.19

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – II

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

Local Engagement & National Recruitment



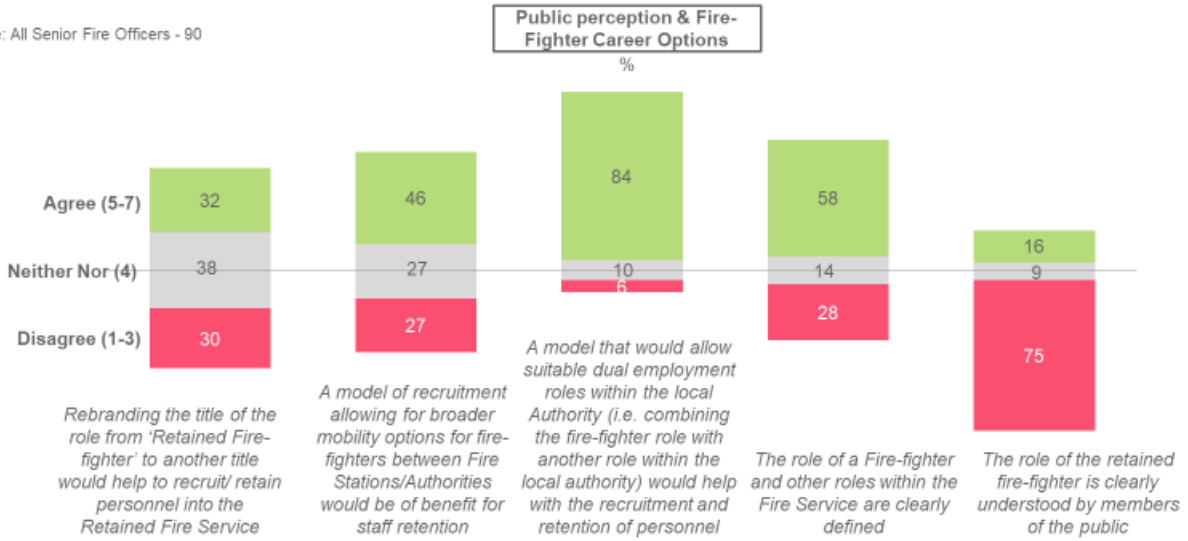
Most Fire Officers disagree that is is necessary to allow any stations to go off the run in order to recruit/retain personnel. More than five-sixths off Officers think that a national media campaign would be beneficial.

Q.19

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – III

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

Public perception & Fire-Fighter Career Options



Mixed opinions on rebranding the role of 'Retained Fire-Fighter'. More than five in six think that a dual employment role within local authorities would help with recruitment/retention. Three in four Officers disagree that the role of retained Fire–Fighters is clearly understood by the public.

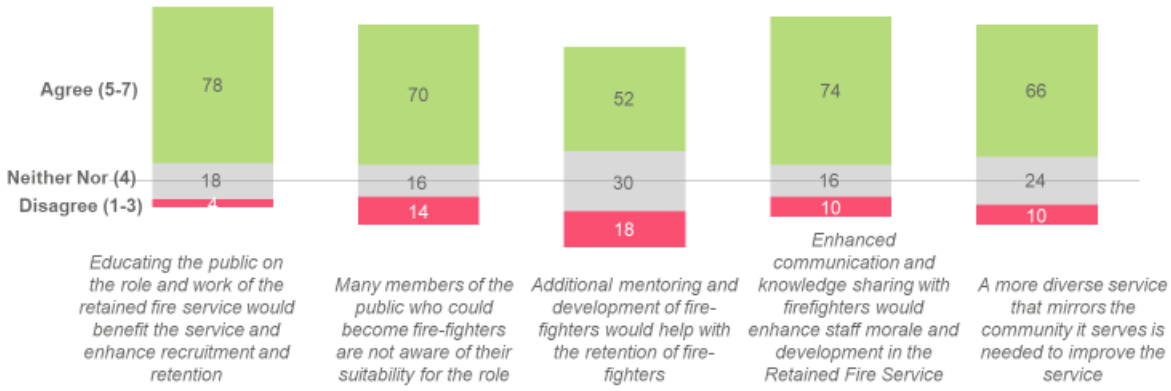
Q.19

Agreement With Fire Authority Statements – IV

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

Education & Diversity

%



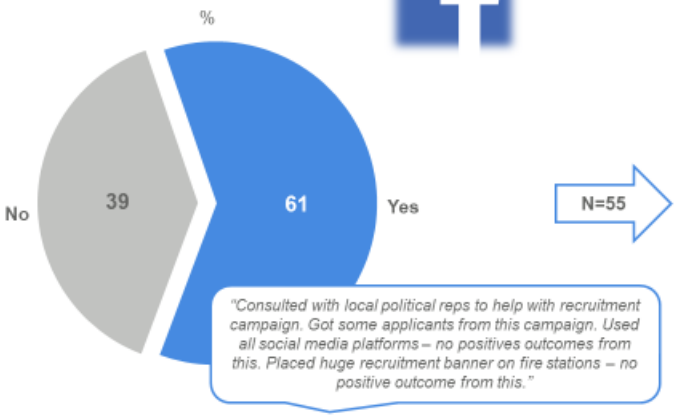
Four in five Officers think that educating the public would enhance recruitment and retention. Two-thirds think that the service needs to become more diverse in order to improve.

Q.19

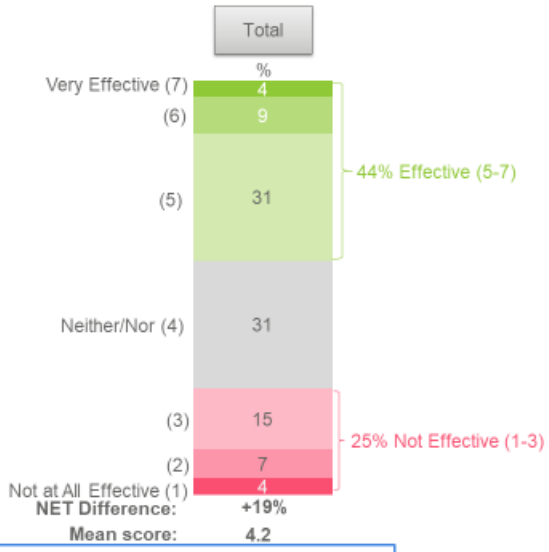
Video Footage/Social Media Recruitment Campaigns

Base: All Senior Fire Officers - 90

Has your Fire Authority ever produced video footage/social media campaigns to help with the recruitment of new Fire-Fighters?



N=55



Over 6 in 10 Senior Fire Officers say their Fire Authority has produced video footage/social media campaigns for recruitment. Among those that have, more than two in five think that it was at least somewhat effective.

Q.21a/b



KEY TAKEOUTS

28

Key Takeouts – I

Challenges in Recruitment & Retention

- Three out of four Senior Fire Officers have at least some difficulty in recruiting new Fire-Fighters, whilst almost half have difficulty in retaining existing personnel.
- The officers deem the following as particularly important in regards to recruitment & retention:
  - Primary employment not within the required distance/time from the station or requiring some travel outside this area.
  - Primary Employers not releasing personnel for fire service.
  - The challenges of the job such as commitment requirements and the complexities of role.
  - Low earnings for the time commitment involved.
- Among Fire Stations with a distance constraint, most use a distance of under 3km, while among those with a time constraint, most have a constraint of under 5 minutes. Most Officers agree that decreasing these constraints would help with recruiting new Fire-Fighters.
- Less than a third of Fire Officers carry out exit interviews with leaving personnel, and those that do are mostly informal without a written record of why the Fire-Fighter is leaving the brigade.

29

Key Takeouts – II

Personnel Management

- The overwhelming majority of Officers think that their Fire Authority doesn't engage with primary employers and local Business Representative Groups. This may contribute to primary employers not releasing personnel for fire service.
- Several proposals to encourage recruitment and retention of Fire-Fighters were well received by the Senior Fire Officers, especially:
  - A new model with rostered time off without loss in previous average income.
  - A national media campaign/advertising highlighting the job Role, encouraging diversification & minority groups and targeting Primary Employers & Community Groups.
  - A model that would allow suitable dual employment roles within the local Authority.
- Most Officers say that their Fire Authority has produced promotional video footage/social media campaigns to help with recruitment. Among those that have, almost half think that it was at least somewhat effective.

31

Suggestions To Be Considered In Review of Current Model of Service Delivery – I

"Increased focus on attracting more females and minority groups, and utilisation of technology to determine incident risk and correspondingly a means to determine crewing levels."

"The key points for me are the balancing the time commitment necessary at the moment i.e. on call effectively 48 weeks of the year on a 24-hour basis. The availability requirement needs to be discussed in detail and adjustments made to the remuneration model as necessary. The current system rewards activity i.e. more and longer incidents with more pay. I strongly feel that people should be provided with more structured time off and this will greatly help with retention in particular. However, there is no single model of pay that works effectively for the variety of stations and their activities around the country. The analysis of the role of the service, including turnout times needs to be considered in the context of risk and will need a further review of the Keeping Communities Safe document."

"Structured time on/off duty is necessary, Payment needs to be spread out evenly across the year with a minimum guaranteed remuneration, Firefighter development needs to be structured like a diploma or apprenticeship model, Promotional opportunities need to be developed."

"Increase the distance from the station within which personnel can work/reside and accept the consequential drop in key performance indicators for mobilisation and attendance times to incidents (or devise/use different metrics) ."

"There is no incentive for employers to release firefighters. Either a local rates incentive or method to claim tax back via revenue must be looked at."

"Volunteer Firefighter like the model in other European Countries."

"Retainer fee is an issue with majority i.e. to be on call 24/7 with little activity. The retained fire service is activity based and the majority of fire fighters consider the retainer as guaranteed income. It has been suggested in raising the 'retainer fee' and reducing the activity payment. This is a double edged sword in that fire fighters will be guaranteed an income (however a % turn out would be required per fire fighter to claim full retainer. A reduced activity fee would provide a more 'efficient' service in relation to incident time."

"Turn Out Times need to be increased to allow a greater catchment area Staffing levels need to increase to facilitate more time off (variable hours contracts could be a method of doing this) - however there needs to be an incentive to the persons working the night/weekend shifts ie increased retainer / hourly rate."

"Expand the number of personnel allocated to each station to enable a realistic work/life balance."

32

Suggestions To Be Considered In Review of Current Model of Service Delivery – II

"Accept and acknowledge that the current system of requiring firefighters to be on call 24/7 is unsustainable. Accept the fact that far higher numbers of firefighters need to be recruited to allow for firefighters to get rest and time off and keep their interest and motivation to help the community Remove hidden impediments to the keeping firefighters like reducing the type of calls they can go to, removing the fire charges that are an incredibly unfair charge on the community and nothing but a deterrent to their safety. Use firefighters as a community safety officer for education and support within the community. Open fire stations to the community as a centre of safety and welfare where programmes such as CPR etc can be delivered by firefighters to the community Offer "commercial rates" breaks to employers who release firefighters for duty. Give firefighters a broader range of responsibility such as water rescue, cardiac response, removing storm debris trees etc from roads to keep them interested and motivated. Remove the inconsistent approach to call categories - if one county goes to a certain type of call then all counties should."

"Most of our staff are well motivated and place good store in their training, equipment and Esprit-de-corps that the Fire Service provides. Nevertheless, they concentrate on potential earnings and notice everything that reduces earnings and most would like to see the Fire Service as their primary employer. Given the ever increasing training requirements, I think that thought should be given to day manning the bigger stations (say 500 or more calls) to allow better access to staff for on-going training and creating specialized units in each county such as confined space rescue or HGV rescue.."

"Open days are somewhat meaningless. Suitability days (assessments) should be promoted to encourage the public to get a taste of the fire service. Cost is modest, but insignificant when compared to cost of loosing a new recruit in the first year. National HR guidelines needed in relation to recruitment process."

"The response times of 5 mins could be increased so that you might get a wider catchment area of firefighters. Is 5 mins realistic in the current day. Maybe some tax incentives for the retained firefighters, some in dual employment are hit by large tax takes. Having a more dynamic system that the officers/firefighters knows who is available or not.."

"Providing national mobility does not strike me as being overly effective in the retention of personnel within retained brigades. If a firefighter moves from one station to another it simply moves a vacancy to another location it does not fill the vacancy. It strikes me as a fig leaf approach to the situation."

"Revise the contract for retained firefighters to cater for changes to the system."

"I think it should be advantageous for employers to employ a retained firefighter e.g. create a PRSI benefit for them to have a retained firefighter on their books - make it worth their while to have ff on their payroll e.g. cost neutral to them - tax flexibility. Have an advertising campaign of some typical rural employers who also employ local retained firefighters and let them speak for the added value they bring to their other day-job role from DUAL training they receive from the fire authority - a new symbiotic relationship but to recognise and add valve to all parties."

"Firefighters need structured time off without loss of earnings and this needs to be balanced against a commitment to attend calls".



33

Suggestions To Be Considered In Review of Current Model of Service Delivery – III

"Every brigade trying to train every firefighter in every fire station to the same level, that is not practical and it's too difficult to maintain the skill levels. Hub stations where different stations have different skills or specialties might allow activity levels to increase for that station ie instead of every station having heights rescue or confined space or whatever allow them to become survivalist in one area but respond to a much wider area than their own station ground. Staggered attendance times depending on the urgency of the call a bunch fire dies it need the same time response as a life at risk call does, have smart paging systems with different tones or alerts indicating the urgency of the call. Use the New Zealand model where you can have firefighters living further away responding later but as a support role eg traffic management Physical fitness requirements from the medical are seen as too onerous and rule out many people who are perfectly fit for most roles but are required to have a level of fitness for carry out tasks that they may never need to do. The fire service is seen as just a cost centre in local authorities and there is discouragement to utilise the retained service fully because this will increase staffing costs. The value of the retained service and what they can deliver is not seen and it is an under-utilised resource.

"An improved approach to flexibility to accommodate modern lifestyles. Local Authorities must lead the way in encouraging and enabling staff to be firefighters. They are among the worst for this currently. Retained Firefighters should not need to be on social welfare to earn a viable wage- the social welfare money currently spent could be used to fund much more proactive community fire safety work at local level, whilst also making role far more attractive. All state money at end of the day."

"The number of fire calls is falling and will continue to fall. Alternative streams of work should be identified for Fire Fighters e.g. below First responders in their community Community trainers in their area - teach first aid, CFR trainers etc If fire cover is required for an event - they should be allowed do this and charge for the service."

"Employers need to be compensated somehow for releasing staff. Employ more in each station. (9 for 6 is madness) Guaranteed minimum pay levels regardless of no of calls in a station (must also attend an agreed minimum no of the calls. Target more female participation in the fire service."

"Provide automatic vehicle location system on all fire service vehicles. make this data available in real time to regional mobilisation centres and also to fire service management at Fire Authority level."

"Role Clearly defined Salary review, Rather than getting a retainer or SS try and give them a guaranteed basic weekly wage and calls are then added on. Holiday pay needs to be looked at, in one station ff is getting â¬15 day. Some sort of pension needs to be developed."

"Rostering Increase retainer. Nominal payment for attending incidents (minor call-out fee) to be covered by increase in retainer."



34

Suggestions To Be Considered In Review of Current Model of Service Delivery – IV

"Information, information, information. Engage with current firefighters, support them, lead them, promptly attend to any issues where a firefighter(s) actions or inaction has a negative impact on the other firefighters. Invest in recruitment and double down on effecting induction. Better to lose a bad fit early in their career than investing significant money and resources only for them to "not work out" and leave many years later. Offer extended contracts to 58 year olds based on physical fitness and to provide mentoring to new recruits."

". The lack of existing proper segregated changing facilities for female retained firefighters in most fire stations may in some instance make the role less appealing to women who may be capable of been excellent firefighters."

"Examination of best practice internationally and NOT JUST WHAT the UK IS DOING! Potential to develop Junior Fire Fighters as is the case in Europe."

"Develop a dynamic system for mobilisation of resources to allow for stations to be off the run/operate at reduced crewing levels in conjunction with neighbouring stations. This would require centralised oversight and defined dynamic arrangements within the regional mobilisation centres to allocate the appropriate level of resources to an incident. It would also require greater scrutiny of the policy on the nearest available resource to attend an incident. ."

"The level of training required within the retained service. Does every fire fighter need to complete every course available? The length of training course/s (increased to 3wks is excessive)(refresher training every 2 years, can this not be extended out i.e. 4yrs +)."

"Incentivise local employers to employ retained firefighters e.g. Local Authority Rates, Letter from CFO to frame in their business thanking them for supporting their community, thank them - annual dinner and recognition of their support. Engage with small business representative groups (SME) Provide tax incentives, communicate with them and engage. Local Authorities must set the example, we expect other businesses to release firefigters yet in some cases we refuse this to Local Authority staff in other areas. Engage at national level with retail units spread across most towns e.g. Lidl/Aldi/Supervalu etc... Promotion, look at what the RNLI do, a similar commitment is needed from their personnel, look at their social media and promotional work. We do not promote ourselves enough. How can we attract people to the role where not many understand what we do or what the role entails. National media campaigns, social media accounts, promotional videos etc.. The current retained model and commitment is not conducive with modern day life or society. A revised model with more structured time off needs to happen, not effecting current income. Increase numbers in fire stations to support this and provide a system where time off is available without effecting income or fire cover. Modernise how firefighters manage this time off with a mobile app on their smart phones rather than a messaging group or paper-based system. Recognise our firefighters, apart from pay, what reward do they attain?.."

35

Suggestions To Be Considered In Review of Current Model of Service Delivery – V

"I refer again to my view that we are too ambitious with our number of 2-pump stations across the country - they should be the exception. 1-pump stations will increase activity (and hence earnings) for all and there will be a corresponding saving to LA. This will involve a review of ARCs etc and maybe even a fundamental review of some of the metrics within KCS. In reality most approached the ARC approach from the point of view of starting with the answer and working backwards - lets be honest how many pumps were moved or taken off the run as part of the ARC process. Retained firefighters offer an incredible service to this country at a very economic cost. Unfortunately they are often seen as 'difficult' from a HR/IR perspective both within their LAs and at a national level (LGMA). I believe this to be unfair in the main and they are sometimes not best served by their reps at both local and national level. Senior Officers and others in positions of leadership need to advocate more on behalf of the retained service rather that seek to criticise - we need to be open to criticism ourselves from the members of the service and be more open to their suggestions. Without a doubt some of the most valued members of our rural communities are the members of the local retained fire service - I'm not sure that we (senior officers/NDFEM/LAs via LGMA) value them quite as much and that may well have contributed to where we now find ourselves - have we taken the work and commitment of our members for granted?"



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Appendix D

Coyne Report on Firefighters Survey

coyne RESEARCH

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management: Retained Fire Service Review



Presented to: National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

(December 2021)

C21-296

Research Background, Objectives & Methodology

- The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management at the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage supports the fire service by updating work and safety guidelines for firefighters.
- Research was required to carry out a review amongst the Retained Fire Service on their experience in their role to better inform recruitment and retention.
- Coyne Research, on behalf of the Department, conducted a Quantitative survey amongst the Retained Fire Service with the objective being:

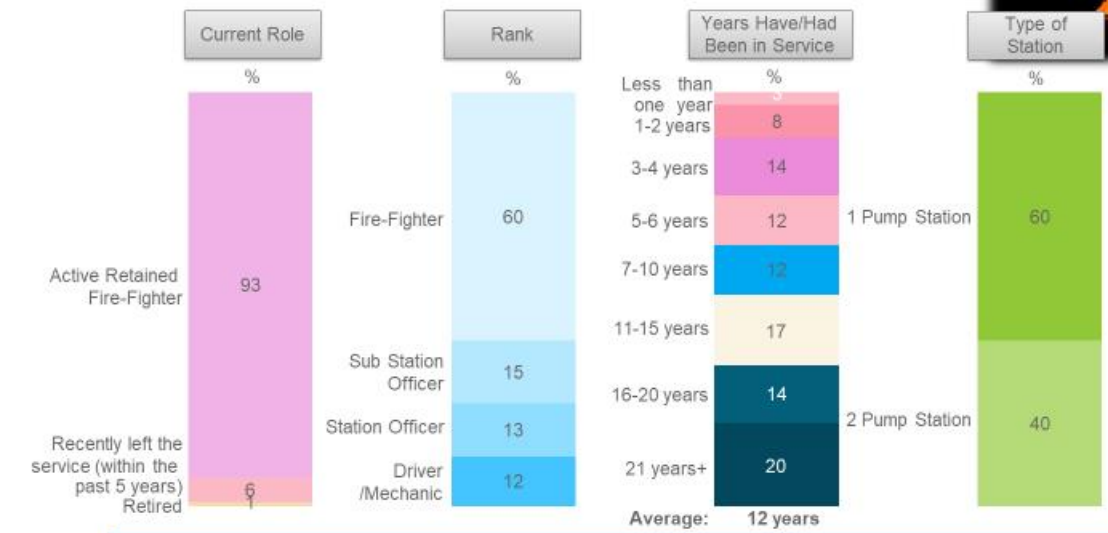
> *"To evaluate the experience and attitudes towards their role in the Retained Fire Service."*

Fieldwork was conducted from the 30th November to the 20th of December 2021. A total sample of 934 of the Retained Fire Service completed the survey.

Profile of Retained Fire Service – I



Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



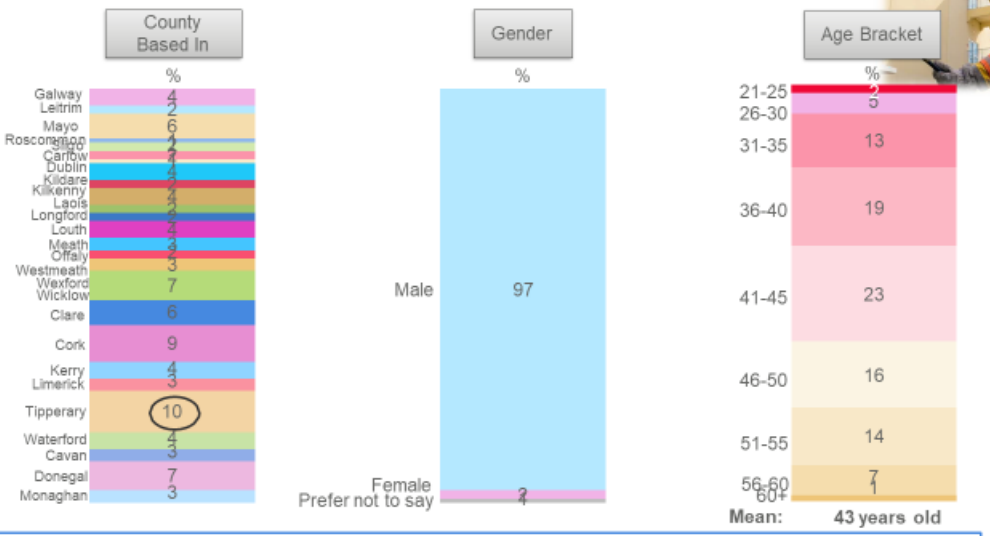
The vast majority were in the role of Active Retained Fire-Fighter. The Fire-Fighters have been in the service for an average of 12 years. 6 in 10 are currently based in a 1 Pump Station and 4 in 10 in a 2 Pump Station.

Q.1a/6/1b/2

Profile of Retained Fire Service – II



Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



The overwhelming majority of Fire-Fighters are Male and the average age is 43 years old. The research also had a spread of all 26 counties – with the highest representation in Tipperary.

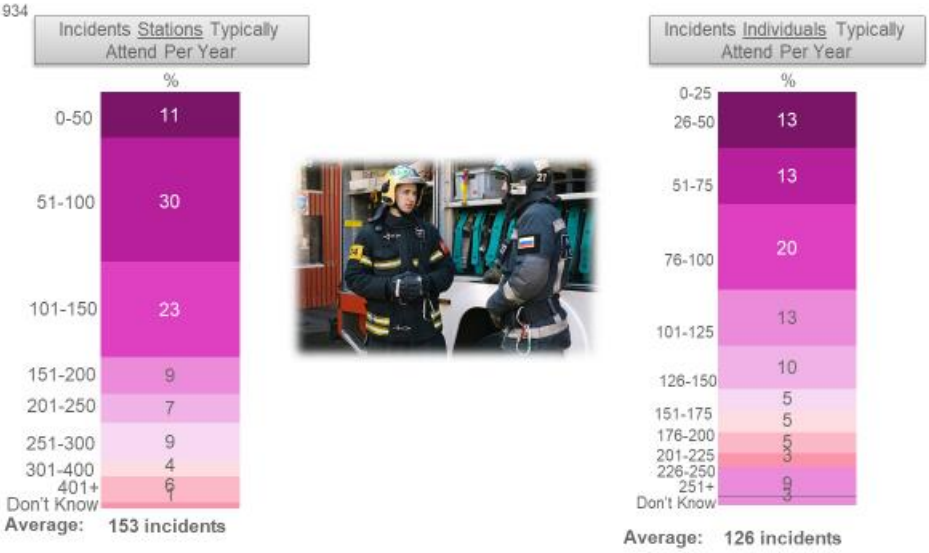
Q.3/4/5



Section 1: Retained Fire Service Role

Incidents that Stations & Individuals Typically Attend in a Year

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



On average, stations typically attend 153 incidents per year with individuals attending 126 incidents themselves.

Q.7a/b

Alternative Employment In Addition to Retained Fire Service

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



*Caution Small Base Size

1 in 4 are employed by another employer on a Full-Time Basis while 1 in 3 have no other employment at all.

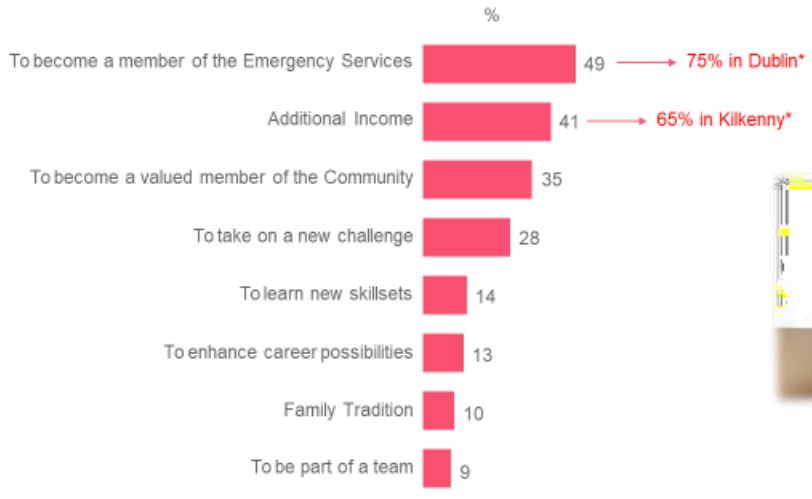
Q.8



Section 2: Satisfaction Within Role

Main Reasons for Joining The Fire Service

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934





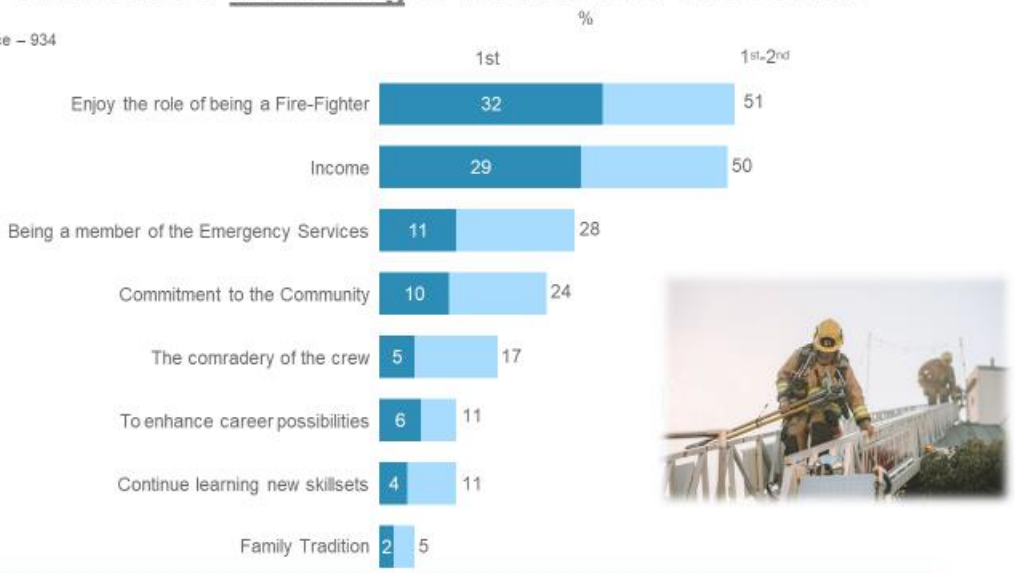
*Caution Low Base Size

Circa half of all Fire-Fighters cite becoming a member of the Emergency Services as the main reason for joining the Retained Fire Service. 4 in 10 cite the additional income as a main reason and over 1 in 3 cite becoming a valued member of the community.

10

Reasons for Remaining in the Retained Fire Service

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



1 in 3 cite enjoying the role of being a Fire-Fighter as their top reason for remaining in the service, with over half choosing this as either their top or second biggest reason. 3 in 10 chose Income as their top reason.

12

Reasons For Being Satisfied With Role As A Retained Fire-Fighter

All Satisfied With Their Role As a Retained Fire-Fighter – 411

"It keeps me sane."
"Good for the community."
"Great learning experience."
"I am trusted to use all the skills that I have learned."
"I love being a firefighter."
"I love the challenge. Love being part of helping others."
"I have a great interest in the Fire and rescue service."
"It fits around my lifestyle."
"It has been a job that gives me a good sense of feeling for myself and within the community."
"Happy with the job overall."
"I love the job."
"I like it."
"I love my job."
"Enjoy the challenge with the job."
"Having a great team to work with."
"I enjoy the challenge of being a firefighter."
"Loved the role of being a retained firefighter and going to incidents and making good friends in the job."
"Love the job."
"Good crew and comradery."
"I enjoy the job and the call outs."
"I love what I do it's exciting and challenging."
"I enjoy all aspects, from training and learning new skills, to attending emergency call outs."
"The job of a firefighter is very enjoyable. Every call you get it different and learning new skills along the way."
"It's rewarding."
"I am happy with my role as a Fire Fighter as I learn new skills and I know I am making a difference and helping people."
"Very rewarding job."
"Just love the job."
"I enjoy the job."
"Like the lifestyle."
"I love the job and the challenge that it brings."
"Really enjoy being a firefighter great satisfaction after completing a job/task."
"Plenty of on the job training and opportunities to complete courses."
"I loved it, helping people in their worst times, providing a service that is unique."
"I found the job very rewarding both personally and professionally. The opportunities I was afforded reflected the commitment I gave to the service."

Q.11b

13

Reasons for Not Being Satisfied With Role As A Retained Fire-Fighter

All Not Satisfied With Their Role As a Retained Fire-Fighter – 364

"Been abused within the station, ongoing issue at all times, management not addressing issues."

"Income too little for the amount of commitment that's given."

"Lack of appreciation by management."

"Too much commitment too little pay."

"There is no incentive for new personnel to join the service, income is not wonderful."

"Poorly paid for the service provided."

"Being on call puts pressure on your normal day to day life."

"No time off with family. Half your wage is gone on tax."

"Staff shortages means less time off."

"Pay to start with! Very poor for the unsociable hours we work, commitment, family sacrifice."

"Very hard commitment we need double the retainer very demanding for the service we require it's quite simply double the money for the same response."

"Full time commitment with very little calls."

"Low income, no time off."

"Lack of guaranteed income and the strain of the commitment being on call."

"Call outs have dropped meaning if you take time off and miss a call you don't know when the next one will come."

"Management at station level is not good."

"The commitment is demanding and pay is not great."

"Feel under valued."

"The expectations for your availability without pay that reflects your commitment."

"I think the pay hours are very wrong i.e. double time only starts at 10pm not 6pm."

"Not happy with the pension."

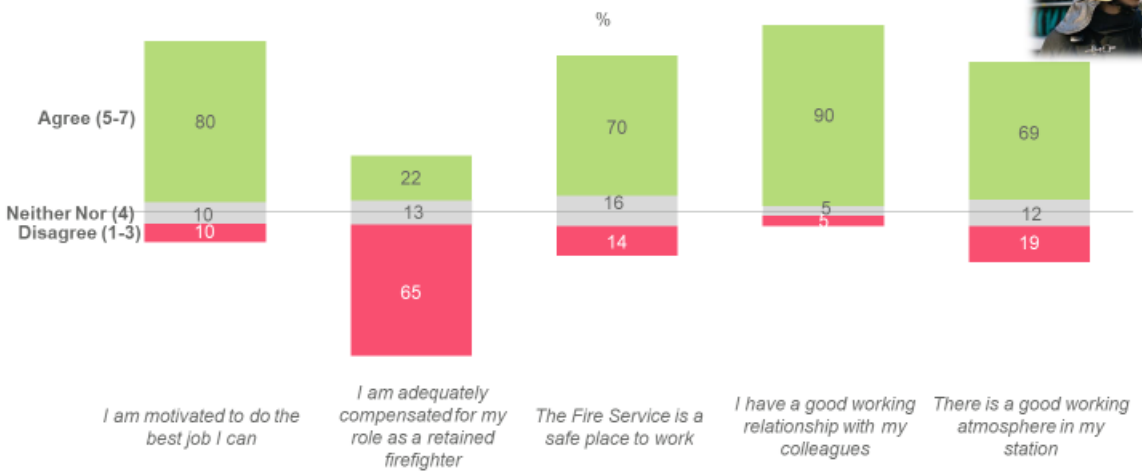
"Thankless role with poor pay for a huge sacrifice."

Q.11b

Job Satisfaction Within the Retained Fire Service – I

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934





9 in 10 claim to have a good working relationship with their colleagues and 8 in 10 agree that they are motivated to do the best job they can. However, circa 2 in 3 disagree that they are adequately compensated for their role as a retained fire-fighter.

Q.12

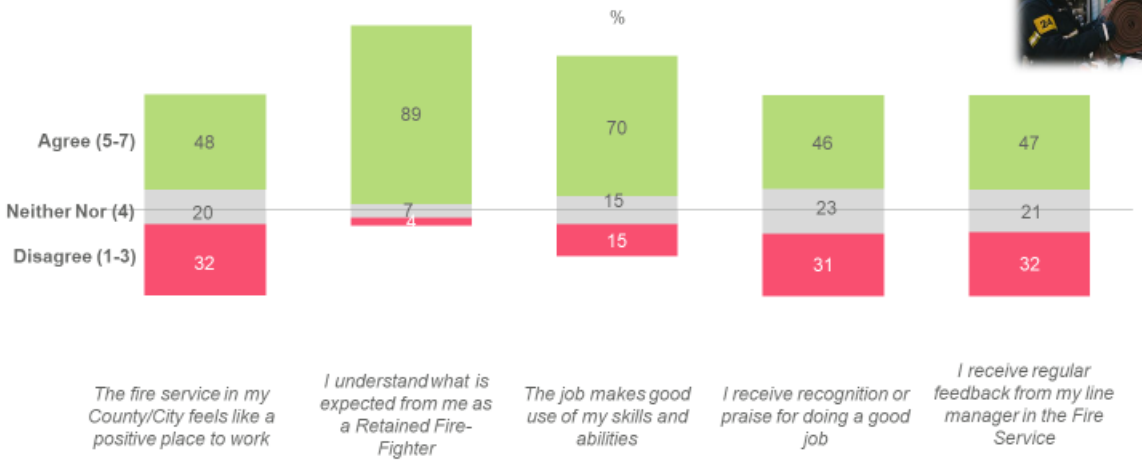
15

Job Satisfaction Within the Retained Fire Service – II

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934

Working Atmosphere





Circa 9 in 10 claim they understand what is expected from them as a Retained Fire-Fighter. 7 in 10 agree that the job makes good use of their skills and abilities. Circa half agree that the fire service in their county/city feels like a positive place to work.

Q.12

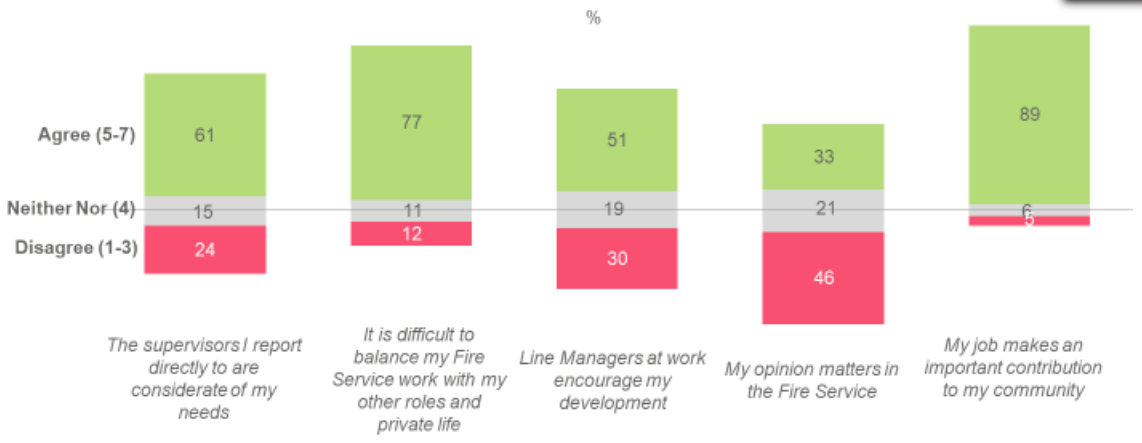
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Job Satisfaction Within the Retained Fire Service – III

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934

Needs and Consideration of Fire-Fighters



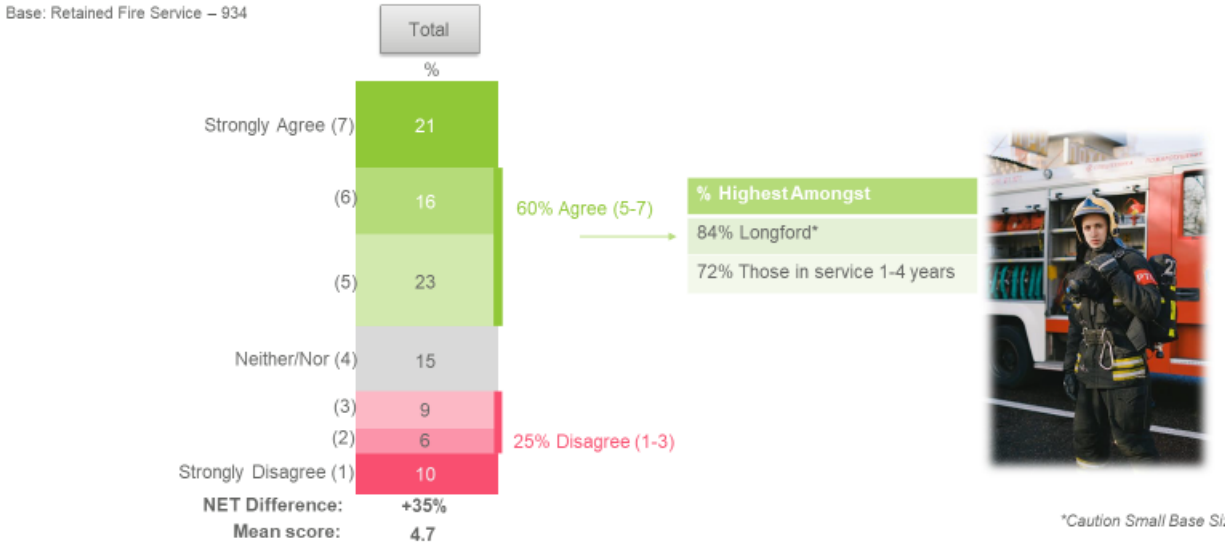


Circa 9 in 10 agree that their job makes an important contribution to their community. Nearly 8 in 10 agree that it is difficult to balance their fire service work with other roles and private life. Just 1 in 3 believe that their opinion matters in the fire service.

Q.12

17

"I have opportunities to learn and develop within the Retained Fire Service."



6 in 10 agree that they have opportunities to learn and develop within the Retained Fire Service while 1 in 4 disagree.

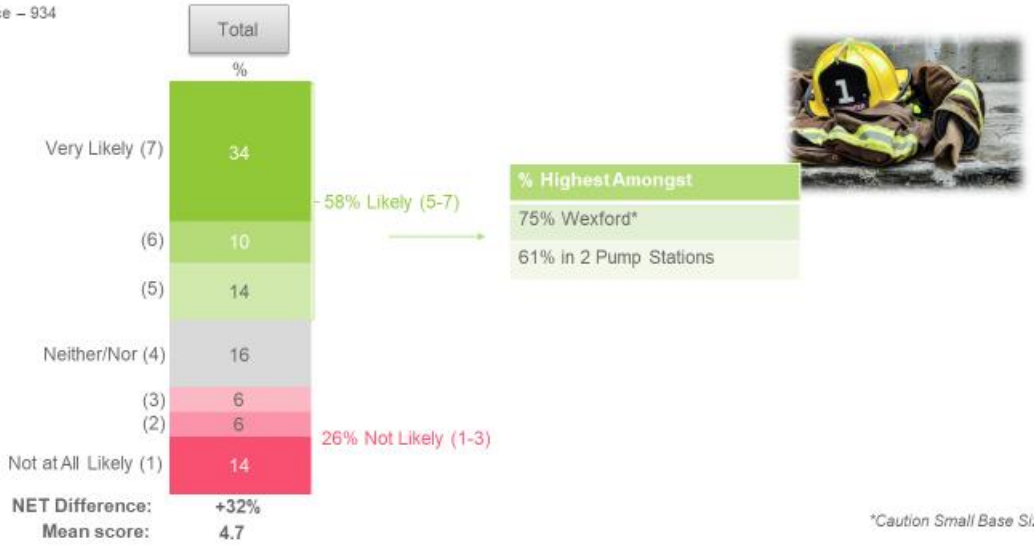
Q.12



Section 3: Potential Intention to Leave Retained Fire Service

Likelihood to Leave the Retained Fire Service in Near Future

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934



*Caution Small Base Size

Circa 6 in 10 claim they are likely to leave the retained fire service in the near future. Circa 1 in 4 are not likely.

Q.13

Years Will Remain in Retained Fire Service & Alternative Employment if to Leave the Service

Base: Those likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future – 682





Circa 4 in 10 of those who are likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future claim it will be in the next 1-3 years. Circa 1 in 3 claim they will instead work full time with a private employer.

Q.14/Q.16

Reasons to Leave Retained Fire Service

Base: Those likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future – 682





*All others 2% or less

Of those likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future, over 2 in 3 claim it is because of the demand of 24/7 on call availability. Over 4 in 10 claim it is the reduction in the number of calls/reduction in income.

Q.15

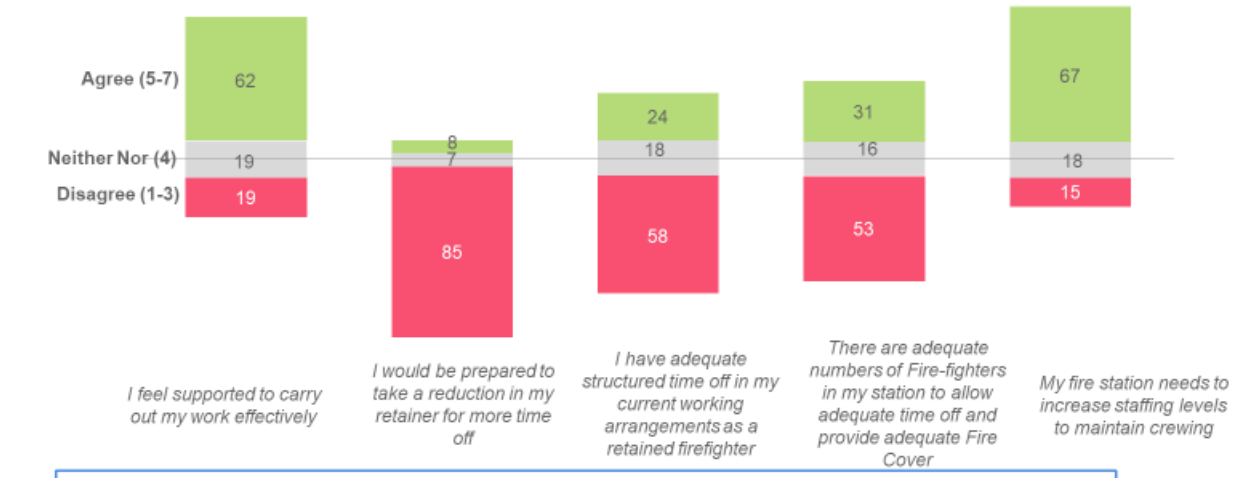


Section 4: Work Experience With Retained Fire Service

Work Experience Within the Retained Fire Service – I

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934





Q.17

The vast majority disagree th at they would be prepa red to take a reduction in their retainer for mo re time off.
Over half disagree that th ey have adequate stru ctured time off in their current working arrang ements.

Work Experience Within the Retained Fire Service – II

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934



Q.17

8 in 10 agree that a guaranteed fixed income would help them to stay in the service. Circa 2 in 3 agree that the service gives them good work experience and skills that can transfer to other employment.

Work Experience Within the Retained Fire Service – III

Base: Retained Fire Service - 934



Over 8 in 10 agree that their station has the right equipment to allow their crew to carry out the role effectively. Nearly half disagree that the system in place in their station to manage crewing levels is suitable and meets their needs.

Q.17

Work Experience Within the Retained Fire Service – IV

Base: Base: Retained Fire Service - 934



Over half agree that the temporary filling of absences by individuals in the crew would be helpful to maintain crewing. Over would not recommend the service as a good place to work to a family member or friend.

Q.17

Appropriate Crewing Level & Personnel for Stations

Base: Retained Fire Service – 934

Crewing Level – 1 Pump Stations	
5	1%
6	1%
7	1%
8	6%
9	19%
10	32%
11	3%
12	25%
13	1%
14	3%
15	3%
16	1%

Minimum Available Personnel – 1 Pump Stations	
4	2%
5	21%
6	38%
7	12%
8	11%
9	6%
10	5%
12	2%

Crewing Level – 2 Pump Stations	
9	3%
10	5%
11	1%
12	16%
13	3%
14	11%
15	22%
16	13%
17	1%
18	11%
20	7%
22	1%
24	3%
30	1%

Minimum Available Personnel – 2 Pump Stations	
5	3%
6	6%
7	6%
8	16%
9	10%
10	23%
11	1%
12	22%
13	1%
14	4%
15	3%
16	2%
18	1%
20	1%



Average:	10.6	6.8	15.2	10.1

Q.18a/b/Q19a/b

Circa 1 in 3 claim that 10 is an appropriate crewing level for 1 pump stations while 1 in 5 claim it is 15 in 2 pump stations.



KEY TAKEOUTS

29

Key Takeouts – I

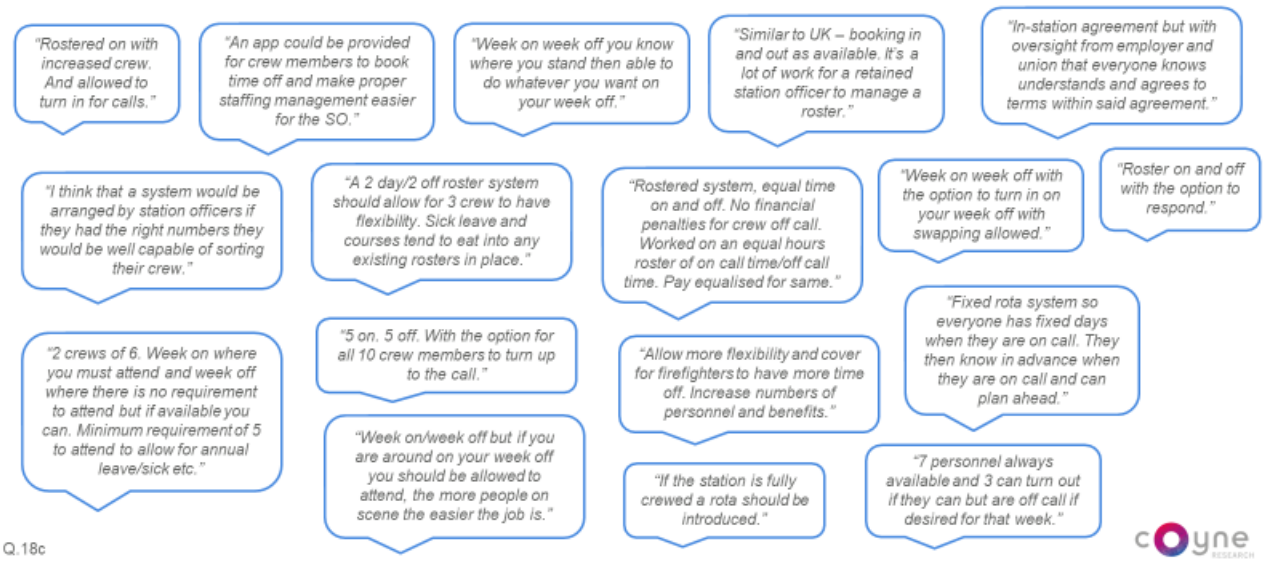
- On average, Retained Fire-Fighters claim that their respective stations attend 153 incidents per year with individuals attending 126 incidents themselves.
- 1 in 4 retained fire-fighters are employed by another employer on a Full-Time Basis while 1 in 3 have no other employment at all.
- Circa half of all Fire-Fighters cite becoming a member of the Emergency Services as a main reason for joining the Retained Fire Service. 4 in 10 cite the additional income as a main reason and over 1 in 3 cite becoming a valued member of the community.
- 1 in 3 cite enjoying the role of being a Fire-Fighter as their top reason for remaining in the service, with over half choosing this as either their top or second biggest reason. 3 in 10 chose Income as their top reason.
- Over 4 in 10 are satisfied with their role as a Retained Fire-Fighter, with 39% not satisfied in their role.
  - 9 in 10 claim to have a good working relationship with their colleagues and 8 in 10 agree that they are motivated to do the best job they can.
  - Circa 9 in 10 claim they understand what is expected from them as a Retained Fire-Fighter.
  - Circa 9 in 10 agree that their job makes an important contribution to their community.
  - 6 in 10 agree that they have opportunities to learn and develop within the Retained Fire Service while 1 in 4 disagree.

30

Key Takeouts – II

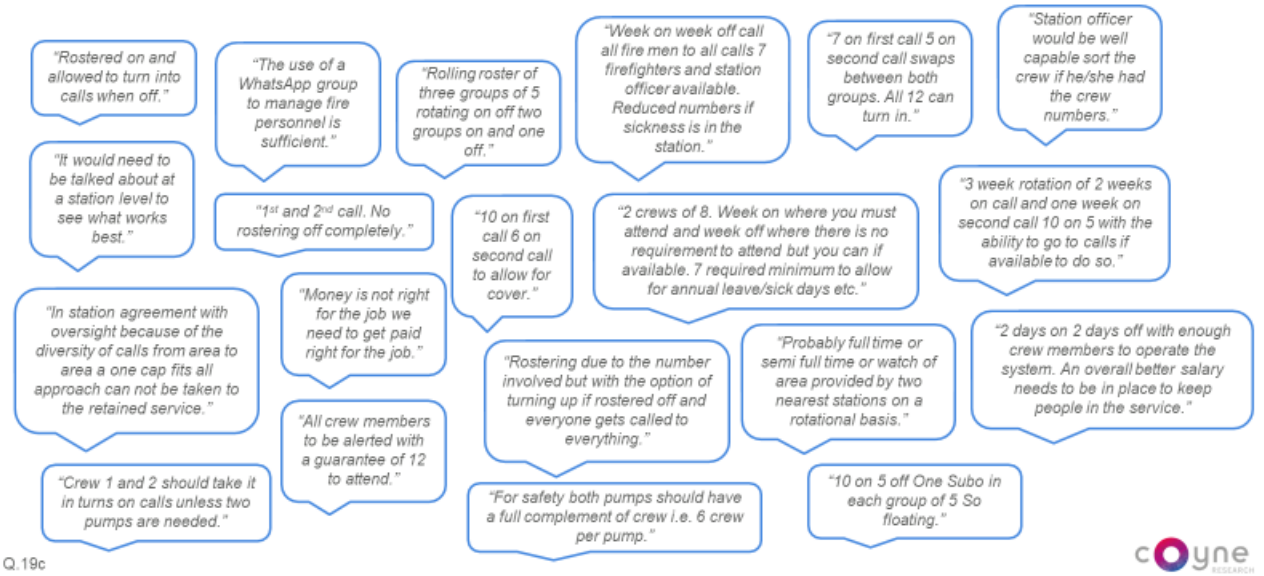
- Circa 6 in 10 claim they are likely to leave the Retained Fire Service in the near future.
  - 4 in 10 of these claim it will be in the next 1-3 years.
  - Circa 1 in 3 claim they will instead work full time with a private employer.
  - Over 2 in 3 claim it is because of the demand of 24/7 on call availability. Over 4 in 10 claim it is the reduction in the number of calls/reduction in income.
- The vast majority disagree that they would be prepared to take a reduction in their retainer for more time off. Similarly, most disagree that they have adequate structured time off in their current working arrangements.
- 8 in 10 agree that a guaranteed fixed income would help them to stay in the service. Circa 2 in 3 agree that the service gives them good work experience and skills that can transfer to other employment
- Over half agree that the temporary filling of absences by individuals in the crew would be helpful to maintain crewing. Over half meanwhile would not recommend the service as a good place to work to a family member or friend.
- Circa 1 in 3 claim that 10 is an appropriate crewing level for 1 pump stations while 1 in 5 claim it is 15 in 2 pump stations.

Appropriate System to Manage Number of Available Personnel – 1 Pump Stations



Q.18c

Appropriate System to Manage Number of Available Personnel – 2 Pump Stations



Q.19c

34

Suitable System for Guaranteeing Crews But Allowing Sufficient Time Off



Q.20

35

Suggested Changes/Improvements to Retained Fire Service



Q.21



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Appendix E

Summary of Recommendations

Ref	Recommendation	Action Milestone(s)	Co-ordinator(s)
RR1	A review of the existing guidance should be undertaken in the context of the Area Risk Categorisation of a fire station, in particular considering the following: • operational resources including minimum staffing levels relative to the risk; and • the distance / time constraint criteria for firefighters relating to their residential and working arrangements.	• Review existing principles of ARC • Collate ARC data • Revise guidance on basis of risk assessment profile • Circulate guidance to all authorities	NDFEM
RR2	A new framework for service delivery is required that: • provides remuneration, which effectively balances the availability requirements with the varying activity levels of firefighters in the retained fire services in Ireland; and • considers structured availability and leave arrangements, providing both an effective service delivery, and a suitable work / life balance for retained firefighters, including structured time off.	• Option appraisal and analysis including cost vs benefits, service effectiveness, affordability • Make recommendations and consult with all key stakeholders in relation to model(s) • Revised model to be forwarded for approval of Government • Implement revised arrangements	LGMA/NDFEM
RR3	Guidance should be provided on the arrangements for retained firefighters taking the various types of leave including annual, certified and uncertified sick leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, force majeure, leave of absence etc.	• Review options with reference to public sector pay agreement • Consult with all key stakeholders in relation to proposals • Circulate guidance to all authorities	LGMA
RR4	The current Occupational Health Medical scheme for members of the retained fire services should be reviewed and updated considering current medical science.	• Commission review of the existing scheme by occupational medical expert • Agree recommendations and consult with key stakeholders • Circulate guidance to all authorities	LGMA

RR5	Guidance should be provided nationally on a standardised process for the recruitment of a retained Firefighter.	• Set up group to review current good practice • Finalise documented processes and agree with local authorities • Circulate guidance to all authorities	LGMA
RR6	A review should be completed for any potential areas of response work that could be undertaken by the retained fire services for other agencies.	• Group to review current incident and activity profile • Consider areas of work that need MoUs necessary to support other agencies e.g. cardiac responses and medical assistance for the HSE • Consult with agencies and formal MoUs covering service delivery provision	NDFEM
RR7	Local Authorities should aim to maintain ongoing employment panels in place for retained fire stations to expedite the process of filling vacancies, as they arise.	• Set up group to review current processes • Consider documented processes and agree with local authorities	LGMA/Local Authorities
RR8	Local Authorities should consider holding appropriate exit interviews with retained firefighters, to determine reasons for leaving the service.	• Consider information and agree on process on methodology for gathering information • NDFEM to seek and collate data on a two-yearly basis from Sep 2023	Local Authorities /NDFEM
RR9	Local Authorities should put in place initiatives and events to recognise the contribution retained firefighters and their families make to their communities.	• Set up group to consider approaches and review existing good practice • Communicate and circulate good practice to authorities	Local Authorities/ NDFEM
RR10	Local Authorities should examine how they can effectively support retained fire services, for both the retention of existing and the recruitment of retained firefighters from within its own workforces, where appropriate, reflecting demands on staff in their existing roles and work location.	• Set up internal group to consider areas where opportunities exist • Put in place policy to support members of staff joining the retained fire service	Individual Local Authorities
RR11	Communications and public relations should be developed, to include national and local programmes and campaigns to both inform the public of the role of a retained firefighter, and to encourage them to apply for a career in the fire service.	• Set up group to consider media campaigns, including all media formats • Procure services as identified to increase service profile	LGMA/Local Authorities/ NDFEM

RR12	The action plans for recruitment and retention in retained fire services, should focus on enhancing inclusion and diversity in the workforce, in particular female participation, and reflecting modern Irish society.	• Set up group to review inclusion and diversity in all fire services • Procure academic review • Prepare report and action plans as necessary for implementation	NDFEM/Local Authorities
RR13	There should be local and national engagement with both existing primary employers and relevant business representative groups, to proactively promote the role and benefits of employing a retained firefighter in their organisation.	• Meet with business advocacy groups and businesses locally/nationally • Engage with key stakeholders to review and detail good practice • Circulate support guidance to local authorities	NDFEM/Local Authorities

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Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage



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