

Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring October to December 2013

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.

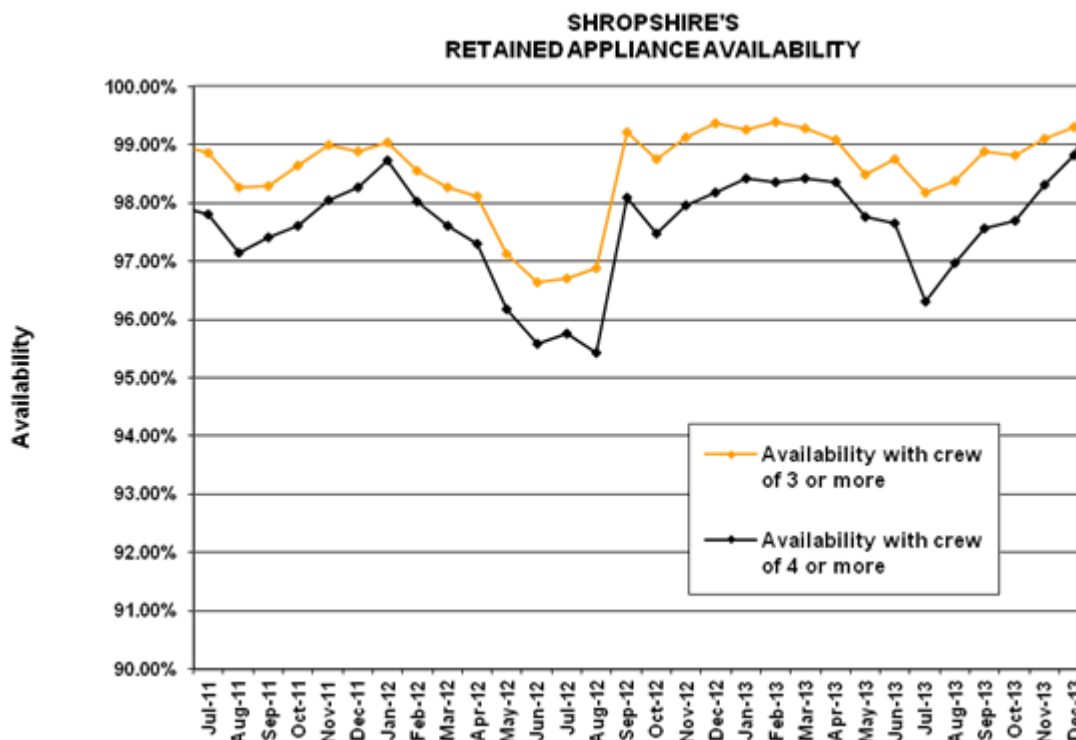
3 Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has 23 fire stations, 19 of which are solely crewed by Retained Duty System (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 99% (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.

NB See appendix for increase to 70% during December.



Graph 1 – Retained Duty System Crew Availability

4 Improving Performance

Graph 1 reveals an overall upward trend in availability during 2013. The upward trend has continued since October 2012, although there was a dip in performance during June this year, owing to a number of issues previously reported to the Committee. The last six months' overall availability has been extremely positive. To maintain and 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 and these have been summarised in previous reports.

6 Background Station Specific Performance

There are currently only four 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.

7 Recruitment Campaign

Ongoing analysis of overall RDS availability has identified those stations with insufficient staff that need to be targeted for recruitment. Over the last 12 months the Service has run a successful campaign, which has provided 28 new recruits for those stations identified as a priority due to reduced staffing.

The latest RDS recruits course of 2013 commenced on 28 October with 10 candidates, of whom 9 will be available for incidents during March 2014. The first course of 2014 commenced on 10 February with a full complement of 10 recruits. Two candidates are 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 shows those fire stations that have required the highest level of support (for reasons detailed earlier in this report) during 2012/13 and the first half of 2013/14. These six stations accounted for **85.4%** of all RSO cover during 2012/13 and **83.4%** of available RSO hours for the period April to December 2013/14. The deployment of RSOs has improved performance at all stations with availability issues.

	2012/13	2013/14				
Stations	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Albrighton	472		47	69.25		
Bridgnorth				127.25		
Cleobury Mortimer	565.25	208.75	290.75	340		
Ludlow	419.70	29.25	127.00			
Market Drayton	240.75	59.50	29.00			
Minsterley	371.50	113.50	163.00	19.75		
Much Wenlock	194.75	136.00	44.75	35.25		
Oswestry 16 (P4)	532.75	135.50	15.50	136		
Totals	2,796.70	682.50	670.00	749.25		
Total RSO hours	3,275.95	788.75	915.50	814.75		

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 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) will soon be providing Area Command with an improved version of their original availability application, with a view to further trials at a number of Stations. This will enable crews to access remotely the database by 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 our 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

As this report provides purely historical data, an initial impact assessment is not required.

13 Appendix

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability Analysis

14 Background Papers

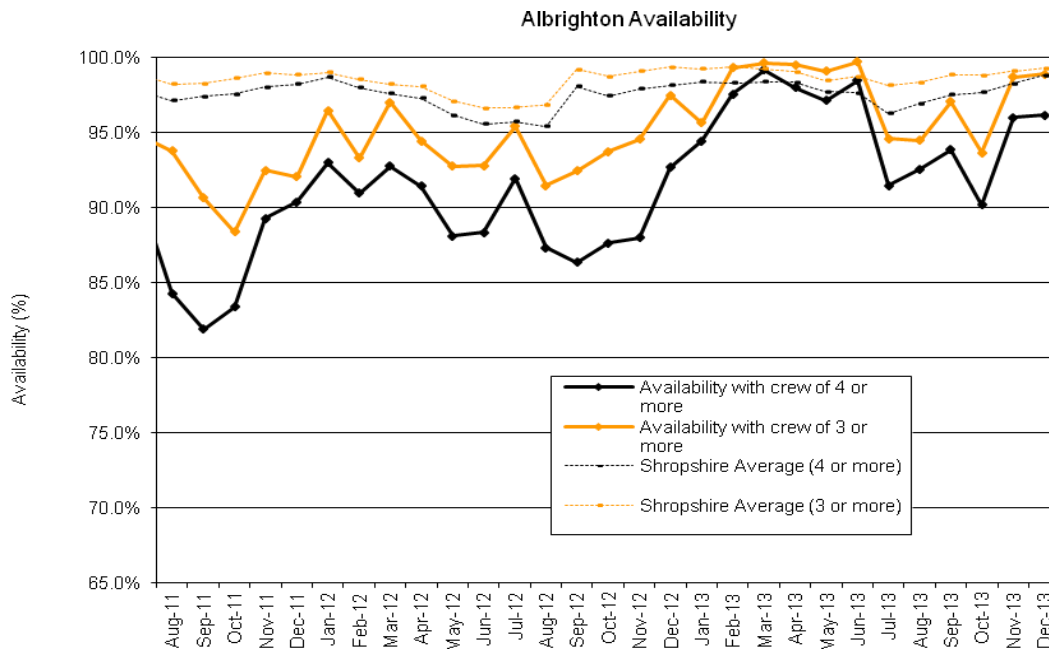
A quarterly RDS performance review summary is presented to the Fire Authority’s Audit and Performance Management Committee. Previous reports can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-the-service/fra/meetings/Audit-and-Performance-Management>

Retained Duty System Fire Station Availability: Analysis

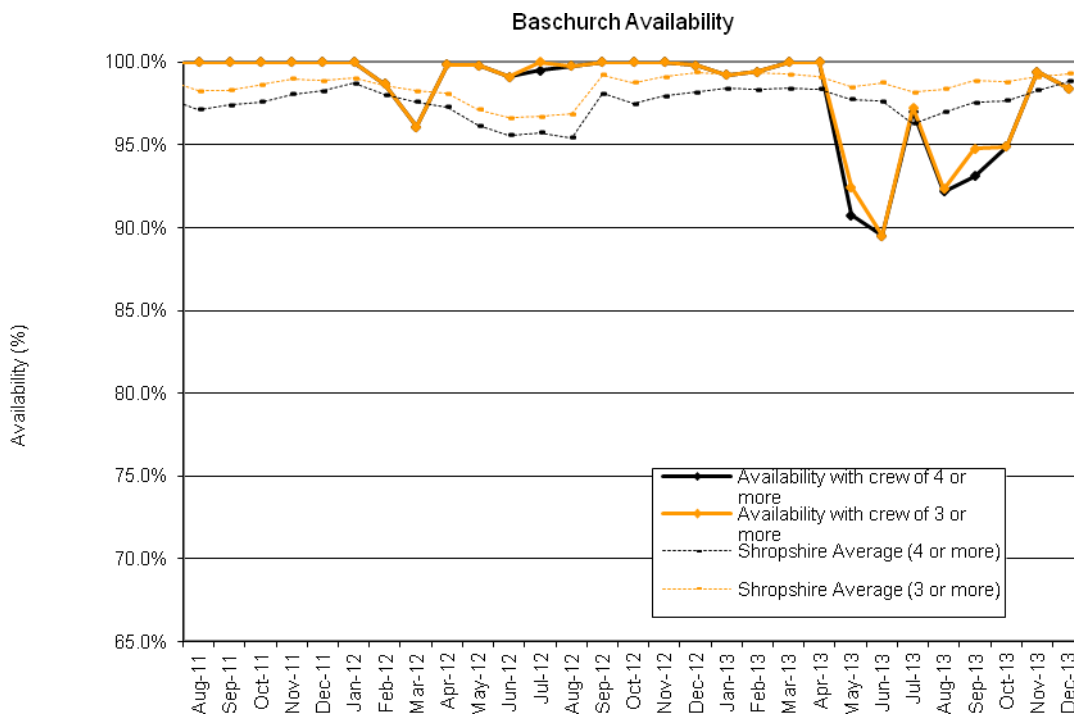
NB: One (1) unit is equivalent to one person being available for full cover (over 120 hours a week), so two crew members each committing three quarter cover (up to 120 hours but no less than 84 hours per week) would equate to 1.5 units.

Albrighton



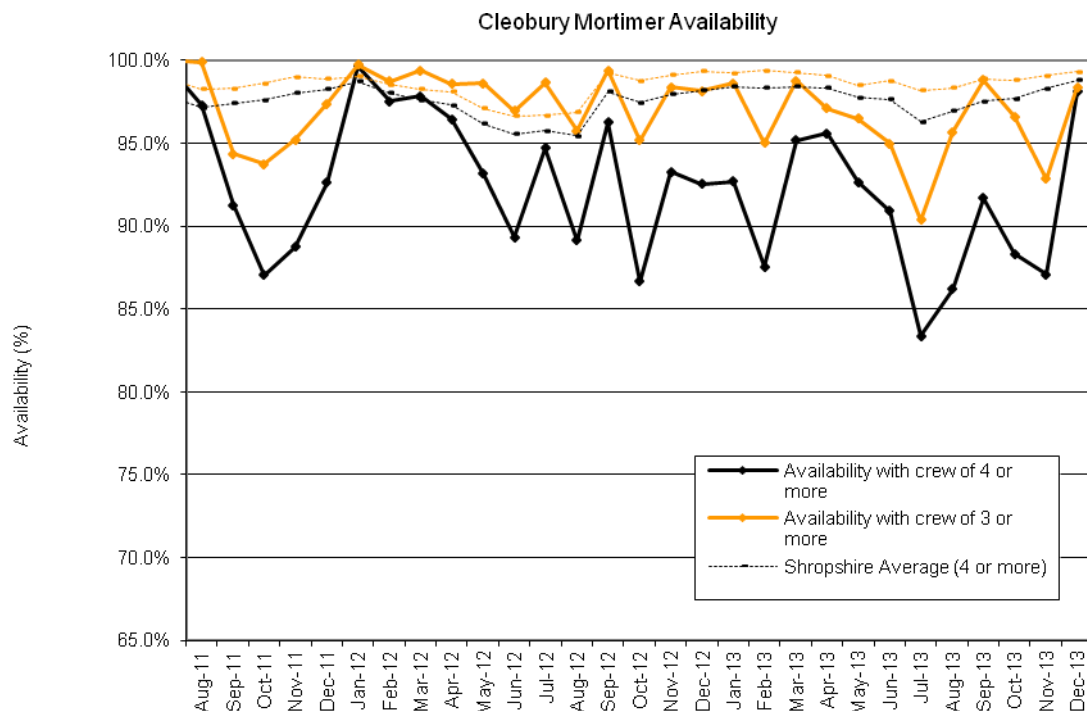
Station Profile	Reasons for Availability Issues	Actions Taken
<p>13 units (see NB below) (11.75 available)</p> <p>Historically it has been extremely difficult to recruit in the Albrighton area, with daytime cover the key problem.</p>	<p>Lack of an Officer in Charge has led to the station being off the run for periods but this has largely been resolved with the introduction of a new Officer in Charge and an additional Crew Manager.</p>	<p>A recruitment campaign, focussing on providing daytime cover, was undertaken. Area Command are researching a half-cover rates contract. Two new recruits completed their training in 2013 and are now available for operational calls. A further recruit was, unfortunately, unable to complete the Breathing Apparatus aspect of the recent course.</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>		

Baschurch



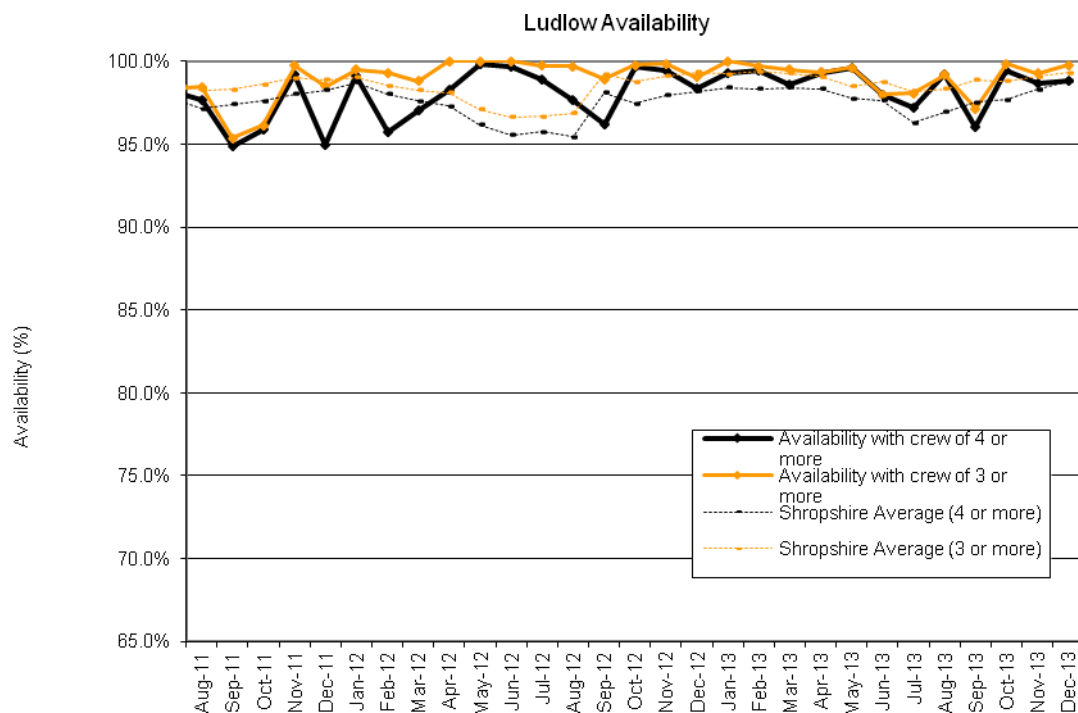
Station Profile	Reason for Availability Issues	Actions Taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 11.25 units are currently on station.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>Recent long-term sickness and applications for 12 months' unpaid leave have impacted on Baschurch availability.</p>	<p>One firefighter is only able to provide daytime cover (approximately 40 hours), whilst at work in Baschurch. He is currently working on a three-quarter contract on a trial basis, pending developments in RDS availability systems and research into alternative fixed contracts.</p> <p>One new recruit commenced training in February and will be available for operational duty in June 2014. A previous employee is returning to duty following re-training later in 2014.</p>
<p>Baschurch will trial the SEED availability application detailed in paragraph 9 above.</p>		

Cleobury Mortimer



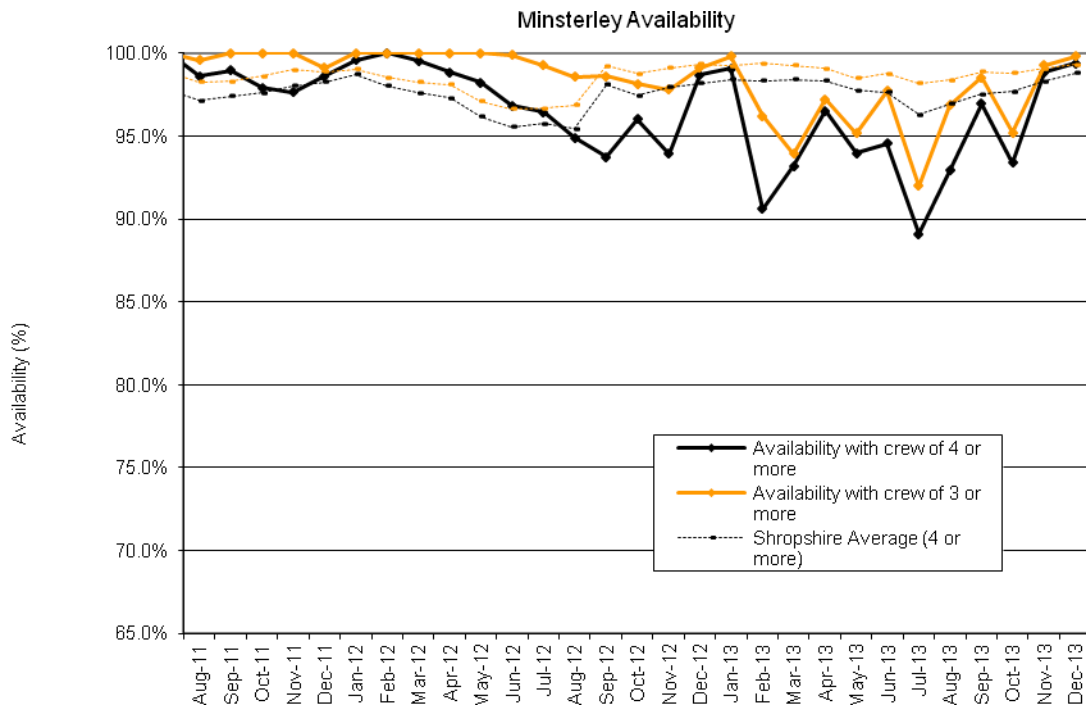
Station Profile	Reason for Availability Issues	Actions Taken
<p>Although 13 units are budgeted for, only 9.5 units are currently on station strength.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge.</p>	<p>Difficult to recruit firefighters in the Cleobury Mortimer area</p>	<p>An ongoing recruitment 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 is due to complete initial training in March 2014.</p>

Ludlow



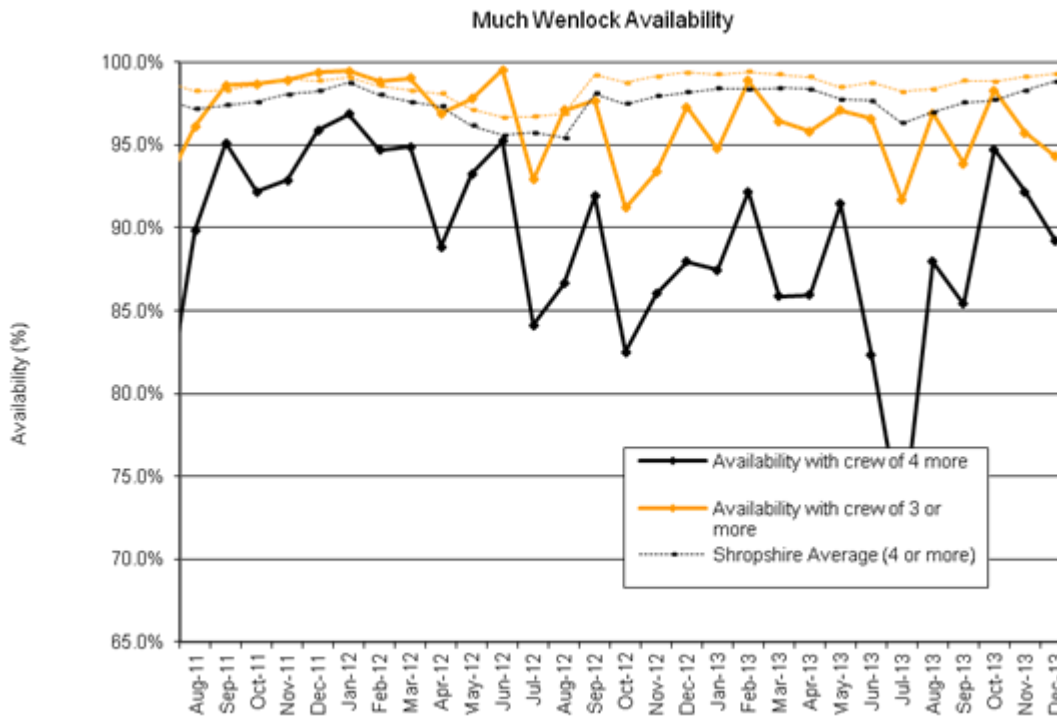
Station Profile	Reason for Availability Issues	Actions Taken
Although 17 units are budgeted for, only 13.75 units are currently on station strength.	A number of staff are employed as wholetime firefighters at Hereford and Worcester, West Midlands and Shropshire and the knock-on effect is linked to station deficiencies at key periods.	Incident Command and driver training has been prioritised in order to ease the situation.
Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge. Ludlow will be removed from the Appendix following the March 2014 committee meeting, as a result of improved performance.		There is an ongoing recruitment campaign, focussed on providing additional daytime cover. One recruit is due to complete training in March and a further recruit commenced training on 10 February 2014. This has the potential for further increasing availability levels by the summer.

Minsterley



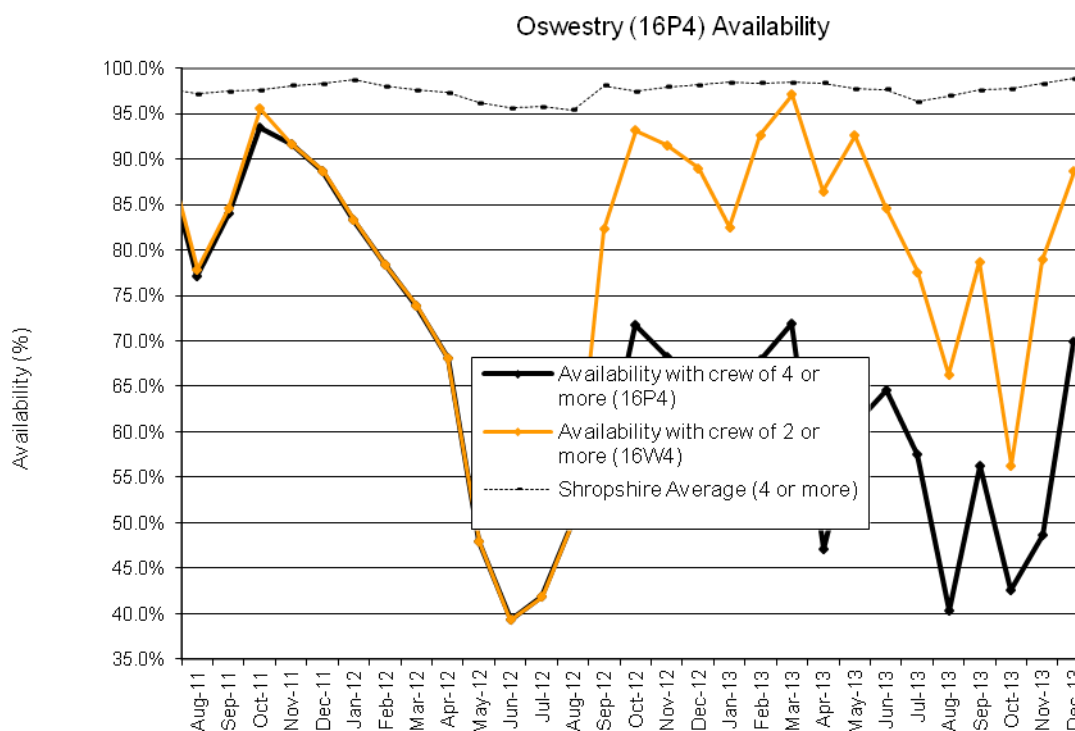
Station Profile	Reason for Availability Issues	Actions Taken
<p>Although 15 units are budgeted for, only 10.25 units are currently on station.</p> <p>Daytime crewing is presenting the greatest challenge</p> <p>Minsterley will be removed from the Appendix following the March 2014 committee meeting, as a result of improved performance.</p>	<p>During 2012 and early 2013 there have been several retirements and resignations.</p> <p>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.</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>One 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 commence training on 10 February 2014.</p>
<p>Much Wenlock must be commended for the cover they provide, given current staffing. They will trial the SEED availability application detailed in paragraph 9 above.</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 14.75 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, because of 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.</p>	<p>One recruit completed training in October 2013 and is now available for operational calls. A further recruit is attending the current course and will be available for operational calls in March 2014.</p>
<p>A number of taster sessions for ladies were held at Oswestry Fire Station on 26 October 2013 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, which will be processed in due course. A similar process is planned for March 2014 at Craven Arms.</p>		

