

Wholetime and Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring April to June 2015

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides information regarding the ongoing performance and management in terms of the availability of wholetime and Retained Duty System (RDS) appliances 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.

4 Wholetime Availability Update

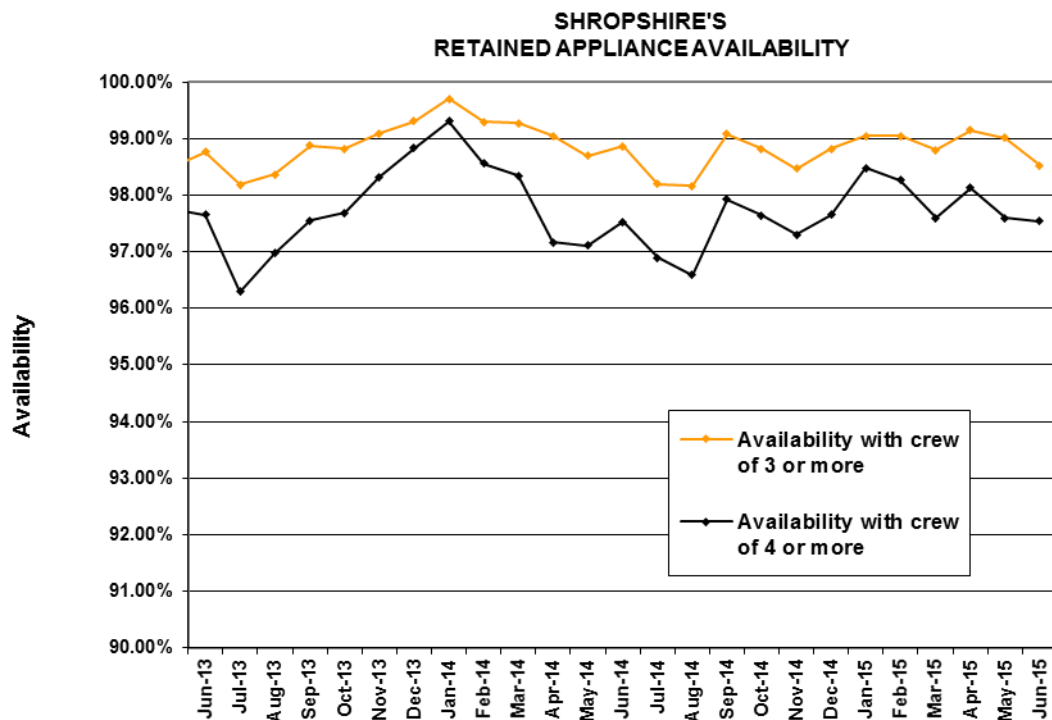
Whilst there is no graphical illustration regarding the availability of the wholetime appliances, officers can confirm that following a 3 month period without strike action wholetime appliance availability remained at 100%. Although the dispute remains in place, the Service continues to have robust plans in place, should a further strike be called.

Wholetime crews provide an increased level of resilience across the specialist operational areas of the Service, including Breathing Apparatus Guidelines, enhanced Water Rescue, Aerial Ladder Platform / Rescue Tender Firefighter Assistance and Safety Team 'FAST'.

Retained Availability

Overall availability of RDS fire engines, by comparison with many other fire and rescue services, remains high at over 97% (see Graph 1 below). This graph shows the average performance for all 23 RDS fire engines, which includes two based at Oswestry Fire Station. Of the 23 RDS fire engines, 17 are available for between 98% and 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 the 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. The Appendix to this report shows extremely positive results for the second appliance over the last 18 months, with the crew maintaining between 70% and 80% performance since May 2014, increasing to over 96% in June 2015. This level of availability, as the only two appliance station in the County, is a testament to the commitment of the team at Oswestry.



Graph 1 – Retained Duty System Crew Availability

5 Performance

Graph 1 reveals an overall upward trend in availability during 2013 until January 2014. Performance saw a gradual decline until November but has since improved, fluctuating between 97 and 98%. Notably, Albrighton and Minsterley Fire Stations, where recruitment has proved challenging in recent years, remain key factors in terms of the decline in performance. Conversely, Much Wenlock and Cleobury Mortimer, who have consistently experienced similar recruitment difficulties, have significantly improved performance to 94.7 and 93.3% respectively

To improve on overall level of performance, the Service remains focused 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.

6 Factors Influencing Availability

Feedback from a recent RDS survey has been analysed and the results have enabled officers to gauge progress following the review conducted in 2006. The Service Management Team has approved the establishment of a working group to identify, prioritise and drive forward improvement initiatives falling out of the light review. The inaugural meeting was held on 17 June 2015 and four broad priorities were identified and allocated a lead officer. The priorities for further investigation are:

- Payment
- Attraction of personnel and engagement with employers
- Training options and
- Communication

The second meeting will be held in early October 2015, after which updates will be provided to the Committee.

7 Background Station Specific Performance

There are currently only 6 fire stations, whose performance during the last quarter falls below the mean of 98% achieved by the remaining stations (16 achieve over 99% availability). An analysis of performance is provided at the Appendix to this report. This includes the Oswestry second appliance, Albrighton, Minsterley, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock and Newport. With the exception of Albrighton and Minsterley at 86.5% and 80.6% respectively, all currently achieve over 93% availability.

8 Recruitment Campaign

The first course of 2015 had a full complement of 10 recruits and key stations, such as Oswestry, Cleobury Mortimer, and Tweedale were represented. The second course of 2015 includes candidates, who will provide much needed support for Oswestry, Much Wenlock and Bishop's Castle.

Positive action taster days have been scheduled for the next three years, an initiative driven by our Equality and Diversity Team and Steering Group. Based on the results of similar events during 2014, where a significant number of women have engaged with the Service, officers anticipate a positive response. The last course of 2014 included two female firefighters and the first course of 2015 has provided a further female candidate, who is assigned to one of the priority stations.

The second course of 2015 is currently underway with female candidates from Prees Fire Station and Much Wenlock. Recruitment is a constant work stream for Area Command teams but a number of stations, including Minsterley, Albrighton, Much Wenlock, Bishop's Castle and Prees, are currently engaging with the local community with specific recruitment initiatives. Please see the Appendix to this report for details.

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 employed in the future along with engagement with local employers and seeking support from local councillors and elected Members to raise the profile of "on call" teams.

Joint venture between West Mercia Police and Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services

This Service is currently working closely with the West Mercia Police and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to facilitate the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers into the Retained Duty System during their on-duty patrol time at stations with crewing issues. A number of meetings have taken place with this Service leading on the project.

9 Retained Support Officer (RSO) Cover – Quarter 2

Table 1 below shows those fire stations that have required the highest level of support (for reasons detailed earlier in this report) during the last three years and the first quarter of 2015/16. These stations accounted for **85.4%** of all RSO cover during 2012/13, **85.3%** during 2013/14 and **89%** last year.

The deployment of RSOs during the first quarter of 2015/16 was significant in supporting performance at Albrighton, Minsterley, Cleobury Mortimer and Bridgnorth in particular with **90%** of all RSO cover. Albrighton and Minsterley are currently the focus of specific recruitment activity, as seen in the Appendix to this report.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16				
Stations	Total	Total	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Albrighton	472.00	276.50	895.75	236.25				
Bishops Castle			164.75	18.25				
Bridgnorth		203.25	191.50	140.25				
Cleobury Mortimer	565.25	902.50	373.25	168.00				
Craven Arms			46.00					
Ludlow	419.70	156.25	64.25					
Market Drayton	240.75	88.50	25.75					
Minsterley	371.50	449.25	1,410.25	427.50				
Much Wenlock	194.75	226.25	107.75	22.75				
Oswestry 16 (P4)	532.75	460.00	222.00					
Wellington			39.25					
Totals	2,796.70	2,762.50	3,540.50	1,013.00				
Total RSO hours	3,275.95	3,239.75	3,980.25	1083.5				

Table 1 – Retained Support Officer Cover

10 Retained Availability System

The Service continues to work closely with 'SEED' to further develop and enhance the interim availability system. A number of operational staff have been seconded into the ICT team to provide increased capacity to develop a more efficient and effective system. Following a number of trials and feedback from end users, an updated version has just been released with a range of improvements added. The intention is to provide more flexibility for people, who are available in areas where the Service struggles to provide cover at certain times. One of the major benefits to the end users is the facility, which allows for remote, web-based access, when booking on and off call. A further development on this system is a service map available to officers through the portal, identifying 'live' appliance availability throughout the 24-hour period.

11 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

13 Initial Impact Assessment

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

14 Appendix

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability Analysis

15 Background Papers

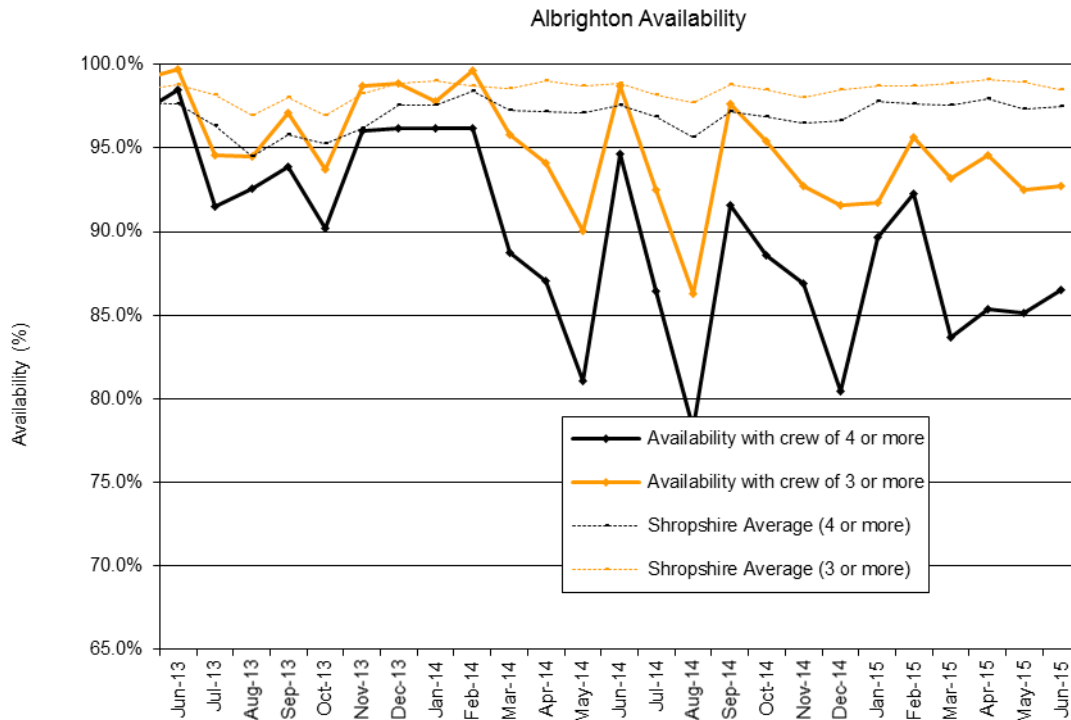
A quarterly RDS performance review summary is presented to the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee. Previous reports can be accessed via the following link:

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

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability: Analysis

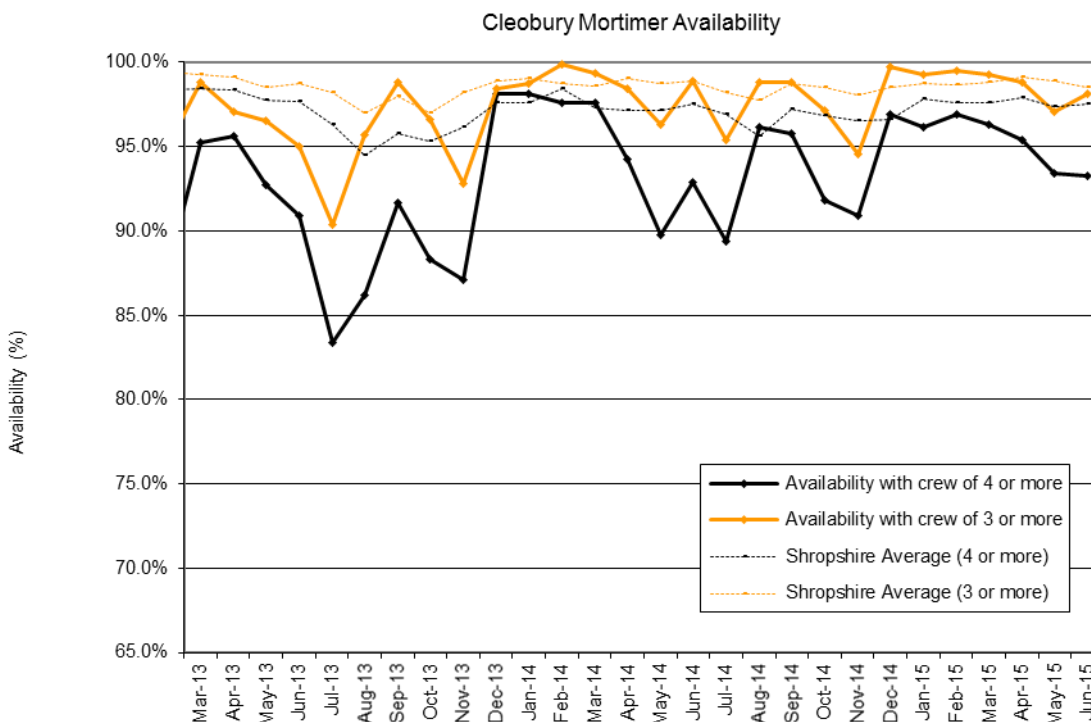
NB: One (1) unit is equivalent to one person being available for full cover (over 120 hours a week), so two crew members each committing three quarter cover (up to 120 hours but no less than 84 hours per week) would equate to 1.5 units.

Albrighton



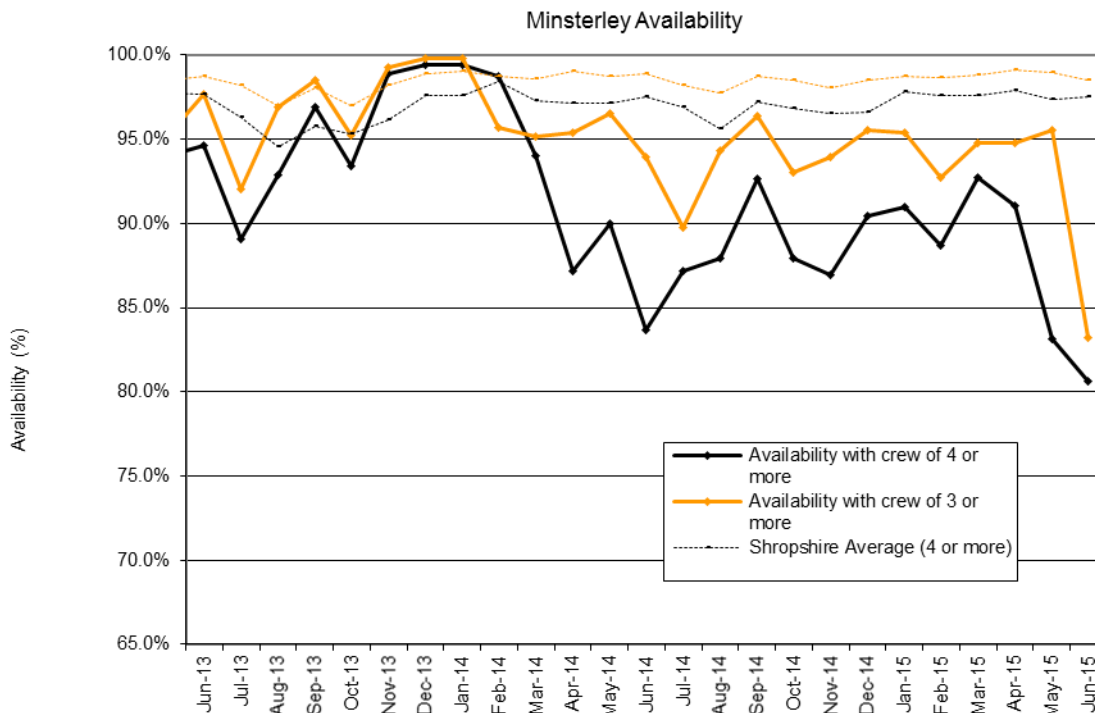
Station profile	Reasons for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>13 units (9.5 units available = 11 personnel)</p> <p>Historically, it has been extremely difficult to recruit in the Albrighton area, with daytime cover the key problem.</p>	<p>Recent long-term absences and the likelihood of further deficiencies are driving a renewed recruitment campaign. Currently 5 personnel unavailable.</p>	<p>The Group Support Team is engaging with the local traders association to increase the profile and understanding of the “on call” service with details for Albrighton recruitment added to the Traders website site. Two female applicants recently interviewed have now withdrawn from the process, which is particularly disappointing, as both could have provided daytime cover. The Station is due a refit later this year. A recruitment session is scheduled to coincide with an open day at the new station, when completed. Leaflets have been circulated to households within the 5-minute area and an advert placed in the local parish magazine but there have been no recent applications. Officers will be arranging a meeting to discuss targeting Cosford in the near future. Cosford Gym has already been identified as a potential source and canvassing is taking place. Recruitment posters are now displayed on appliance lockers as part of an initial pilot.</p>

Cleobury Mortimer



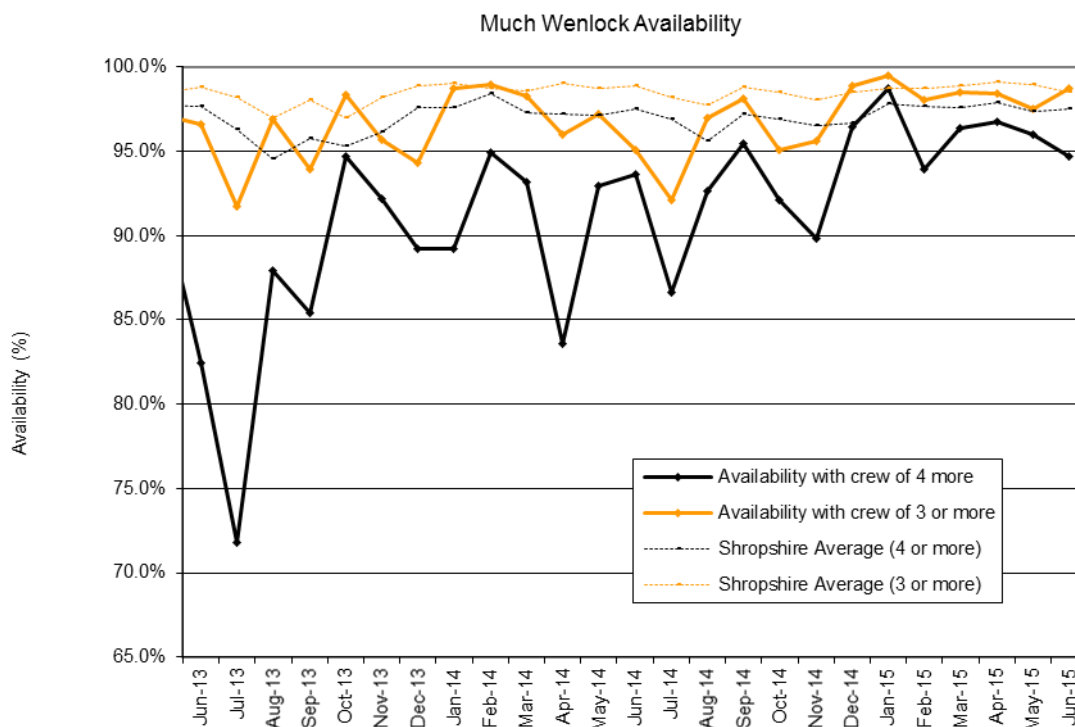
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 9.5 units = 11 personnel are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge</p>	<p>It remains difficult to recruit firefighters in the Cleobury Mortimer area.</p>	<p>An ongoing recruitment campaign has focussed on providing additional daytime cover.</p> <p>One recruit completed initial training in February and one in June and both are now attending incidents and providing daytime cover. One applicant is currently being processed.</p> <p>Recruitment posters are now displayed on appliance lockers as part of an initial pilot and we now have advertising space in local press.</p>

Minsterley



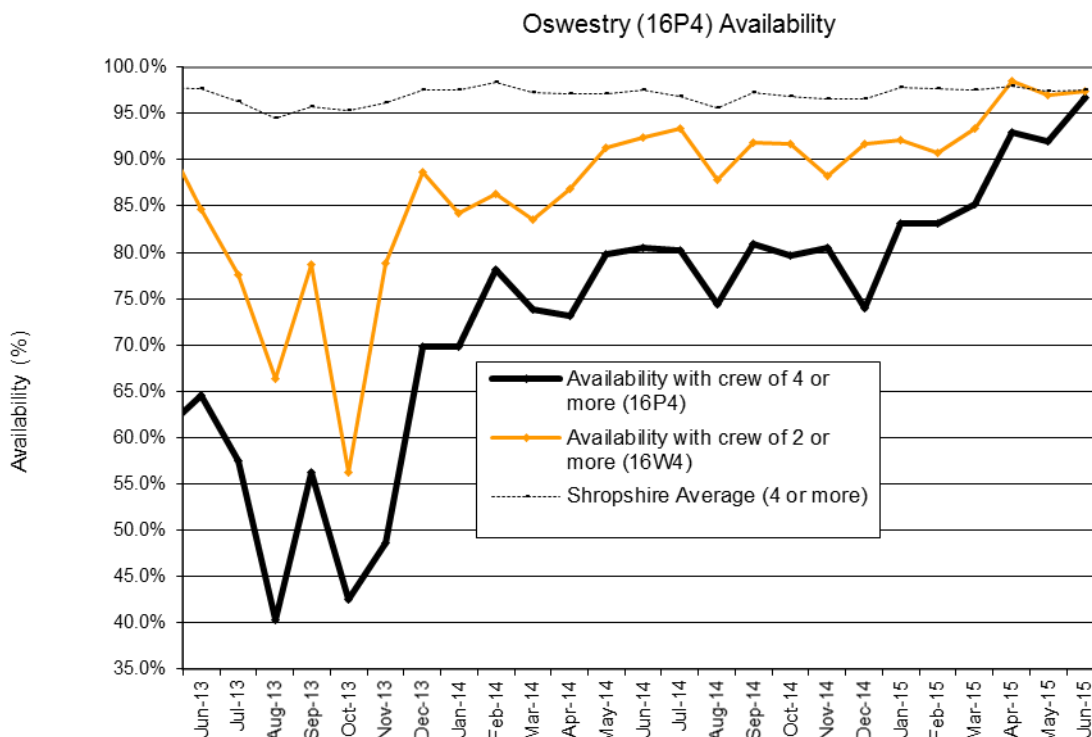
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 14 units are budgeted for, only 7.25 units = 9 personnel are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>A reduction in employment opportunities in the area has resulted in personnel relocating.</p>	<p>Performance dropped significantly during 2014 and a new recruitment campaign was started in April 2014 by the Group Support Team. A recruit, who had been undergoing a period of development, is now attending operational calls. Further work is being done and the Assistant Group Commander is working toward positive action sessions in conjunction with the Equality and Diversity Team, with a view to attracting more female recruits. The need for daytime cover is driving an initiative with the main local employer, who has historically released personnel during working hours. Group Support Team personnel are currently setting up recruitment stands at local focal points for face-to-face promotion of the Service and posters have been renewed throughout the area in conjunction with a comprehensive leaflet drop. A recent Parish Council meeting attended by Group Support Team staff has confirmed that the posters have been widely observed. Recruitment posters are now displayed on appliance lockers as part of an initial pilot.</p>

Much Wenlock



Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 10 units = 11 personnel are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing still remains 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>Two recruits completed their course in June last year and are now attending operational calls and performance has improved. A further recruit has just completed initial training and is now available for operational calls. One female candidate is attending the current course. Plans are in place to hold a station open day, which will include recruitment activity.</p> <p>Recruitment posters are now displayed on appliance lockers as part of an initial pilot, whilst we also now have adverts in local press.</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 over the last two years, reflecting several personnel changes, as communicated at earlier Committee meetings. Recruitment at Oswestry has remained a priority and this is reflected in the latest data, which has seen availability rise to 96.7% in June 2015.

Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
Although 18 units are budgeted for, 16.5 units = 19 personnel are currently on station.	The first pump at Oswestry currently has 100% availability. Availability of the second appliance has fluctuated continually since June 2012. This is Oswestry’s second appliance, which has a dual role as a water ladder and water carrier. However, since October 2013 the upward trend has been largely maintained. Second appliance availability has remained stable at between 75 and 80% for the last year and now increased to 96% - an excellent performance from the Team.	It is anticipated that the current level of recruitment and greater retention of staff will be sufficient to maintain and potentially improve on recent performance. One recruit completed training in February and two further recruits completed the second course of 2015 and are now available for operational calls. A further recruit commenced training in June. Retention is the issue rather than recruitment. Retention will, no doubt, improve with sufficient personnel to allow effective management of workload.