

Wholetime and Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring October to December 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

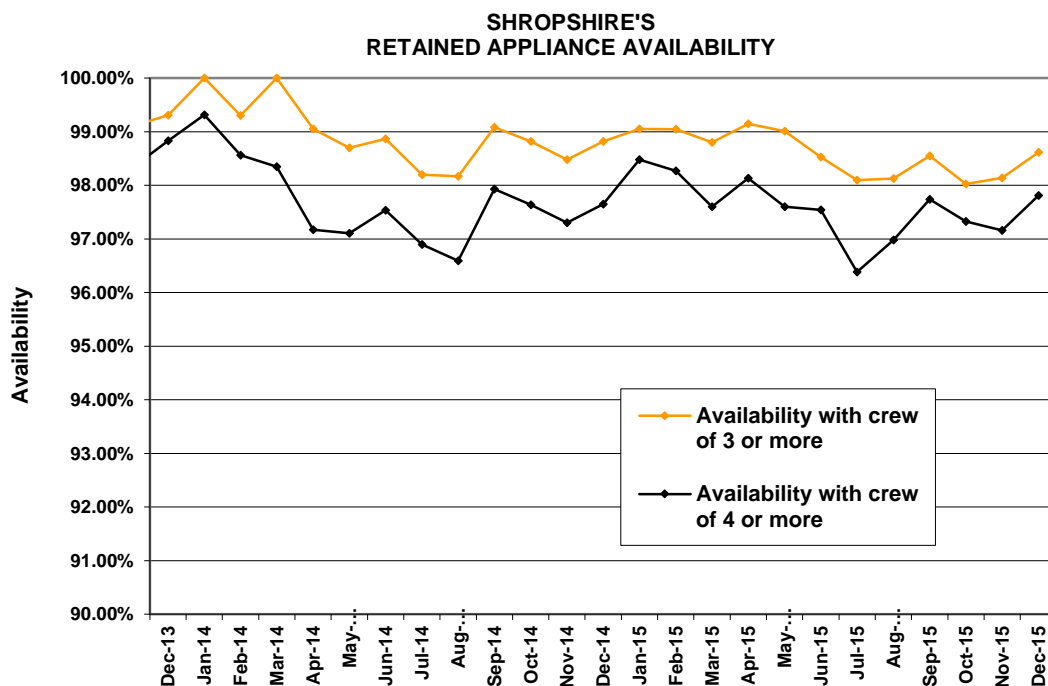
Availability of wholetime appliances remains at 100%. To support continued high performance, the Service has appointed 3 qualified firefighters from other services, due to join in May 2016. Also, the Service has embarked upon a wholetime recruitment programme, with 12 successful candidates undertaking a recruits' course in September 2016 and deployment in December 2016.

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 and the Firefighter Assistance and Safety Team (FAST).

Retained Availability

Overall availability of RDS fire engines remains high at 97.81% (see Graph 1). This shows the average performance for all 23 RDS fire engines, which includes two based at Oswestry Fire Station. Of the 23 RDS fire engines, 18 are available for between 98% and 100% of the time, which is an outstanding level of performance. The Fire Authority's target is always, however, 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 two years, with a steady increase in availability during that period. Since April this year performance has been high, peaking at 96% in June. Despite falling to just above 85% in December 2015, the level of availability at 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 a steady performance since March 2014, fluctuating between 96% and 98%. Notably, Albrighton and Minsterley Fire Stations, where recruitment has proved challenging in recent years, remain key factors in striving to maintain over 98% cover across the County. Much Wenlock and Cleobury Mortimer, which have consistently experienced similar recruitment difficulties, have since significantly improved performance to 98.4% and 98.9% 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

RDS Working Group

The Service Management Team approved the establishment of a working group to identify, prioritise and drive forward improvement initiatives falling out of the light review. The group has now met on three occasions and much investigative work has been conducted by responsible owners on the four broad priorities. The report generated has already been shared with the Service Management Team in February 2016 and the Fire Authority's Standards and Human Resources Committee in March 2016 and can be accessed via the link below.

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/14-rds-working-group.pdf>

The next meeting of the working group take place later this month.

7 Background Station Specific Performance

There are currently only five fire stations, whose performance during the last quarter falls below the mean of 98% achieved by the remaining stations (15 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, and Much Wenlock. With the exception of Albrighton and Minsterley at 81.5% and 84.9% respectively, all currently achieve over 97% availability.

8 Recruitment Campaign

The first course of 2015 had a full complement of recruits (10), and key stations, such as Oswestry, Cleobury Mortimer, and Tweedale were represented. The second course of 2015 included candidates, who now 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 department and Steering Group. The Service has received a positive response in this respect in that a steady flow of female recruits has joined since 2014. The Celebration of Success event held at Theatre Severn in early November 2015 saw three women receive their certificates amongst a total of 23 recruits.

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 their local communities with specific recruitment initiatives. The latest campaign has been particularly successful in attracting three recruits for Bishop's Castle, who are attending the current course, and potentially four candidates for Minsterley later in the year. Please see the appendix to this report for details.

All aspects of the recruitment campaign, including the use of social networking as a method of attraction, continue to impact positively on the Service's desire to achieve 100% availability. Similar recruitment tactics will, therefore, be employed in the future, along with increased engagement with local employers and seeking support from local councillors and elected Members to raise the profile of "on-call" teams.

9 Joint West Mercia Police and Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services Venture

The Service has recently embarked on an exciting pilot scheme, working closely with West Mercia Police (WMP) and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (H&WFRS) on a joint training course. A number of RDS recruits from both Services have trained alongside Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's). The course was condensed from the standard process, where recruits spent almost five months achieving initial competence, into a five-week intensive modular course.

The intention is to utilise PCSO's during their patrol hours within the catchment area of particular stations. SFRS now has two PCSO's, qualified and moving into the development phase, who will operate in Oswestry and Albrighton. The level of availability may be only a portion of their on-duty hours but officers anticipate that these hours could be tailored to suit the needs of their respective station.

A by-product of this pilot scheme in the longer term, if considered viable, may be that the two Fire and Rescue Service share modules to avoid the lengthy lead-in times from recruitment to operational readiness. This will clearly depend on many other factors, not least the availability of recruits in relation to their normal employment.

10 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 half of 2015/16. These stations accounted for RSO cover of:

- **85.4%** during 2012/13;
- **85.3%** during 2013/14; and
- **89%** during 2015/16.

The deployment of RSOs during the first three quarters of 2015/16 was significant in supporting performance at Albrighton and Minsterley in particular, with **86.5%** of all RSO cover. Albrighton and Minsterley are currently the focus of specific recruitment activity, as seen in the Appendix to this report. Bishop's Castle, despite maintaining 100% availability, is also subject to specific recruitment focus, currently having only 9 personnel to call upon. Their performance remains exemplary.

	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	276.5	321		
Bishop's Castle			164.75	18.25	24.75			
Bridgnorth		203.25	191.5	140.25				
Cleobury Mortimer	565.25	902.50	373.25	168	98	19		
Craven Arms			46			21.75		
Clun					42.5			
Ellesmere					29.75			
Ludlow	419.70	156.25	64.25					
Market Drayton	240.75	88.50	25.75					
Minsterley	371.50	449.25	1410.25	427.5	737	653		
Much Wenlock	194.75	226.25	107.75	22.75	44.5			
Oswestry 16 (P4)	532.75	460.00	222		15.75	27		
Newport					31.5			
Wellington			39.25					
Totals	2,796.70	2,762.25	3,540.50	1013	1300.25	1041.75		
Total RSO hours	3,275.95	3,239.75	3,980.25	1083.5	1392.5	1125.75		

Table 1 – Retained Support Officer Cover

11 Availability System

The Service has now undertaken a full review of the current status of the SEED RDS Availability System. The review identified that, whilst progress had been made against many of the elements of the original specification, and some significant benefit had been seen at station level, there were still several elements of the specification that had not yet been delivered.

After a full and robust discussion on the findings of the report, the Service Management Team decided that the most appropriate way to move forward is to accept the SEED system as being substantive, rather than an interim solution, and to commit the resources to ensure that the outstanding elements of the original specification are delivered as a priority. This decision was based on the recent acceptable progress towards meeting the specification, the level of investment so far and the potential cost of change.

The system is providing more flexibility and access to the RDS firefighters, who are now able to use mobile devices to book on and off.

The system also provides a service map, available to officers through the portal, which shows a 'live' picture of appliance availability. Phase II development of the system is progressing, which will provide Area Command managers with robust management reports, processed from data within the system.

12 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

13 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

14 Initial Impact Assessment

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

15 Appendix

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability Analysis

16 Background Papers

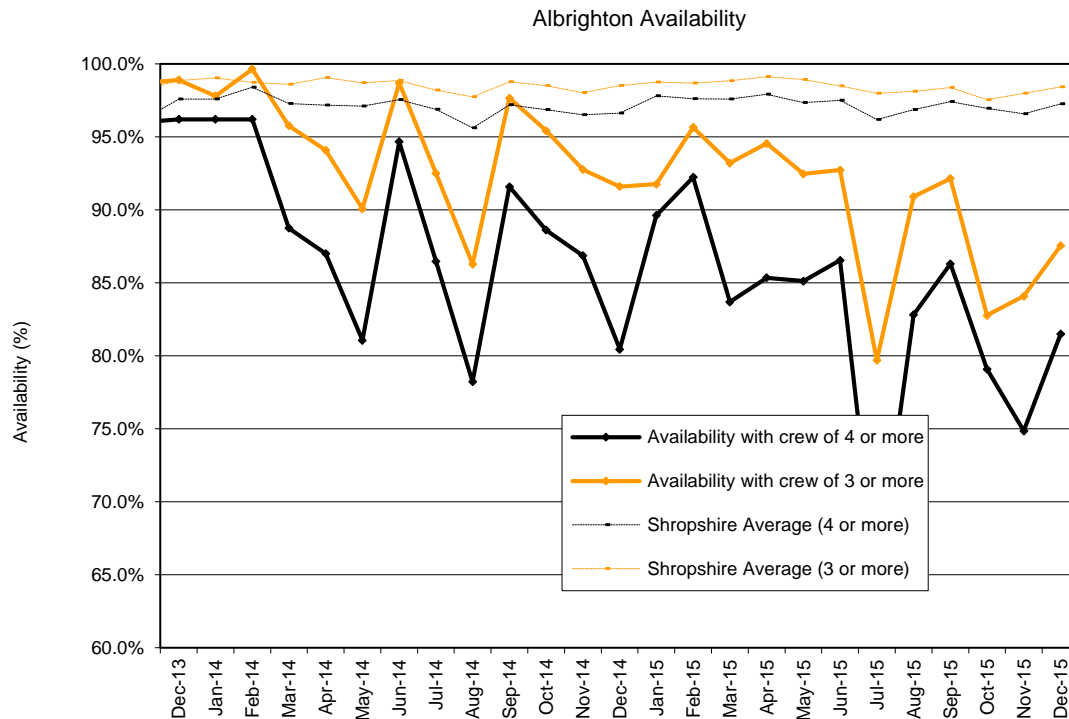
A quarterly RDS performance review summary is presented to the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee. Previous reports can be accessed via the following link:

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

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability: Analysis

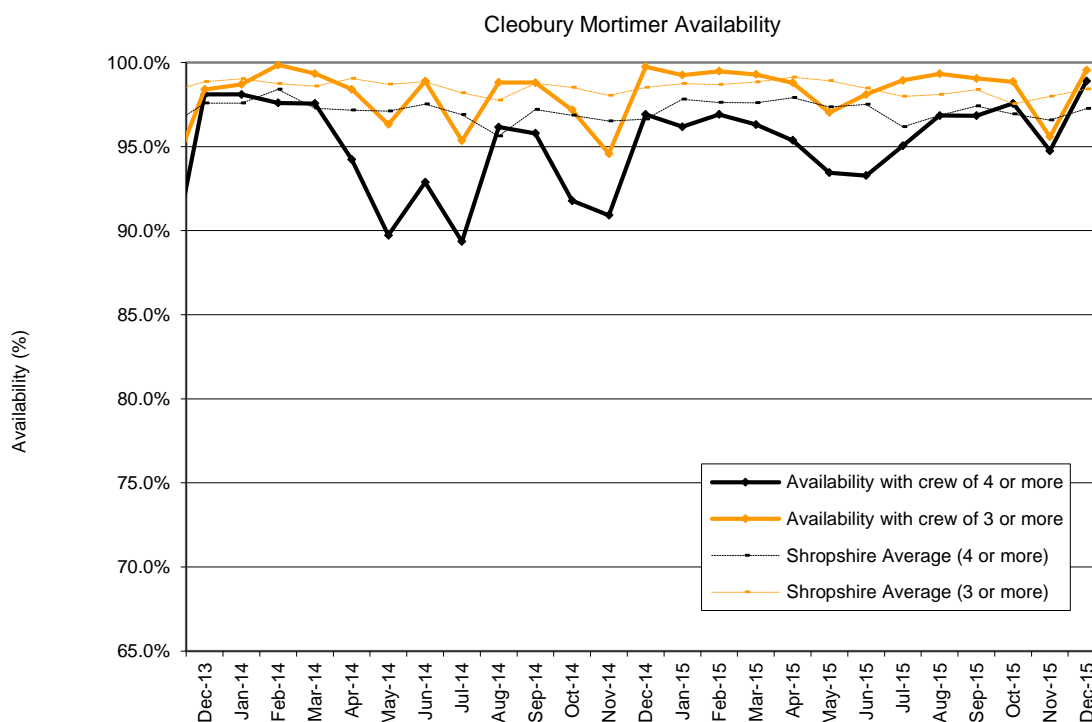
NB: One (1) unit is equivalent to one person being available for full cover (over 120 hours a week), so two crew members each committing three quarter cover (up to 120 hours but no less than 84 hours per week) would equate to 1.5 units.

Albrighton



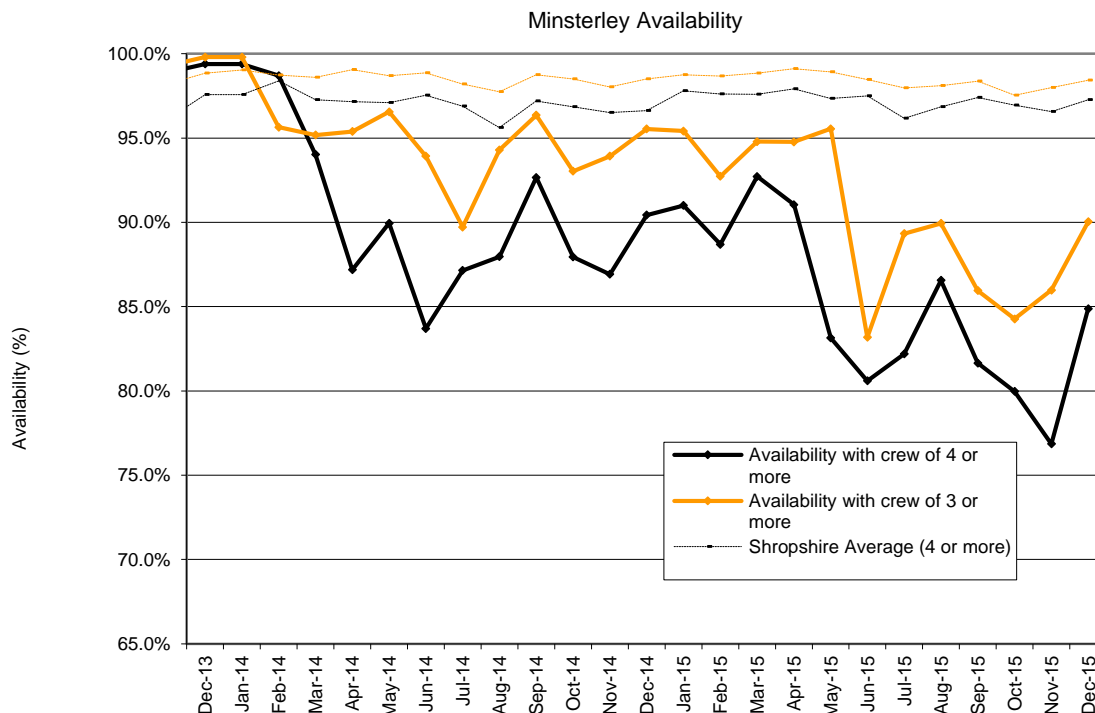
Station profile	Reasons for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>13 units (8.75 units available = 10 personnel)</p> <p>Historically, it has been extremely difficult to recruit in the Albrighton area, with daytime cover the key problem.</p>	<p>Recent long-term absences and retirement and the likelihood of further deficiencies are driving a renewed recruitment campaign. Currently 4 personnel are unavailable.</p>	<p>The Station is currently undergoing refurbishment. A general recruitment session is scheduled to coincide with an open day at the new station, when completed. One candidate is available for recruit training but due to personal circumstances was unable to join the current course. He is, however, scheduled to attend the second course of 2016 which commences on 11 July.</p>

Cleobury Mortimer



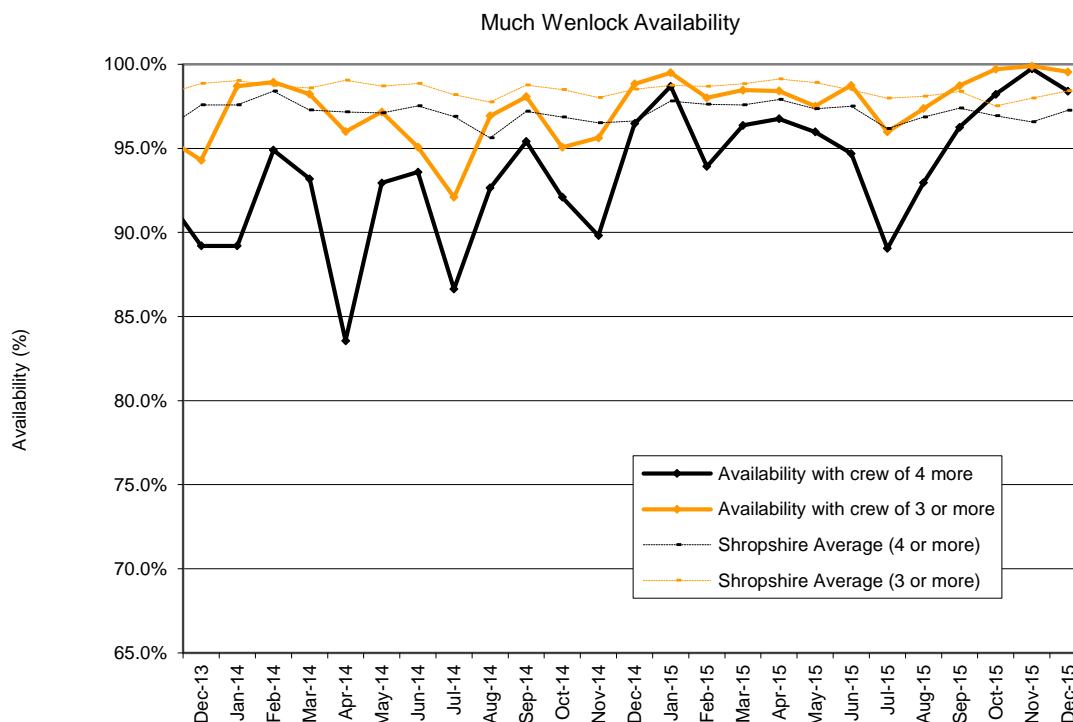
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 9.5 units = 11 personnel are currently on station strength.	It remains difficult to recruit firefighters in the Cleobury Mortimer area.	<p>An ongoing recruitment campaign has focussed on providing additional daytime cover. Two new recruits completed training in 2015 and have already improved availability due to providing daytime cover.</p> <p>The candidate, who recently completed his training on the pilot PCSO (Police Community Support Officer) initiative detailed in Section 8 above, is now available for operational calls. One further recruit is currently undergoing his initial training on the first course of 2016.</p>

Minsterley



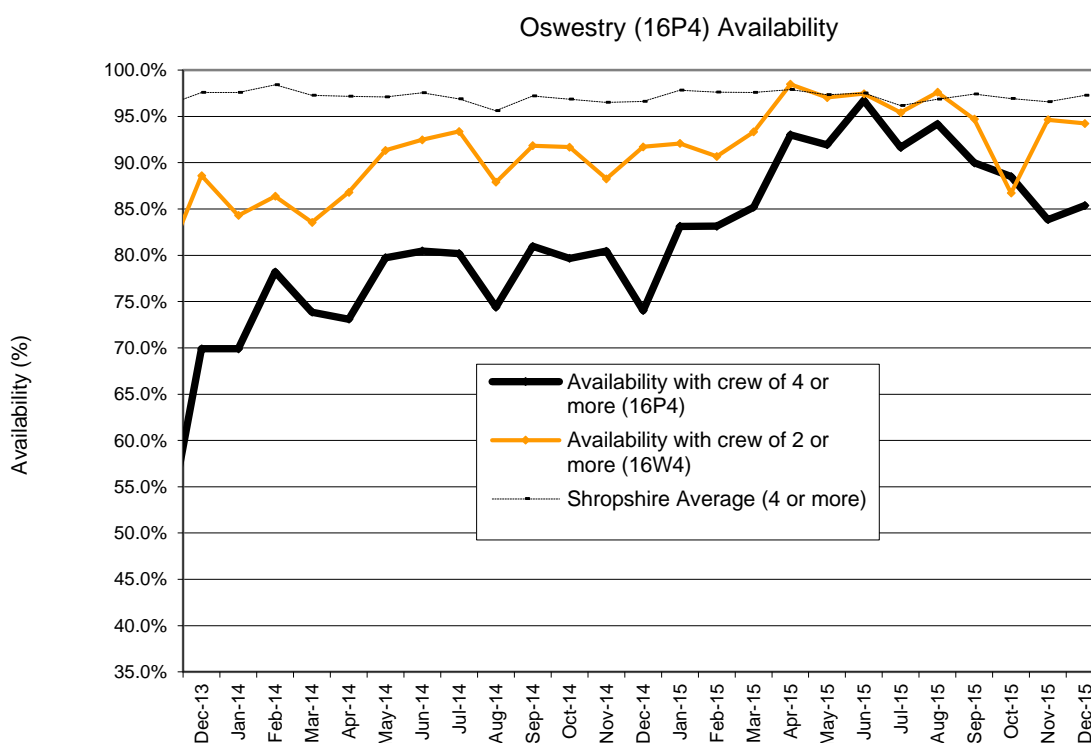
Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 14 units are budgeted for, only 7.25 units = 9 personnel are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>A reduction in employment opportunities in the area has resulted in personnel relocating.</p>	<p>Performance dropped significantly during 2014 following the departure of several personnel for a variety of reasons, including employment opportunities and retirements. A recruitment campaign was started in April 2014 by the Group Support Team. Officers arranged a positive action day (women’s taster session late 2015) with a view to attracting more female recruits, along with a general recruitment session during the afternoon. Two candidates are being encouraged and assisted to improve their potential with a view to joining the July course. Two further candidates have also been registered as potential recruits for the July course, one of whom can provide vital weekday cover.</p>

Much Wenlock



Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, 10.75 units = 12 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 female recruits have completed initial training during the last year and are available for operational calls. Much Wenlock performed remarkably well for a number of years with only eight personnel. Now with 12 crew the team delivers a high level of availability, whilst managing increased resources to improve the work/life balance of serving members. A further recruit is currently participating in the first course of 2016 and will be operational in June.</p> <p>Three of the Service's 20 female firefighters serve at Much Wenlock.</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 three 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 a high of 96.7% in June 2015 and still remaining at above 85%.

Station profile	Reason for availability issues	Actions taken
Although 18 units are budgeted for, 17.25 units = 20 personnel are currently on station.	The first pump at Oswestry currently has 100%. Since October 2013 an upward trend has been largely maintained. Second appliance availability has remained stable at between 75% and 80% for the last year, reaching a high of 96% in June. It is currently 85%, which is clearly an excellent performance from the team.	Four new recruits completed training during 2015 and are available operationally. Retention at Oswestry is the issue, rather than recruitment. Retention will, no doubt, improve with sufficient personnel to allow effective management of workload. There are a number of potential recruits to fill the last available post later this year.