

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
	POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE	
date	30 March 2007	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

STATION COOKS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To give Members an insight into the complex issues that exist in the provision of catering services/facilities across the organisation; including:
- Station catering facilities;
 - Service Development Centre catering facilities;
 - Headquarters catering facilities; and
 - Emergency Catering facilities
- 1.2 To provide information on the national context and the general direction of travel nationally for the provision of catering facilities on stations to look at some of the options for the future delivery of these services and suggest a way forward.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Historically some form of catering facility has been provided on nearly all fire service premises. This ranges from facilities to make beverages to commercial standard kitchens. Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority strive to achieve value for money in the delivery of service to the community and in expenditure of public monies. Government review and reform of efficiency programmes in the public sector requires opportunities to be explored for cash-releasing efficiency savings throughout the organisation.
- 2.2 The current catering provision supplied by Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) to its staff is non-statutory. The level of catering provision within NFRS is one area identified for possible savings to be made. NFRS operates a total of 28 main locations, 14 of which have commercial standard on-site catering services. The catering provision currently costs NFRS in the region of £210K per annum. The majority of station catering facilities are operated on a station/watch messing basis, i.e. station staff meet only the cost of the food, whilst NFRS subsidise the service in terms of contractor staff costs and catering facilities.

- 2.3 A full catering service is provided at the Service Development Centre (SDC) location because personnel are away from their permanent locations (food and contractor staff costs are all borne by NFRS). Permanently located staff at SDC also receive free meals, in addition to trainee firefighters during their training programme. A full catering facility is also provided at Headquarters; this facility not only provides snacks and meals to HQ staff, but is also responsible for the delivery of corporate catering facilities; including teas, coffees and buffet/business lunches.
- 2.4 The broad aim of the examination of our current catering provision is to identify the best value for money for catering services across all 12 NFRS wholetime stations, Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, Service Development Centre and the provision of emergency catering facilities. The objectives are to identify opportunities for cash-releasing efficiency savings and maintaining a provision that is fair and proportionate to staffing levels.

3. REPORT

Current Provision

Wholetime Stations

- 3.1 Currently the Service provides midday cooks Monday to Friday at all wholetime stations with only one Saturday cook remaining at Central. These facilities are subsidised, with staff that use the catering facilities only covering the cost of their meals, with the Service covering the cost of the provision and maintenance of facilities and station cooks.
- 3.2 To support the cook on stations, the Authority provides an allowance for individuals who wish to take on the responsibility of Mess Manager. This person is required to keep records and accounts for audit by the Finance Section and generally manage the provision of food on the station.
- 3.3 Additional costs are attracted where on-duty personnel are detached to stations other than their normal place of work, currently these personnel are allowed to claim a free meal from the station they are detached to or claim £1.78 as a subsistence allowance. It is not possible to attribute a cost to this allowance at the moment, as detached duty allowances are recorded with several other subsistences. The amount is likely to be in the region of £5k per annum conservatively based on 5 detachments per year, per wholetime firefighter.
- 3.4 As well as these regular costs, there is also a cost involved in the maintenance of station kitchens. This work includes an annual deep clean of all station kitchens, keeping equipment and fittings up to an acceptable standard and continual works to ensure we comply with food hygiene regulations and the workplace health and safety and welfare regulations 1992.

3.5 Table 1, below, is included as an indication of the costs involved in providing station catering facilities;

Table 1

Cost Point	Amount £'s 05/06
1. Station Cooks	91,342
2. Temporary/Agency Cooks	23,430
3. Mess Managers	11,343
4. Spoilt meal claims	8,966
5. Detached duty claims	5,000
6. Maintenance	51,300 (07/08)
Indicative Total	191,381

3.6 There are also several other issues that are likely to impact on any future delivery of catering facilities on stations, these include:

- Currently vacancies are not being filled. Two posts currently being supported by agency staff at additional cost to the organisation.
- Future merger of Dunkirk and Beeston. No kitchen facilities included on the plan for Hassocks Lane.
- Currently staff cook for each other on nights and over the weekend. The Service are currently non-compliant with food hygiene regulations. This would create a training need (food hygiene course for all those that prepare food for others)
- The introduction of the new shift system and the lack of a cook on the 12 hour wakeful night shift could expose the organisation to calls for night cooks to be recruited.
- If catering facilities were not provided to personnel detached into a station from their permanent base this would incur a cost of £1.78 per detached duty.
- Activity levels for some station cooks are at very low levels. In some instances the station cook is preparing meals for one or two station personnel.

Service Development Centre (SDC)

3.7 NFRS has one main training centre located at the Dukeries Centre, Ollerton. The catering and the staff at this location are fully serviced by NFRS and the complete cost of both catering staff and food are subsidised by NFRS. At SDC, free meals are provided in accordance with terms and conditions regarding subsistence for staff away from their permanent base. Staff permanently located at SDC also receive free meals and beverages. Trainee firefighters also avail of free meals whilst permanently located at training centres for the duration of their initial training period.

3.8 Table 2, below, is included as an indication of the costs involved in providing SDC catering facilities;

Table 2

Cost Point	Amount £'s 05/06
1. SDC Cooks	30,122
2. Maintenance	25,000 (08/09)
3. Costs of meal and refreshment provision	21,000 (05/06)
4. Income	25,000-
Indicative Total	51,122

- 3.9 Currently the level of student and trainer days per annum stands at approximately 8,000, which indicates that each meal is provided at a cost of £2.60 to the organisation. If the catering facilities were to be removed, all personnel attending courses at SDC would be entitled to claim £1.78 per day of attendance at SDC.

Service Headquarters

- 3.10 The canteen at NFRS Headquarters in Arnold serves approximately 120 people and operates between 0800hrs and 1500hrs Monday – Friday. The canteen at this location is operated by personnel under contract from Nottinghamshire County Council's Catering Services. This canteen is also used to service meetings, committee meetings, external meetings, events, training events and other supplementary activities. The Control Centre for all emergency calls is located at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters. This working environment is provided with a small kitchen area suitable for the preparation of ready meals, snacks and beverages. Many Control staff use the main canteen for hot meals at lunchtime.
- 3.11 With the completion of the extension works at HQ there is likely to be an increased requirement for catering. With the extended facilities and the capacity to hold more meetings/events at HQ there is also a likelihood that the organisation's expenditure on external venues/catering will drastically reduce.
- 3.12 Table 3, below, is included as an indication of the costs involved in providing HQ catering facilities;

Table 3

Cost Point	Amount £'s 05/06
1. HQ Cooks	55,555
2. Maintenance	5,000 (07/08)
3. Cost of meal and refreshment provision	28,200
4. Income	27,300-
Indicative Total	61,455

Emergency Catering at Fires

- 3.13 At this time the procedures for providing emergency catering at fires are inappropriate and burdensome:
- Requests for hot liquid refreshment are normally considered at 4 pump incidents or at protracted incidents where crews will be detained for periods in excess of 2 hours. Crews from Retford or Beeston are mobilised to the incident to deliver beverages directly to the fireground;

- For incidents that require solid refreshments, a taxi is used to deliver sandwiches supplied from Solway foods in Worksop, to any location in the County. If no sandwiches are available food is to be obtained from a local supermarket/fast food chain;
- A supply of 6 'Hot Cans' (self heating) are provided on each appliance along with tea, coffee and other beverages, however there is no way of supplying hot water on the appliances and this still calls for remote support or utilisation of other available sources.

The National Context

3.14 Of the twenty nine Fire and Rescue Services that responded to a request for information on the provision of cooks:-

- Twelve still employ station cooks;
- Two are intending to remove cooks in 2007/08 budgets; and
- Fifteen have already removed the provision of station cooks

See Appendix A for further detail.

Best Value Review

3.15 It is suggested that the practical way to address the issues around the future provision of catering facilities across the organisation would be to carry out a Best Value Review. Best Value Reviews have a significant role to play in ensuring that services are improved in ways that are consistent with both local and national aspirations. Best Value Reviews should be used to critically evaluate their approach in delivering service improvement and modernisation.

Best Value Reviews can help identify:

- Areas for improvement and address weaknesses, both before and after implementation of CPA;
- Opportunities to make progress towards the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework priorities and objectives.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications are contained within the body of the report. It is worth noting that there may be a considerable financial impact on the Authority, which will be dependant on the Authority's agreed options for the future delivery of catering facilities presented within the Best Value Review.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Currently the Service employs 17 cooks to support the catering arrangements across the service. Any outcomes coming out of the Best Value Review are likely to have an impact on the existing catering staff and the staff across the rest of the organisation.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An initial impact assessment indicates that the commissioning of a Best Value Review into organisational catering is the best way to deal with the equality issues around the provision of cooks. The organisation and staff will benefit by taking part in a clear and transparent assessment of existing provision and the options for the future delivery of catering across the organisation.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are numerous risks to the organisation if the issue of organisational catering facilities is not addressed. We are currently non-compliant with food hygiene regulations and there is also an issue around the possible need to recruit night cooks to avoid accusations of inequalities, because of the new shift system.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members approve the commissioning of a 'Best Value Review' into the provision of catering facilities across the organisation and the existing provision of emergency catering facilities. The Best Value Review project manager is tasked to report back to the Policy and Strategy Committee by Autumn 2007, with options for the future delivery of catering facilities for the Authority's consideration.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

None.

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Appendix A

Service	Cooks Removed	Date Removed	Cooks Remain	Comments
Bedfordshire & Luton			Yes	
Berkshire			Yes	Cooks removed 2000, reinstated 2002 & are in process of seeking removal again
Cambridgeshire			Yes	
Cheshire	Almost	2006		In process of issuing redundancies now
Cornwall	Yes	Many years ago		Made redundant more than 10 years ago
Cumbria	Yes	Mar-97		Cooks lost following county council cutbacks and low volume of meals provided (some watches only cooking for 2/3 people)
Devon	Yes			
Dorset	Yes	Many years ago		Do not have cooks on stations and have not done so for many years
Dumfries & Galloway			Yes	
Durham & Darlington	Yes	Jun-06		
Essex			Yes	
Gloucestershire				Employ 1 cook and there are no plans to remove this facility in the near future.
Grampian			Yes	Restricted Ffs from undertaking mess duties only & met with huge resistance, so haven't yet pursued removing station cooks
Hampshire	Yes	2003		Decision taken following a best value review of catering - issue still raised on stations now
Hereford & Worcester			Yes	
Humberside			Yes	
Lincolnshire	Yes	Last went in 1999		
Norfolk	Yes	Late 1990s		
North Yorkshire	Yes	1996		Disestablished 10 years ago as part of raft of efficiency savings - up to that point were employed on basis of 1/WT shift and day crewed workplace
Northumberland	Yes			
Somerset	Yes	2003		
South Wales			Yes	Just looking at the issue of cooks on stations with an intention to implement changes in time for 2007/08 budget
Staffordshire	Yes	2005/2006		

Service	Cooks Removed	Date Removed	Cooks Remain	Comments
Suffolk	Yes			Suffolk are likely to TUPE cooks under our PFI, but it is not a preamble to removing them; we are still providing cooks and messing facilities on stations and have no other plan to remove them.
Surrey	Yes	2006		
Tyne & Wear			Yes	Night shift cooks were removed some time ago and day shift cooks, Mon-Fri, were retained
Warwickshire	Yes	Many years ago		Facility of station cooks withdrawn many years ago, however stations still have cooking facilities available to station personnel
West Midlands			Yes	
Wiltshire			Yes	