



Meeting	Service Leadership Team	Agenda Item	4 b
	Performance & resources Board		
Meeting Date	12 January 2021		
	25 January 2021		
Report Author:	Moira Bruin, Director of Operations		
Presented By	Moira Buin, Director of Operations		
Subject	On Call Conversion Project (OCCP) Next Steps		
Type of Report:	Information		

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper outlines an updated agreed approach to move Dovercourt, South Woodham Ferrers, Great Baddow, and Waltham Abbey from day-crewed status to On-Call status by April 2022. This is further to SLT decision paper 4b of 8/12/2020 and a workshop facilitated by the Director of Operations between Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner on 21/12/2020.

The purpose of the workshop was to agree the way forward for the On-Call Conversion Project (OCCP) to include:

- Confirmation of a review of the original objectives and scope of the project
- Confirmation of a review and refresh of the project governance
- A review, discussion, and agreement on the timelines of the project

BACKGROUND

Programme 2020 was a product of the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2016 to 2020. One of the key aspects of this was a move away from Day-crewed stations at Dovercourt, Great Baddow, Great Dunmow, South Woodham Ferrers (SWF) and Waltham Abbey. Great Dunmow was completed in 2017, and Dovercourt transitioned to On-Call in April 2020, albeit still be supported by significant Wholetime resources. For this reason, Dovercourt will be the subject of a transition action plan and is included in this report reference next steps.

OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

The Day-crewing model is established within the Grey book. Nationally, risks to the Service and individuals around working time and tax liability have emerged since the crewing model was established. The Service has attempted to mitigate these risks by adopting a more flexible approach to crewing. However, the Day-crewed stations have largely continued to work a two-watch system. In essence, this means that accepting annual leave etc, staff would be working 50% of the time either on station or On-Call.

There are two factors which provide challenge to current working practices on Day-crewed stations;

- Individual tax implications: HMRC has previously expressed concern to the Service on the provision of houses, advising that they were being viewed as a benefit in kind. Whilst not acting on this at the time, it was indicated to the Service that this would be something that they may look at more closely in the future, which could lead to a significant tax liability put onto the individuals within Service Housing.
- Matzaks ruling on standby duty – this opens up a challenge to employees providing On-Call cover deemed to be in positive hours. One of the key defences to the Service on this matter is flexibility on being able to book off and on when fulfilling the On-Call element of your contract. Largely this facility does not exist within the Day-crewed model.

For these reasons, it remains the intent of the Service to change the status of Day-crewed fire stations to On-Call stations as the risk of maintaining a Day-crewed duty system outweighs potential risk of moving those stations to On-Call.

RISK IMPLICATIONS AND RISK MITIGATION

The current risks to the Service associated with the move from Day-crewed to On-Call status are:

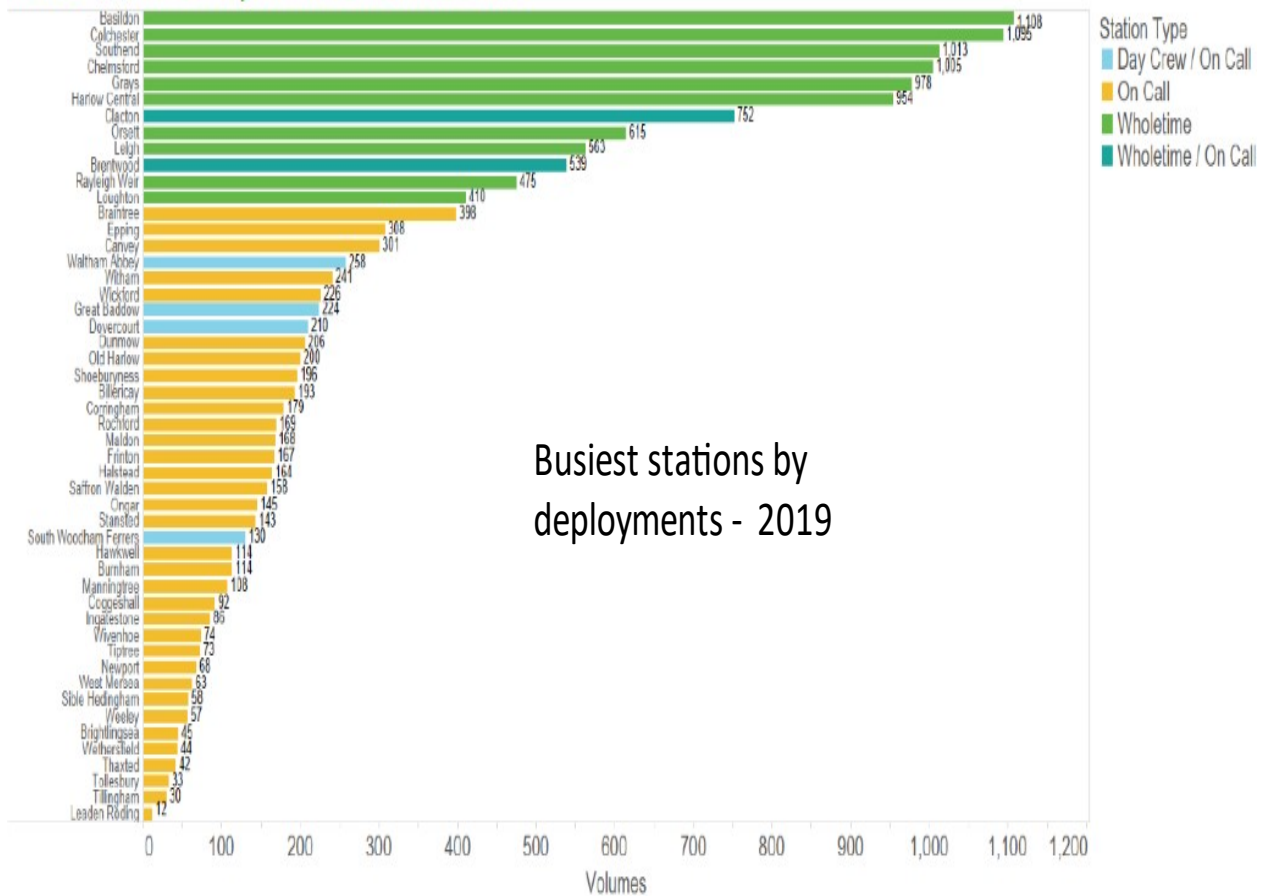
- Increased response times during the day in conversion station areas
- Ability to maintain availability at each of the converting stations when On-Call status is achieved resulting in an impact on response times locally.

We will address this risk by using a risk-based approach to establish and prioritise the availability of a number of Key and joint Key stations across the County, to ensure we can always maintain initial response times.

This will allow us to consider the converting of stations alongside management of availability for the wider area. Whilst doing so, we will work to optimise availability of our converting stations on a case-by-case basis and by using additional resources as required locally to ensure that we maintain operational resilience and the ability to deliver our core responsibilities.

An analysis of activity levels (2019) has been conducted, which demonstrates that the levels of demand for the day-crewed stations do not exceed activity levels for existing On-Call crewed stations. This is illustrated by the chart below.

Incident Volumes by Station Ground - 2019



ACHIEVING OCCP OBJECTIVES

The Service will continue working to achieve the original OCCP Objectives going forward which are stated below for clarity:

Convert Dovercourt, Great Baddow, South Woodham Ferrers and Waltham Abbey Fire Stations to On-call, meaning:

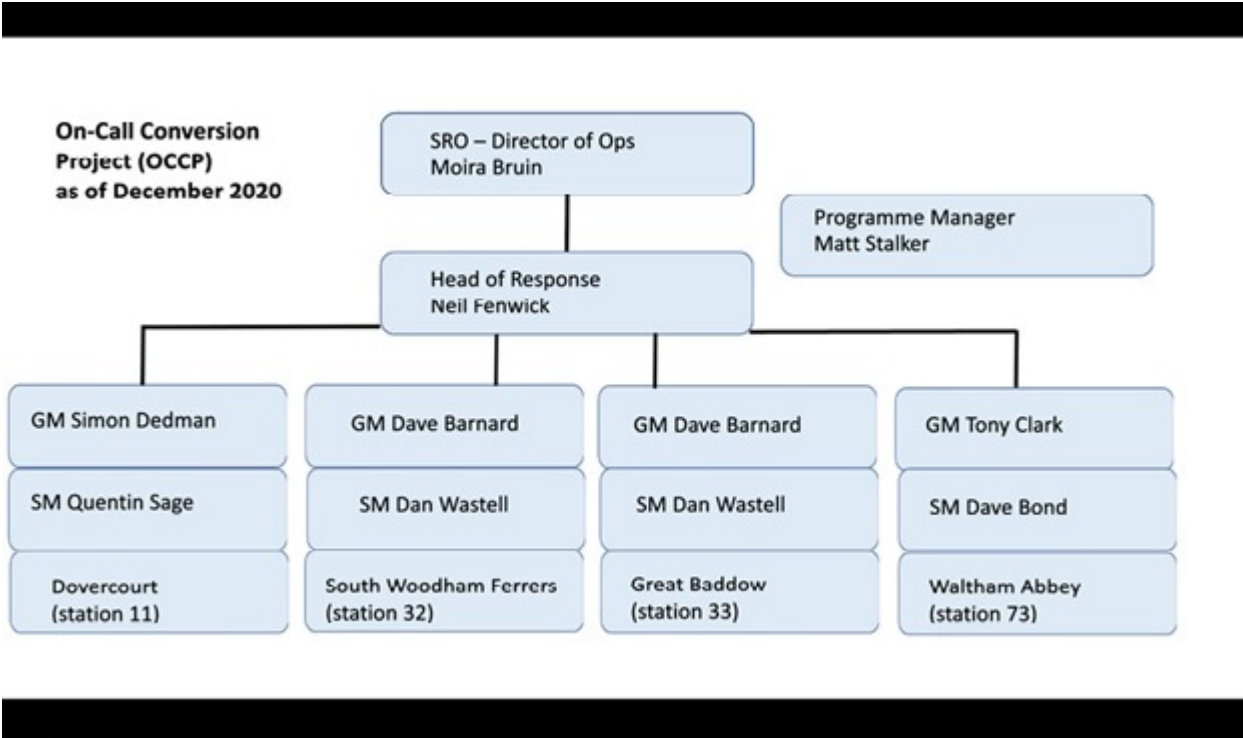
- The Service moves away from the Day-crewed Shift pattern for fire stations
- The Stations will have an appropriate and competent management structure in place
- Number of personnel sufficient to provide adequate availability
- Sufficient drivers and other specialisms (i.e. ICS Competent)
- Have station succession plans in place to ensure long-term sustainability of Stations going forward

The Service has already extended the timeframes for changing the status of stations from Day-crewed to On-Call. Dovercourt converted in April 2020. Lessons have been learned around the reasons for this from the Dovercourt change of status. These will be taken into account when planning for the subsequent changes at Great Baddow, South Woodham Ferrers and Waltham Abbey fire stations and the continued management at Dovercourt.

AGREED NEXT STEPS

To achieve this there will be: -

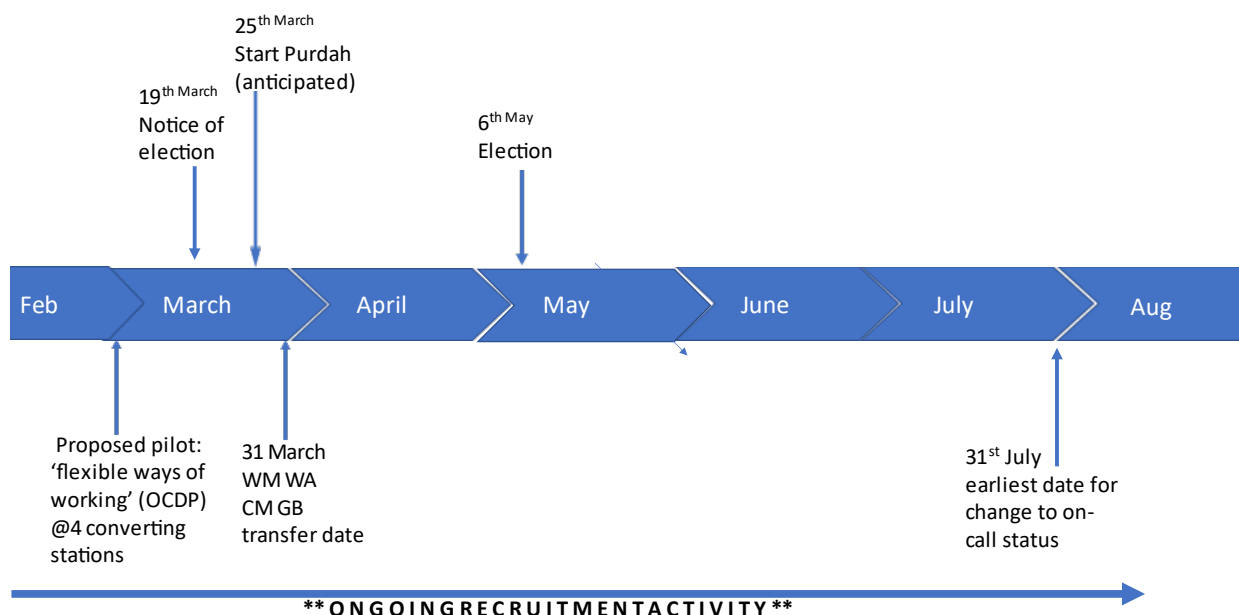
- A refresh of the governance structure of the OCCP to include a change of SRO, a change of Project Manager and a review of the meetings, Board and reporting schedule to ensure the above activities are achieved. The chart below shows responsible officers for on-call conversions.



- Station Plans will be completed for each of the converting station clearly setting out the steps to achieving the conversions. These will use the Dovercourt Action Plan as a template and will be completed by the nominated responsible officer for each station (as per chart above), in conjunction with the Head of Response and the SRO. Clear ownership for all actions under the plans will be clearly allocated and time dated. These plans will be completed, available and be formally reported monthly at the OCCP Board as of January 2021.
- In recognition of the different associated risk levels, local challenges, and success of recruitment campaigns, the plans may differ between the stations.
- In recognition of the time that is required to recruit and develop individuals to OIC/Driver/BA team leader, each plan will identify interim transitional arrangements to support the change to On-Call. Learning from Dovercourt has indicated that the original plans underestimated the time it takes to recruit an individual, develop through phase 1, 2 and 3 – and then develop in Incident Command (to become an OIC), emergency response driving. Along with retention challenges, we estimate the time to develop a full cadre of skills for each station from scratch to be approximately 6 years from start of project.

- 100% availability cannot be guaranteed at any fully on-call station. The transition period of support will use whole-time/additional personnel to maintain availability – in line with our agreed risk appetite with particular attention to the provision of fire cover for the South Woodham Ferrers/Dengie area. This will have budgetary implications.
- For the reasons above, each plan can identify – in terms of interim arrangements - additional resources required to ensure all competencies are available to support availability to the agreed level i.e., the Process will be to cease the day duty system at the stations then introduce a transition period of support from WT before moving fully to the on-call system. Responsible officers will identify the required support at each station and work with ECFRS Chief Finance Officer to identify the cost and budget implications.
- We will support these stations in line with the way we support Whole-time stations – for example through Mixed Crewing, Pre-arranged out-duties and Additional Shift Working to On-Call stations or through temporarily attaching whole-time personnel to On-Call stations. It is expected that these support arrangements will extend past April 2020 and into a transitional period.
- Communications and engagement to existing colleagues on each station will be increased, not decreased in the run up to the change of status.
- We will continue attraction and recruitment activity for all four stations throughout – but this will have been started prior to March 2021.
- As well as the above, support will be provided to ongoing local initiatives considered as good practice and likely to increase recruitment success following the evidence of the difference this made at Dovercourt.
- Sufficient basic On-Call recruitment courses will be provided in 2021 - to respond to the demand at each station so that there is no attrition of potential recruits due to excess waiting to access the training. This can be achieved by the provision of locally hosted training courses at each of the converting stations– following the success of this initiative at Dovercourt. This will be monitored by the OCCP Board (monthly).
- Having in place individual development plans to move Firefighters through to Crew and Watch Managers to ensure a long term ‘succession pipeline’.
- There will be sufficient driving courses allocated in 2021 to ensure that in the long term, there are adequate Fire-fighter drivers. This will be monitored by the OCCP Board (monthly).
- Work will be carried out with Director of People, Values and Culture and Director of Corporate Services, both members of the OCCP Board, to understand and increase if necessary, capacity within our recruitment and training. We will look to ring-fence some of that capacity for the activity around converting stations. If there is insufficient capacity and we cannot find a way to increase, this may impact on conversion timelines (so all three do not draw on same resources at the same time) This will be co-ordinated through the monthly Board.

- Lessons will be learned from the conversion process at Dovercourt and used to inform the activities stated above.
- To complete the move away from the Day-crewed system and realise the benefits, we will need to have converted to On-Call and relocated all current Day-crewed personnel by April 2022. It is likely that some watches/stations may have super-numerary posts. This will allow us to better support the proposals outlined in the action plans to support availability during the transitional period.
- We will not move away from the day-crewed system at any of the three stations before 31st July 2021.
- Property assets associated with the day-crewing system will be disposed of once they become vacant to realise project benefits.
- There is a PFCC election scheduled to take place on 06.05.2021. This places a responsibility on the Service to observe the period of Purdah (start 25.05.2021). This Service will ensure that there are no new consultation processes that run close to or into this period 19.05.2021 (notice of election) until 07.05.2021. All activity ongoing during this period will be ongoing, pre-planned activity. The timeline below illustrates.



CURRENT STATUS OF CONVERTING STATIONS

Dovercourt (2 pumps)

Date of conversion: Converted in April 2020. Now On-Call station with key station status. The required establishment of On Call at Dovercourt is a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 24.

Currently there are 15 On Call Firefighters in phase 1- 3 giving a FTE of 11.25 (15 X .75) Transitional support arrangements are in place. Currently have 2 Whole-time OICs and 3 whole-time drivers seconded.

Waltham Abbey (1 pump)

Date of conversion: Due to convert July 2021. Currently Day-crew status.
The required establishment of On-Call at Waltham Abbey is FTE of 12.
Currently there are 9 On-Call Firefighters in phase 1-3 giving a FTE of 6.75 (9 x .75)

South Woodham Ferrers (1 pump) *

Date of conversion: Due to convert after July 2021. Currently Day-crew status.
The required establishment of On-Call at SWF is a FTE of 11.
Currently there are 7 On Call Firefighters in Phase 1- 3 giving a FTE of 5.75 (5x.75 and 2x1).

* SWF also houses the Red Cross Vehicle (staffed by Red Cross volunteers)

Great Baddow (1 pump):

Date of conversion: Due to convert after July 2021. Currently Day-crew status.
The required establishment of On-Call at Great Baddow is a FTE of 11.
Currently there are 5 On Call Firefighters in Phase 1- 3 giving a FTE of 3.75 (5x.75).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There will be increased budgetary implications in supporting the implementation of individual station plans to support the successful transition from Day-crewed to On-Call status. However, this will be necessary to achieve successful conversion to allow the financial benefits associated with the disposal of Day-crewed housing to be realised as per Project benefits.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no equality and diversity implications associated specifically with this paper, however in line with Service policy, action plans which impact on our people will be people impact assessed.

WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

There has been a considerable amount of engagement with our workforce and our representative bodies around the topic of day-crewed to On-Call conversion.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Case law has demonstrated that there is a legal imperative to move from our current Day crewed systems.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are none specifically associated with this paper.