

Public safety is always our top concern. Our role is to provide fire cover across the whole county and that is delivered as a county-wide service. To imagine fire cover is on a station by station basis is a fundamental misunderstanding of how fire services not only in Kent but across the UK operate.

We don't judge our outcomes or success in terms of numbers of engines on the run. The Service's published outcomes are based on attendance times to incidents – for fires this is to reach 90% of fires within ten minutes. For the first half of this month 1-15 June we are in fact doing slightly better than last year with:

- o 2011 (1-15 June) we reached 92.6% of fires within ten minutes – more than meeting our standard
- o 2010 (1-15 June) we reached 89.96% of fires within ten minutes – just under our standard

Here in Kent, fire & rescue cover across the county is at a guaranteed level for the first time in over 40 years following the move to part time contracts. As a Management Team, we are absolutely confident this new way of working will offer us the flexibility to use our part-time and full-time staff in different ways to ensure we have fire engines available where and when we need them.

Currently around 90 retained fire-fighters have chosen not to move onto the new part time contracts for a number of reasons. This is not unexpected as annual turnover is normally around 70-80 fire fighters and we expected higher numbers this year as many retained staff were holding on for details of the back pay package following the long-awaited national FBU tribunal ruling. Also in moving to new part time contracts we needed to ensure that all staff met the fitness, literacy and competence criteria necessary for their own safety, and although we offered support, a number did not meet this.

One of the main reasons for this change was to get guarantee of fire cover rather than let staff choose whether to work or not. This led to a situation where in order to ensure we had enough crew to get a fire engine available we sometimes had to accept overstaffing. With the new contracts part-time fire fighters (formerly retained) will commit to guaranteed hours so we can ensure we have exactly the right number of fire-fighters available when and where we need them– vital for a modern emergency service.

Fire-fighting is a dangerous job, and KFRS was concerned that a couple of hours a week for drill nights was not adequate to complete vital safety training. Other factors triggering the need to change included a national tribunal ruling on terms and conditions - taken out by the fire-fighters union - as well other government legislation on issues such as health and safety. Every retained fire-fighter was offered a new part time contract that gives them the same benefits as full time fire-fighters. These contracts came into place on 1 June.

The intention was always to operate flexible working arrangements which mean that fire cover is provided by a balance of whole time, part time and flexible working. We have in no way eroded our ability to meet risk and demand but we are getting more efficient use of our staff.