

Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring January to March 2014

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides information regarding the ongoing performance and management of the Retained Duty System (RDS) in Shropshire.

2 Recommendations

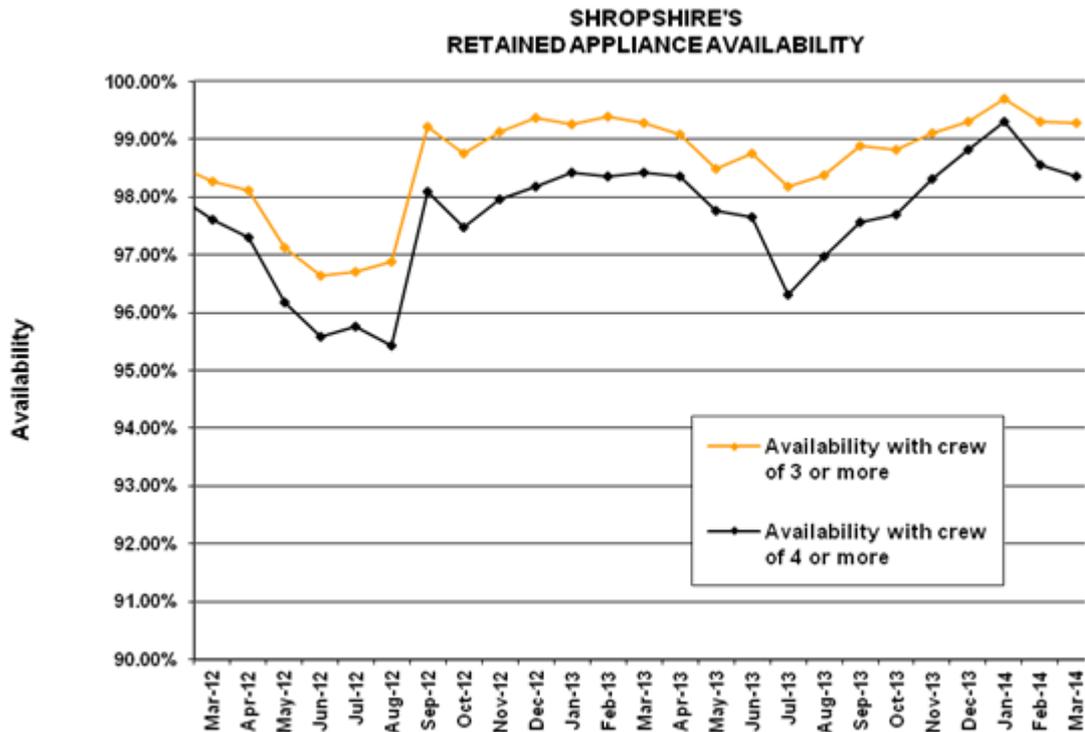
The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

3 Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has 23 fire stations, 19 of which are solely crewed by RDS staff, and a further 3 stations have both a wholetime and RDS complement. Only Telford Central Fire Station is solely crewed by wholetime firefighters.

Overall availability of RDS fire engines, by comparison with many other fire and rescue services, remains high at over 98% (see Graph 1 overleaf). Graph 1 shows the average performance for all 23 RDS fire engines, which includes two based at Oswestry Fire Station. Of the 23 RDS fire engines, 19 are available for 98% to 100% of the time, which is an outstanding level of performance. The Fire Authority's target is, however, always for 100% availability for all of its fire engines.

Night-time cover remains at almost 100% availability between the hours of 6.00 pm and 8.00 am across all stations. The exception to this is an occasional shortfall with the 'second' fire engine at Oswestry, which, whilst not ideal, is tolerated, as the remaining 'primary' fire engine remains available 100% of the time during these hours. Please see appendix for maintenance of over 70% performance since December 2013.



Graph 1 – Retained Duty System Crew Availability

4 Performance

Graph 1 reveals an overall upward trend in availability during 2013. This level of performance has continued since October 2012, although there was a dip during June 2013, due to a number of issues previously reported to the Committee. In the last three months overall availability has fallen slightly. To improve on this level of performance the Service is focusing attention on those fire engines / stations that are currently failing to meet the Service average. An outline of the factors affecting availability and the actions to improve performance is provided below.

5 Factors Influencing Availability

In recent years it has become increasingly challenging to ensure that all 23 fire appliances crewed by RDS personnel are available '24 / 7'. There have been a number of legal, economic and societal changes in recent years that have affected the RDS, which have been summarised in previous reports. Whilst recruitment levels have increased, retention remains a significant factor for a variety of reasons, but primarily associated with levels of commitment and extent of operational exposure.

6 Background Station Specific Performance

There are currently only six fire stations, whose performance during the last quarter falls below the mean of 98% to 100%, achieved by the remaining stations. An analysis of performance is provided at the appendix to this report. Please note Cleobury Mortimer and Clun have only fallen slightly below the 98% benchmark, currently achieving between 97% and 98% availability.

7 Recruitment Campaign

Ongoing analysis of overall RDS availability has identified those stations with insufficient staff that need to be targeted for recruitment. During 2013 the Service conducted a successful campaign, which provided 28 new recruits for those stations identified as a priority.

The latest RDS recruits course of 2013 commenced on 28 October with 10 candidates, of whom 9 were available for incidents during March 2014. The first course of 2014 commenced on 10 February with a full complement of 10 recruits. This includes two candidates from Much Wenlock, who by mid-2014 should be available to provide long-awaited and well-deserved support for this small, but committed, team.

All aspects of the recruitment campaign, including the Service's decision to venture into social networking as a method of engagement, have been hugely successful. Similar recruitment tactics will, therefore, be utilised in the future.

8 Retained Support Officer (RSO) Cover – Quarter 4

Table 1 below shows those fire stations that have required the highest level of support (for reasons detailed earlier in this report) during 2012/13 and 2013/14. These stations accounted for **85.4%** of all RSO cover during 2012/13 and **85.3%** of available RSO hours during 2013/14. The deployment of RSOs during the fourth quarter has been significant in supporting performance at Albrighton, Minsterley and Oswestry in particular.

Stations	2012/13	2013/14				Total
	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Albrighton	472.00		47.00	69.25	160.25	276.50
Bridgnorth				127.25	76.00	203.25
Cleobury Mortimer	565.25	208.75	290.75	340.00	63.00	902.50
Ludlow	419.70	29.25	127.00			156.25
Market Drayton	240.75	59.50	29.00			88.50
Minsterley	371.50	113.50	163.00	19.75	153.00	449.25
Much Wenlock	194.75	136.00	44.75	35.25	10.25	226.25
Oswestry 16 (P4)	532.75	135.50	15.50	136.00	173.00	460.00
Totals	2,796.70	682.50	717.00	727.50	635.50	2,762.25
Total RSO hours	3,275.95	788.75	915.50	814.75	720.75	3,239.75

Table 1 – Retained Support Officer Cover

9 Flexible Cover

The Service has instigated work to develop an option for cover outside the current full and three-quarter cover levels that operate at present. The intention is to provide more flexibility for people, who are available in areas where the Service struggles to provide cover at certain times.

This proposal has been put to the Representative Bodies and officers will continue to consult with them as the project progresses (see Appendix, reference Baschurch Station profile below).

Further investigation has been conducted in relation to the procurement of a bespoke Retained availability system, which will assist in the monitoring and management of RDS activities across the Service. The potential benefits to the Service appear to be considerable. The recently trialled Interim Availability system provided benefits from a station management perspective and also in terms of remote monitoring, enabling Area Command instant availability status for all “on call” teams.

Hull University (SEED software) is supporting Area Command with an improved version of its original availability software, with trials currently taking place at five key stations: Oswestry, Much Wenlock, Market Drayton, Baschurch and Wellington. This enables crews to access remotely the database via personal communication devices, recording availability without having to attend the Station. This efficient and ‘user friendly’ aspect would form one of the key requirements from any product selected as the Service’s eventual long-term availability solution.

A progress report will be provided to the Committee in due course.

10 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

12 Initial Impact Assessment

This report contains merely statements of fact / historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

13 Appendix

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability Analysis

14 Background Papers

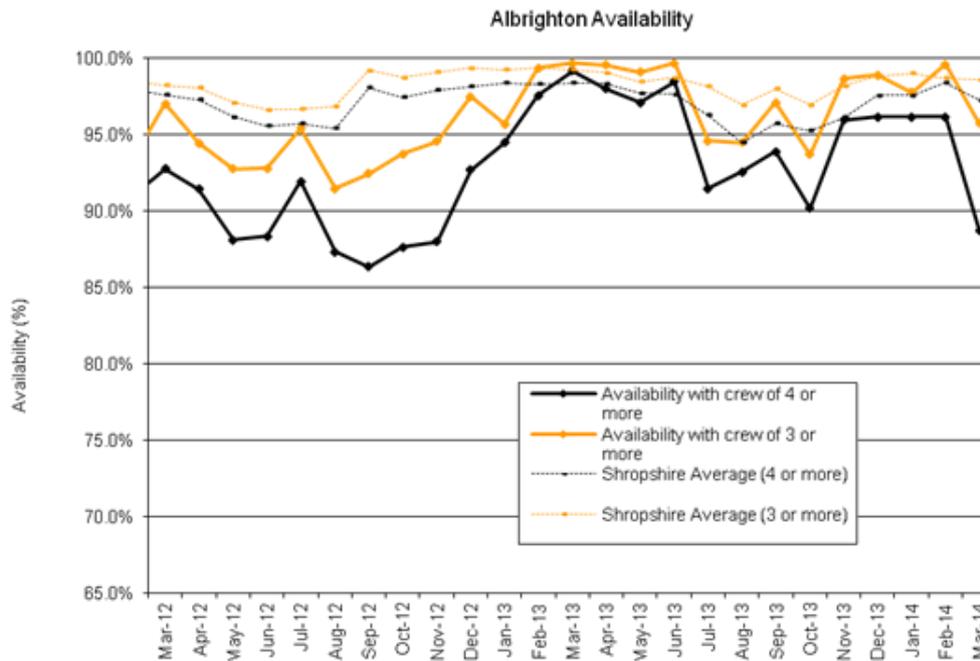
A quarterly RDS performance review summary is presented to the Fire Authority’s Audit and Performance Management Committee. Previous reports can be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-service/fra/meetings>

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability: Analysis

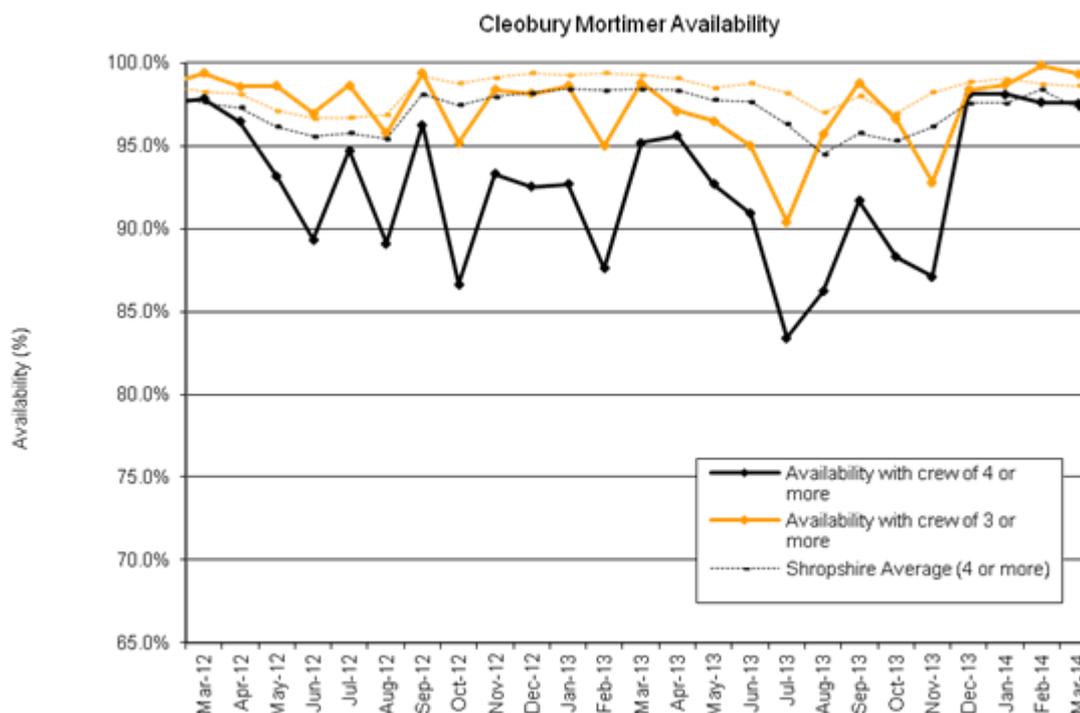
NB: One (1) unit is equivalent to one person being available for full cover (over 120 hours a week), so two crew members each committing three quarter cover (up to 120 hours but no less than 84 hours per week) would equate to 1.5 units.

Albrighton



Station profile	Reasons for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>13 units (see NB below) (11.75 available)</p> <p>Historically, it has been extremely difficult to recruit in the Albrighton area, with daytime cover the key problem.</p>	<p>Recent medium-term absences and the likelihood of two further resignations for employment and family reasons are driving a renewed recruitment campaign.</p>	<p>New recruitment banners have been erected. The Service's outreach vehicle will be attending a "party in the park" event on 21 June to promote recruitment and community safety. The Group Support Team will engage with the local traders association to increase the profile and understanding of the "on call" service. A leaflet drop is scheduled to cover all properties within a 5 minute radius of the station.</p>
<p>The introduction of an electronic availability system has also helped. Future plans for a bespoke system will enhance this aspect considerably by supporting greater management controls and staff flexibility.</p>		

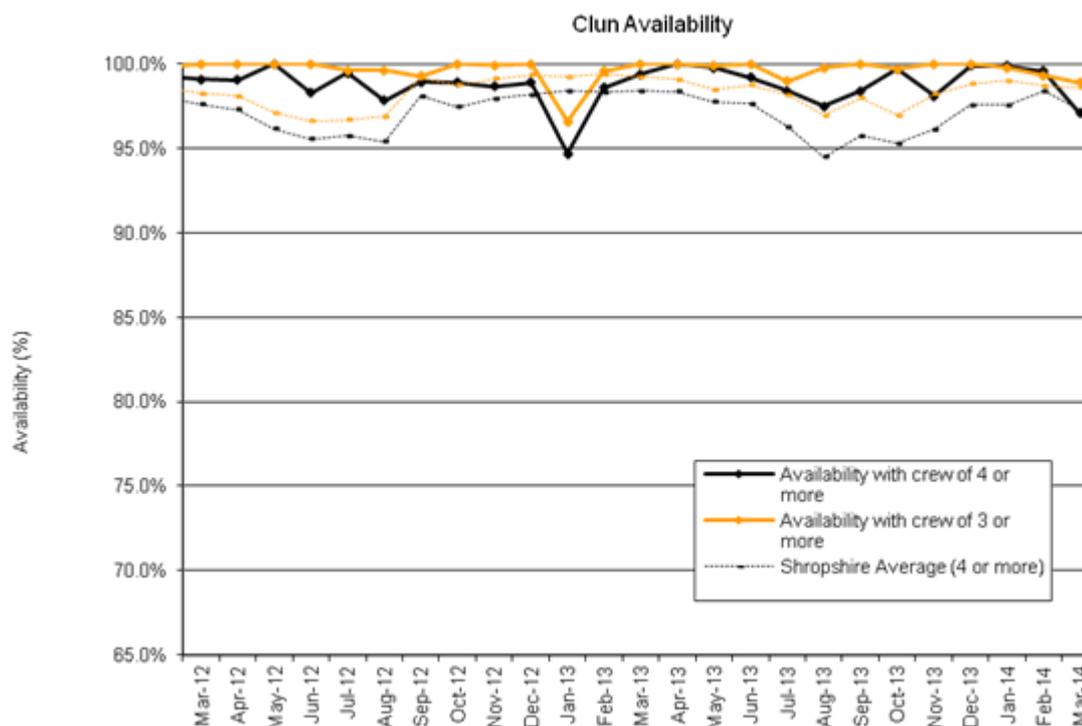
Cleobury Mortimer



Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 10.75 units are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting greatest challenge.</p>	<p>It is difficult to recruit firefighters in the Cleobury Mortimer area.</p>	<p>An ongoing recruitment campaign has focussed on providing additional daytime cover. Some work with the local council, councillors and trading network in conjunction with employer initiatives are underway.</p> <p>One recruit completed initial training in February 2014 and is now attending incidents.</p>

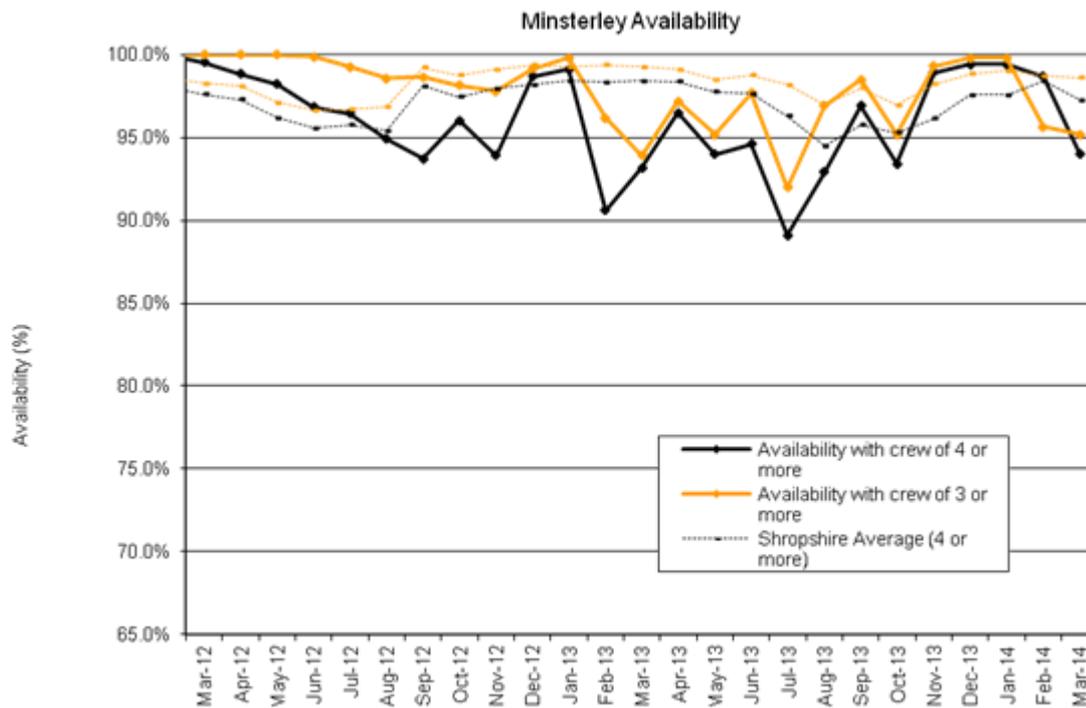
Clun

Recently fallen slightly below 98% performance for the first time since January 2013



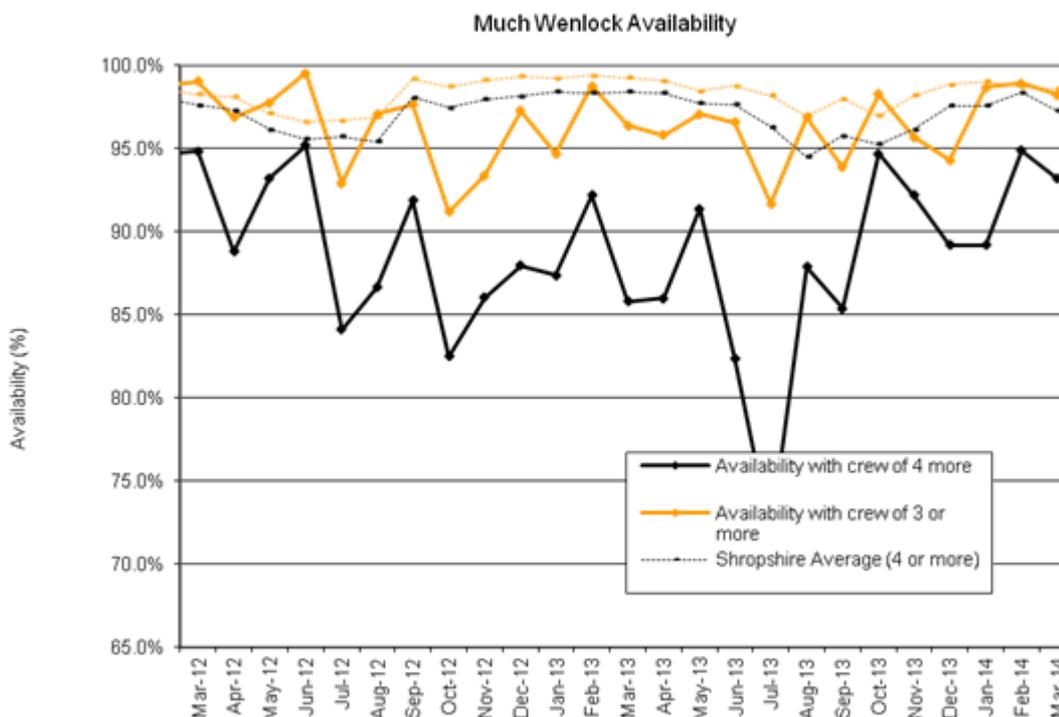
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
Although 14 units are budgeted for, only 12.25 units are currently on station strength.	It is difficult to recruit firefighters in the Clun area.	The standard recruitment strategy continues. See below for additional information.
A number of taster sessions for women were held in October 2013 and March 2014 as part of the drive to influence greater diversity within the Service. The events have resulted in positive feedback and considerable interest in terms of potential applicants. Two female candidates for Clun are due to attend job related tests: one in May and one in July 2014.		

Minsterley



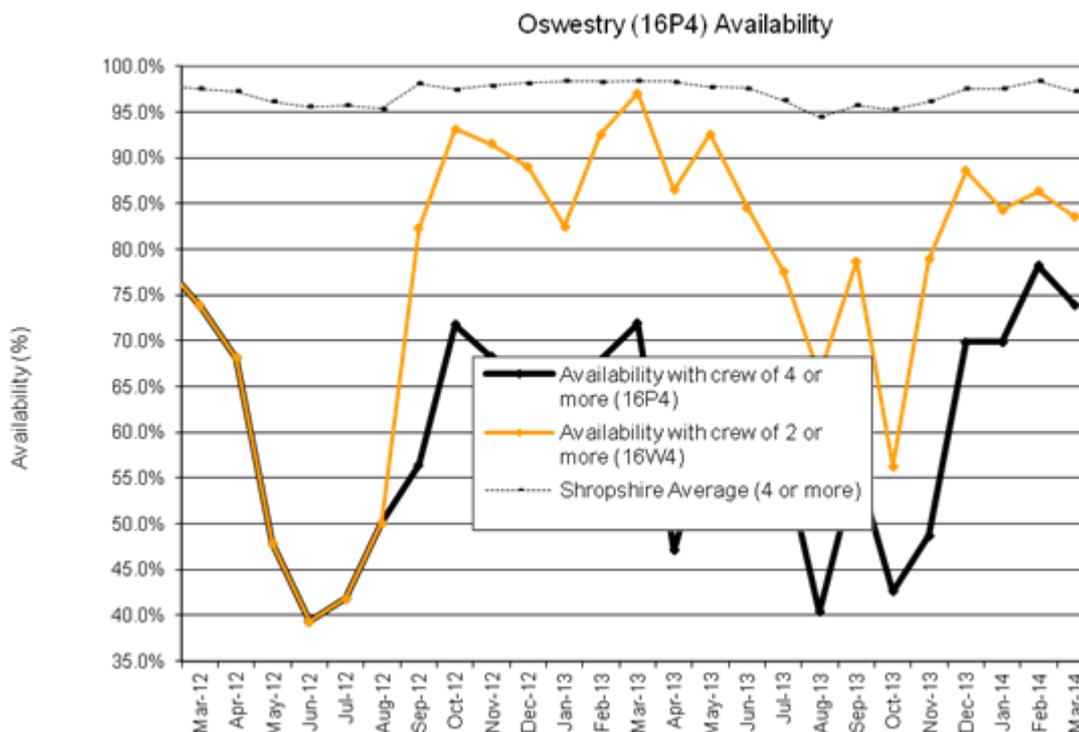
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 15 units are budgeted for, only 10.25 units are currently on station.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>During 2012 and early 2013 there have been several retirements and resignations.</p> <p>A reduction in employment opportunities in the area has resulted in personnel relocating.</p>	<p>One recruit completed training in June and is now available for operational calls. There has been a significant improvement in performance, resulting in the best availability since February 2011. This has reduced slightly due to short-term staffing issues.</p> <p>A new recruitment campaign was started in April 2014 by the Group Support Team.</p>

Much Wenlock



Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 7.5 units are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>It is difficult to recruit from the local population, because of the high number working outside Much Wenlock.</p>	<p>1 new recruit commenced training but failed to complete the course. A focussed recruitment drive commenced in January 2013 with a local home and business leaflet drop, poster campaign and two open days in March and April</p> <p>2 recruits commenced training on 10 February 2014 and will be available for operational calls in early June.</p>
<p>Much Wenlock must be commended for the cover they provide, given current staffing. They are trialling the SEED availability application detailed in paragraph 9 of the report.</p>		

Oswestry



As of September 2012 Oswestry’s second appliance report shows availability with crew of 4 or more and availability with crew of 2 or more. The second appliance availability has fluctuated considerably over the last 18 months, reflecting several personnel changes for reasons communicated at earlier Committee meetings. Significantly, there are positive signs for the future with recruitment at Oswestry remaining a priority and a number of personnel currently in the system as indicated below.

Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 18 units are budgeted for, only 15.5 units are currently on station.</p> <p>This is Oswestry’s second appliance, which has a dual role as a water ladder and water carrier.</p>	<p>The first pump at Oswestry currently has 100% availability. Availability of the second appliance has fluctuated continually since June 2012, due to further difficulties with retention of personnel as a result of the level of commitment required. However, between October and December 2013 the upward trend has taken availability to 70% for the first time since March 2013. The position remains fairly stable at over 70%.</p>	<p>One recruit is now available for operational calls, having completed basic training in March 2014. A further candidate is currently awaiting a medical and, if successful, will attend the course commencing in June 2014.</p>
<p>A number of taster sessions for women were held at Oswestry Fire Station on 26 October 2013 and Craven Arms in March 2014 as part of the organisation’s drive to influence greater diversity within the Service. The events have resulted in positive feedback and considerable interest in terms of potential applicants. One candidate for Oswestry is due to attend Job related tests in May / June 2014. Oswestry are trialling the SEED availability application detailed in paragraph 9 of the report.</p>		