



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Policy & Strategy Committee

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CATERING

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 1 February 2008

Purpose of Report:

To present to the Policy and Strategy Committee management's response to the outcomes of the Best Value Review of catering within Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Members of the Policy and Strategy Committee will recall that in March 2007 a proposal was put forward to undertake a Best Value Review of catering within Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. The review was commissioned as a result of the need to examine all possible efficiency savings within the organisation and to demonstrate value for money.
- 1.2 All areas of catering provision within the organisation were included. This covered station based catering, Service Development Centre (SDC), Headquarters and emergency catering at incidents. The review was completed in December 2007 and is attached at Appendix A.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The Best Value Review looked at principles of challenge and compete, compare, consult and continuous improvement, and applied these to the current arrangements for catering within Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. A review team was convened consisting of:

- Management;
- 3 Trade Unions (Fire Officers' Association, Fire Brigades Union, Unison);
- Finance;
- Fire & Rescue Authority;
- Occupational Health;
- Human Resources;
- Corporate Services.

This team examined all of the current arrangements, using the principles outlined, between October and December 2007.

- 2.2 The review team was able to look at the current and future implications for both staff and the Service. As well as undertaking benchmarking within other Fire and Rescue Services, an electronic staff survey was undertaken, which generated in excess of 400 responses.
- 2.3 Rather than making firm recommendations, the review identifies a number of issues and presents a number of options for consideration. Management have looked carefully at the options and have concluded that the following response is appropriate.

2.4 **General**

The report highlights a lack of flexibility in the current provision and whilst many staff will provide catering for meetings and community events, this is not part of the formal provision. There are also some issues with catering arrangements for visiting retained crews and other visitors. It is proposed that contract arrangements are reviewed with a view to increasing this flexibility and employees will be consulted as to how this might be achieved.

2.5 Service Development Centre

The report considered the provision of catering for both staff and students at the Service Development Centre and concludes that the Service should continue to provide meals free of charge to students attending courses. This is cost effective as it saves both the time required to purchase meals and the cost of subsistence allowances which would otherwise be payable to students. In terms of provision for staff however, the review recommends that all staff whether uniformed or non-uniformed should be required to pay for meals. At present only uniformed staff are provided with free meals and this is considered divisive.

The present catering staff will therefore be retained as part of a more Service- wide catering provision.

2.6 Headquarters

Catering at Headquarters is currently outsourced to Nottinghamshire County Catering, who charge both a management fee and all costs of food and supplies. The Service then retains all monies collected in the restaurant. A number of alternative options were considered for the provision of catering at Headquarters, ranging from a discontinuation of the service to sandwich vending machines and a full outsourcing model. Given the continued use of the service by Commercial Training, expected increases in volumes from the enhanced facilities at Headquarters and regular usage of the facility, it is considered that it should be retained in its current form. However, it is considered that the current level of subsidy is excessive and therefore prices are to be reviewed to significantly reduce this subsidy.

2.8 Retained

In respect of retained duty personnel, the only recommendation is that management ensure that adequate facilities are available for self catering as at present, and that arrangements are put in place for emergency catering and catering at wholetime stations as appropriate.

2.9 Wholetime

In respect of wholetime stations the review considered a number of options. The ability of crews to leave the station during work time to purchase food is limited and therefore there is clearly some justification for catering to be provided, albeit in some cases to rather small numbers of staff. However, management consider that providing catering on a six day per week basis is not justified and therefore propose to discontinue the employment of cooks on Saturdays. This will be achieved by a combination of natural wastage and offering redeployment where there are existing vacancies for cooks. There is no proposal for redundancies.

It is noted however, that providing some central guidance and management of cooks throughout the Service may be desirable, as would moving towards

a more flexible approach where a broader range of facilities are available (see Paragraph 2.4).

2.10 Hassocks Lane

In accordance with the policy on wholetime stations, a Monday to Friday service will be provided at Hassocks Lane.

2.11 Catering – Emergency Response

Some shortfalls in emergency catering were noted by the review and it is clear that some “incremental” levels of emergency provision are needed. There are already plans to issue procurement cards to deal with the immediate issues around emergency provision, and identified problems with hot cans are under review with the suppliers.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the Best Value Review into catering are contained within Appendix A, the report from the review. Any of the actions taken from the management response to the options presented will result in efficiencies for the Service. These will be reported to the Finance and Resources Committee through the current efficiency statement process.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Existing employees involved in the catering review were notified of the review and its implications. Appropriate staff will now be written to explaining the outcomes on the impact on them as individuals.
- 4.2 The Service will review its current establishment and ensure appropriate recruitment to existing vacancies.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 An initial impact assessment is attached to this report at Appendix B.
- 5.2 The Best Value Review established some key issues regarding equality and provision of catering services. These will be addressed as part of the management response.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service needs to test its efficiency and effectiveness against a range of its services and operations. The Best Value Review process is a key way of addressing this and ensures the Service continues to deliver value for money.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That Policy and Strategy Committee accept the Best Value Review into Catering.
- 8.2 That Policy and Strategy Committee accept and endorse the proposed actions of management in response to the options presented within the Best Value Review.
- 8.3 That Policy and Strategy Committee task management with consulting the representative bodies with a view to implementing the actions set out in this report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

- Best Value Review Catering Report – Appendices (December 2007) – copies will be available at Policy and Strategy Committee;
- Policy and Strategy Committee Report – 30 March 2007 – Station Cooks.

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NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Best Value Review of Catering Report

December 2007

**Best Value Review of Catering Report
18 December 2007**

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1. Purpose of this Report

This review examines the issue of Catering arrangements, the employment of Cooks and the provision of hot and cold food, at Headquarters, Service Development Centre (SDC), full-time Stations and other Service establishments. It also considers the issue of Emergency Catering.

2. The Principles of Best Value

2.1 Challenge and Compete

The Review Team has examined the current situation of Catering within the Service and has challenged that provision in terms of:

Whether there is a requirement to provide the current services

What options there are for alternative provision, if we decided to continue to provide meals on our sites

The economic considerations

This gave rise to discussion of a wide range of alternatives which were combined into the options that were tested using a Political, Economic, Social, Technical, Environmental and Legal based framework. The framework and analysis of the options is given as Appendix VII: Options Appraisal.

Challenge was ensured through the composition of the Review Team, which consisted of a range of interests and backgrounds, see Appendix I.

2.2 Compare

The solutions to the issue of Catering in other organisations were also looked at and is noted at various stages throughout the report. The provision of Cooks on Stations in other Fire and Rescue Services was also noted and is given in Appendix IV. Also in the report there are references to a Cook staffing formulae which has been widely used within the public sector.

2.3 Consult

As part of the Review the opinions of staff were sought using a staff survey on the intranet. All members of staff were emailed and direct links were placed on everyone's computer 'desktop screen' to ensure easy access. The survey was also highlighted in 2 issues of 'Service Bulletin' which is emailed to staff every Monday. This was an innovative approach which resulted in some technical teething problems and resulted in some null returns. However, we received some 408 completed responses. Details of results are given in Appendix V.

2.4 Continuous Improvement and Control

The current pattern of catering provision has arisen historically and this is the first opportunity that has been taken to review the provision as a single entity. The report

highlights that there is no rigorous management or control of the catering situation, in some cases poor record keeping, a mixed record in quality of the food and of the Agency staff provided, also a mixed local response to the annual Food Hygiene Inspection reports. There is no expert catering knowledge within or shared across the organisation. The report considers these issues.

3. Background

In November 2006 station based kitchen staff were informed that the Service had proposed to dispense with manned catering facilities on Stations and a final decision would be made before the end of that year. Following further consultation, staff were informed in December that the Policy and Strategy Committee would decide whether to abandon or continue with the proposals. The conclusion of the Committee was to convene a Best Value Review into Catering at Stations, SDC, Headquarters and on the incident ground to report by the end of 2007. The present document is that report.

On 3 October 2007 staff were informed of the creation of the present Review Group and of its core membership. The group held its first meeting on 19 October. The composition of the group is given at Appendix I.

During August 2007 the Service was the subject of an annual Food Hygiene Standards Report, by our retained consultant Mr John Gee. This 64 page report detailed issues concerning food Hygiene and related matters in our kitchens. It highlighted variable standards of training, cleanliness and food hygiene, also confusion regarding responsibilities. It should be noted that the inspector did not have access to all areas within the kitchens due to locked storage areas.

The report highlighted between 16 and 32 actions required per kitchen (average 23). Some of these are arguably minor such as minor damage or cleaning required to kitchen but others are more obviously consequential such as:

- Dry foods stored on floors
- Dirty food temperature probes
- Raw meats and eggs stored above ready to eat foods in refrigerator
- Eggs stored on window sill
- No cleaning schedule in place
- Tea towels and cloths not changed daily
- Food hygiene training expired
- Out of date food stock (May 2007/Jan 2007/ August 2006/June 2006 in some cases)
- No dates on frozen foods
- Pan of food being cooled in Refrigerator
- Equipment not cleaned after use
- Open packets/cans of foods stored
- Much minor cleaning, maintenance and equipment replacement required.

Of additional concern is that some issues were outstanding from previous years. **The summary of the report is given as Appendix II, as are the recommendations. These need to be addressed.**

4. The Current Situation

Generally staff are happy with their cooks, the food and the service provided, however from the staff side there are some concerns, many of which focus on the

variability and often unsatisfactory nature of the agency cooks. There are some specific individual issues that will be discussed elsewhere.

4.1 Headquarters

Headquarters has an establishment of some 110 plus visitors. From February 2007 the extension will become operational. This primarily consists of facilities which were specifically designed to bring Commercial Training Events, currently externally held meetings and other activities into Bestwood Lodge. This will temporarily increase the population at Bestwood Lodge during the working week, thus increasing the potential customer base for any catering facility.

The current kitchen facilities are funded and maintained by the Fire Authority. However, the staff and Catering Services are contracted out to the County Council at a cost of £61,703 in 2006/07. This includes some £4,300 management fee, £23,800 food cost and £31,000 staff costs, but excludes additional catering such as buffets and dinners for which only food and labour costs are charged. A staff survey was undertaken by the contractors in 2006 which indicated that 57 from 73 respondents wanted healthier options, including 27 wanting salads.

Detailed records (other than for income and hospitality) are not kept. However, it is understood that:

The HQ kitchen provides some:

- 48 sandwiches per day
- 30 hot dinners and puddings per day
- 10 salads per day
- sundry coffees and biscuits for meetings and stock maintenance of the vending machine, also hot bacon/sausage cobs and rolls and a trolley service and an average of 10 buffet covers per week

The kitchen generated an income of £10,656 in 2006/2007.

- Staffing is 74 hours per week
- Subsidy in 2006/2007 was £51,310¹
- Of 110 HQ staff responding to the staff survey 36% thought that meals were subsidised by 20% or less. 73% believed that meals were subsidised by 50% or less.

4.2 SDC

SDC has a staffing of 32 plus a variable number of trainees attending per day, averaging some 16 per day. The whole cost of Catering is met by the Authority including the employment of one permanent and a sessional cook. Uniformed staff based at SDC receive their meals free of charge as do course participants. Non Uniformed Staff based at SDC have to pay for their meals.

Between April 2006 and April 2007 the Cooks at SDC produced an average of some 29 meals per day. These were split between meals for;

- SDC uniformed staff (30%) – funded by the Fire Authority

¹ In all cases the subsidy figure is a revenue based figure and does not include premises overheads or capital costs.

- Course attendees (43%) - funded by the Fire Authority
- Fire-fighter trainees (22%) - funded by the Fire Authority

The remainder being visitors from within and without the Service and SDC non-uniformed staff.

- SDC cooks do not prepare food for off site activities but prepare sandwiches for evening courses.
- Food and kitchen staff costs at SDC amounted to £57,520 in 2006/2007. The kitchen generated a cash income of £1,400.
- Staffing is a basic 29 hours per week, plus temporary staff when required, this amounted to, for example between 15 and 76 additional hours per month in the last 5 months.
- Overall subsidy was £ 56,120 in 2006/2007.

4.3 Clifton, Edwinstowe, and Retained Stations

At Clifton (20 staff) and Edwinstowe (8 staff + retained) , only a basic food preparation surface, storage, hand and pot washing, microwave also hot water facilities are provided. Meals are not provided. Staff either bring in their own food on an individual basis or 'eat out'.

Retained stations have the same basic facilities as Clifton and Edwinstowe.

4.4 Whole-Time Stations

The situation on wholetime stations varies in terms of the kitchen staff (Cook) hours and the numbers having meals. See Appendix III

Retford employs a cook for 4 hours per day Monday to Friday lunchtimes (20 hours per week). Arnold, Ashfield, Beeston, Carlton, Dunkirk, Mansfield, Stockhill, West Bridgford, Worksop, Newark - as Retford plus Saturday (24 hours per week).

Central Fire Station has a cook establishment of 29 hours per week (including Saturday) for the Crews although other staff based at Central are welcome to book meals. There are small kitchenettes available on the 2nd & 3rd floors for non operational staff. The number of staff based at Central during the week is 35; the number of meals served per day is reportedly 3.

Some cooks also make cakes and meals to store for the night and Saturday/Sunday Watches. Some cook for visitors, others apparently do not. Some cooks carry out messing duties others do not.

Cover through absence and holidays is provided by agency staffing which varies from excellent to very poor and limited. Cooks at Carlton/ Arnold also Dunkirk/Beeston co-operate and have informal reciprocal support arrangements. Others are totally stand alone.

Watch or Station Messing is practiced, where the crews purchase the food which is prepared by the Cooks for the benefits of members of the messing club. The Authority covers all non food costs including staff, agency and premises costs. All

full time stations have commercial kitchens. However Watch messing normally results in each Watch having separate, locked refrigerators and storage facilities.

Overall Subsidy - **£161,905** (includes Cooks pay, Mess Managers allowances and other revenue costs – excludes refurbishment and capital costs)

or

£148,600 (Cooks pay and salary oncosts only)

Of 244 staff based on stations who responded to the staff survey, 82% thought that meals on stations were subsidised by 20% or less.

4.5 Emergency Catering

Different circumstances will call for a different catering provision.

Currently, there are, reportedly, issues surrounding the reliability of the Hot Cans currently in use and the availability of suitable alternatives.

One problem is that many of the Hot Cans reportedly do not work. However, only a few faulty cans are returned to Stores, some are thrown away by crews and with others the contents are eaten cold. Relevant Members of the Review Team intend to carry out a test of Hot Cans in conjunction with the Manufacturers

We have agreements in place to obtain pre-packed sandwiches from some supermarkets and a sandwich supplier.

We have full catering facilities on many of our premises throughout the County and hot water/microwave facilities at the rest.

There are a limited number of credit cards in the Service that can be used to purchase food.

The new Scania appliances have built into them the ability to provide hot drinking water. Rollout of the new vehicles means that all full-time crewed appliances will have this facility by early 2009 and all retained appliances by, circa, 2012.

However, we often have to rely on the goodwill of local food outlets who either provide food on trust, free of charge or enable payment by invoice.

For New Dimensions, category 4 (major national/regional) incidents; holding areas are created in car parks of Motorway Service Stations. This has the added benefit that such locations usually have at least one 24 hour, 7 day per week catering outlet also often hotel facilities that can also be utilised by visiting crews and others.

Any proposals with respect to Emergency catering should bear cognisance of the deliberations of the Local and Regional Resilience Forums to ensure compatibility and alignment.

5. Legal, Quasi-Legal and Good Practice issues

The Health and Safety at Work Act only requires that:

'an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water shall be provided for all persons at work in the workplace'

'suitable and sufficient rest facilities shall be provided'

'suitable and sufficient facilities shall be provided for persons at work to eat meals where meals are regularly eaten in the workplace'

'where workers regularly eat meals at work suitable and sufficient facilities should be provided for the purpose'

'Seats in work areas can be counted as eating facilities provided they are in a sufficiently clean place and there is suitable surface on which to place food. Eating facilities should include a facility for preparing or obtaining a hot drink, such as an electric kettle, vending machine or a canteen. Workers who work during hours or at places where hot food cannot be obtained in, or reasonably near to, the workplace should be provided with means of heating their own food'

'cleanliness' and 'good hygiene standards should be maintained'

'responsibility for cleaning should be clearly allocated'

Food Hygiene Regulations are vague. In discussions with Gedling Borough Council they recommended that:

All Cooks/anyone in charge of food preparation at any given location should be trained in Food Safety, including agency cooks. They do not need to have certification but should be able to prove that they have successfully been through an equivalent course or process. Refresher training every 3 years is recommended.

Other people handling foods should also have a proven awareness of food hygiene, such as having worked through and signed the booklet within the FSA 'Safer Food, Better Business' pack. Again with a proven refresher every 3 years.²

It is not necessary for people to attend a college course on an individual basis, bringing in qualified trainers to train staff on a group basis is appropriate.

Discussions within the Best Value Group have highlighted that different District Councils interpret and apply the legislation with varying levels of 'rigour'.

The Authority needs to ensure that we apply 'best practice' across the Service and it is proposed that as HQ is based in Gedling, the approach and advice of Gedling Borough Council be adopted as this bench mark.

It is also proposed that the overall responsibility for Cooks be vested in one person to ensure the adoption of suitable practice and staffing, whatever the outcomes of this review

² Arnold Fire Station have already obtained advice and a requested visit from Gedling's Environmental Health Officers and are using the FSA 'Safer Food, Better Business' pack

Conditions of Service and local agreements for non-uniformed staff do not require the service to provide meals/food for staff.

Conditions of Service and local agreements for uniformed staff encompass various elements and costs such as mess managers allowances, spoilt meals, detachment, training, SDC staff. These may need to be visited, dependant upon the outcome of deliberations concerning this report. In addition it must be remembered that although operational crews have rest periods, they are unable to 'sign out' to obtain or consume food away from their place of work.

Nutritional requirements: The review team has considered the nutritional and healthy eating opportunity that any changes could bring.

Whilst there is undoubtedly a moral obligation on any organisation which provides food to ensure that it does no harm. NFRS has the added responsibility of supplying adequate energy intake to workers in safety critical operations. No legislation or guidance requiring Hot Meals was found.

The Occupational Health and Fitness Team have been part of the review team and should be used as a resource in the design and implementation of any recommendations.

Good practice around dietary intake can be found in the Appendices.

6. Resilience, Equality, Economy and Effectiveness

6.1 Staff Welfare and Effectiveness:

The provision of cooked food on our premises is a service that staff have become accustomed to over the years and value, particularly on Stations. Several spontaneous representations were made during the review on both a personal basis on behalf of the cooks also with arguments about the positive impact that the provision of hot midday meals (of fire-fighter proportions) had on the attitudes and effectiveness of crews. It became clear that there is an issue with the often poor quality of agency staff.

It has been suggested that we discuss with the County and City Councils, possibly PCTs to negotiate access to their temporary registers of kitchen staff. This would at least ensure that we can access staff with suitable catering training and Hygiene qualifications.

The issue of lack of Cook cover at night was discussed. However, it was concluded that there was no demand for full cooked meals, hence no cook at night. However, why provide cooks midday for 5 or 6 days per week and not Sundays? We are sure that the provision of midday cooks on stations, 7 days per week would be appreciated by crews.

On Stations the Authority has no control over, or policy concerning, the food prepared or consumed using staff cooks and resources. Thus there is no guarantee that appropriate food is prepared in terms of the right nutritional and energy requirements for the job. The parameters are the preparation of whatever the individual watches purchase and/or request. This is a situation of desire not require, wants not needs. It is considered that if the Fire Authority continues to significantly subsidise meals then it should assure that the right types of food are served to enable optimum performance by staff and that this should be a requirement of the

subsidy, whatever the location. However, will staff wish to contribute financially to such food if it was different from the current provision? It is thought not, especially on stations? (Firefighters currently purchase the food prepared on stations). Free and subsidised meals at SDC should certainly follow this principle as should menus at HQ.

The review group considers that the outcomes of review should take into account healthy eating issues, there is an equality issue to be considered with the drive to recruit and maintain a more representative workforce. Whether it is a desire/requirement for vegetarian, salad or potentially for specially prepared meals (on health or religious grounds) then the Authority must be prepared to meet such requirements/options wherever it provides meals in any of our establishments.

In addition there can be a parochial view of the facilities on station including who individual cooks work and prepare meals for. The Review Group heard anecdotal evidence, from within and from visitors to the Service, of retained crews on detachment being denied access to station catering facilities. Also of visiting Officers being refused requests (made several days prior) for meals for visitors attending meetings - because the cook was already fully employed.

It is considered that if Cooks remain across the service then their utilisation, flexibility, responsibility also their (local and corporate) management³ needs to be reviewed, whatever the location of their employment. Their role should include provision of services for visitors (including visiting Retained crews) and community meetings (for example) at their primary location as well as for all staff – not be determined by themselves or a particular interest group. Cooks could also be required to work at any Service location.

There were very strong feelings in the group that there should be an equality in the treatment of staff concerning whether they paid for their meals or not.

Management and Members should consider equality between different categories of staff within the Service, this is brought into sharp relief by the example of SDC where uniformed staff (based at SDC) receive free meals and non uniformed staff do not. Also of concern were the reported cases of Retained staff being denied the facilities (catering and other facilities) of whole-time stations when providing cover from those locations.

6.2 Economy and Effectiveness of Resource Use

At none of the locations under discussion is there a logical, management controlled, basis for determining the number of hours staffing. Indeed with the low number of meals being prepared it would be impossible to have a cost efficient cook provision as no matter how many meals are being prepared enough time has to be allowed for the food to cook and enough hours have to be offered to make it worth a person's while to turn up for work. Thus unless other productive work is undertaken in addition to cooking the meal concerned (in some locations cakes and meals for weekend and night shifts are produced) then we are 'over staffing' and will have to accept this as an ongoing additional cost and built in inefficiency.

³ District Administrators have been given local responsibility for Cooks, if this is to continue then this 'managerial' position and its scope needs to be strengthened and reinforced on all sides. However, there needs to be a central control and appropriate professional support and direction.

Meals prepared in 4 hour shift	Basic salary cost ⁴ to Authority of each meal	
	Employed Cooks ⁵	Agency ⁶
4	£6.19 - £7.38	£9.20 - £15.28
6	£4.13 - £4.92	£6.13 - £10.17
8	£3.09 - £3.69	£4.60- £7.67
10	£2.48 -£2.95	£3.68 - £6.11

Employers National Insurance contribution and pension cost, alone add some 20% to this figure, cost of cleaning kitchens, purchasing and maintaining equipment etc is **not** included in the above figures.

Many public sector organisations have historically used formulae to determine kitchen staffing hours. Indeed a 1950's staffing formula is still commonly in use. This is a good starting point for determining the capacity of kitchen staff as it is based on the use of basic raw materials and equipment to prepare meals e.g making pastry from raw ingredients, mincing meat, hand peeling vegetables etc. It also includes hand washing of daily utensils and equipment and allowances for weekly cleans. The bottom end of the formula currently used by Nottingham City and North Lincolnshire Councils, for example, shows 30 hours staffing per 5 day week having the capacity to produce some 25 meals per day. Which would suggest the station based 20 hour week has a capacity of some 16 meals per day⁷? The kitchens on all full-time stations have a physical capacity well in excess of this.

This issue was recognised in discussions with the County Council who suggested that we combine the Cook and Cleaner role to ensure that staff are fully and gainfully employed. This option did not find favour with the Review Team

6.3 Resilience

There are three issues to consider under resilience:

Health and Hygiene - as discussed above the Annual Food Hygiene Inspection report highlighted a number of recurring issues, which have apparently worsened since the removal of Station Managers from station based roles.

Resilience on stations to cover for cook absence and illness – the variable and often unsatisfactory quality of Agency provision has also been highlighted above.

Resilience in terms of major incident and need for HQ and in the short term Control, to 'fall back' or other high demand conditions.

It has been suggested that, at a minimum, the 3 Service locations with the highest potential daily volumes i.e. HQ, SDC and Hassocks Lane maintain active kitchen capacity and flexible staffing to enable them to support HQ and crews in the face of prolonged major incidents.

⁴ Salary only excludes salary oncost and other overheads

⁵ Bottom of salary scale is £6.19, the top is £7.38 per hour excluding any salary oncost

⁶ Agency costs vary between £9.20 and £15.80 per hour

⁷ As an indication only, for a 5 day week: 20hrs Station staffing divided by 30 hours formula times 25 meals = capacity of 16+ meals per day

6.4 Other

The outcomes of the **self-rostering** trials is obviously not yet known. The resultant impact on the need and demand for full midday meals cannot therefore be determined. Furthermore in some other Services the timing of meals has been abused, with staff having Fire Authority subsidised meals, in work time, at the start and end of shifts.

7. Management Issues

If **any** catering is to remain within the Service, proper management of the Catering function needs to be introduced to ensure

Appropriate menus

Appropriate and controlled determination of cook hours according to workload

Full compliance with best practice with respect to Health and Safety, Food Hygiene and cleanliness

Appropriate arrangements are made in the absence of staff and proper provision of agency staff, if required

To ensure that catering throughout the Service is seen and operates as a Service facility and cooks can be required to provide appropriate meals for all staff, visitors and events (including local, regional or national emergency), not just one particular group.

Flexibility of cooks contracts to enable them to be brought in to provide cover, prepare additional meals for other stations and staff, to enable them to be brought in in response to major operational needs – perhaps at their own location or elsewhere.

Maintain Catering under constant review.

Ensure proper control of costs and to bring to the attention of management and the Authority the ongoing cost of the provision and opportunities that may impact on the cost balance, such as the need for major refurbishment.

8. What happens elsewhere?

The picture is varied.

The survey results within the March 2007 Committee Report, highlighting which Fire and Rescue Services maintain cooks on stations, has been extended and is given in Appendix IV. This shows that of the 32 Services who responded 18 have removed Cooks from Fire Stations 14 Services still have Station Cooks – although it is not known how many have reviewed the situation and actively decided to retain station cooks. Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire are the only East Midlands Fire and Rescue Services that maintain cooks on Fire Stations. Where cooks are not provided on station some crews sort out collective, voluntary, messing arrangements, others bring in food individually.

Throughout the County and Country, the provision of hot meals to staff within the Public Sector varies, where there are large numbers of staff, and especially where there is a potential public, paying customer base – e.g. hospitals, a canteen/restaurant facility is usually provided.

However, as examples:

- i. Nottinghamshire Police have removed catering facilities from their divisional locations but continue to provide a restaurant at HQ. Police Officers are expected to either bring in their own food to work or to use facilities in the community (the latter is not an option for operational staff within the Fire Service as although crews have a rest period they need to remain on station or with their appliance).
- ii. Gedling Borough Council have some 500 staff on their Arnot Hill site. They do not provide hot meals but enable an external business to provide a trolley service. They also successfully use external contactors for functions and events.
- iii. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service employ no Cooks at all. All Stations have a kitchen with a standard domestic cooker, 4 fridges (one per watch), wall mounted hot water boiler and sink. Employees bring in their own food, usually sandwiches but sometimes food to heat up, and employees do not cook for each other.

Catering provision at Lincolnshire Headquarters and their Training School is outsourced to 3 or 4 contractors to provide buffet meals for HQ meetings and for trainees. Buffets are mainly cold but sometimes include hot food in the winter.

These arrangements have been in place in Lincolnshire for some 3 years and, although employees raised concerns about cold food and portion sizes at the outset, the arrangements are now embedded and are satisfactory. The Service is now happy with the quality of the buffets and the portion sizes although it did take a while to source suitable contractors.

9. Staff Survey

An electronic survey was designed to elicit the views of staff. A link was emailed to all staff email⁸ addresses which enabled the survey to be completed, submitted and subsequently analysed on line. This is a new, previously untested and innovative approach which has faced some teething problems. However, these do not detract from the themes of the results. The survey was open from Monday 3 December for 10 days. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix V and an extended summary as Appendix VI.

10. Options

The Review Team developed a long list of options and a framework against which each could be considered. The list of options that reached this full consideration stage is:

Stations Status Quo

⁸ Although some 120 staff do not have email addresses, the survey was designed to obtain views to inform the Review Team, SMT and the Authority not as a vote to directly determine the outcome.

Cooks midday 7 days per week
Cooks Midday alternate days (include prepare & chill food for next day)
No Cooks – staff bring in own food
No Cooks alternate provision

HQ

Status Quo
Terminate Contract, bring Service in house/another provider
No hot food provision, cold food only options e.g Vending or trolley only service
No provision staff to make own arrangements/External provision for meetings

SDC

Status Quo
No hot food provision, cold food only options e.g Vending or trolley only service
No provision staff to make own arrangements
Another Provider?

An appraisal of the options is given as appendix VIII. The full range of the above options were discussed by the Best Value Review Team to give rise to the following recommendations

11. Key points and recommendations

78% of staff found the catering provision in their workplace acceptable or very acceptable

11.1 Headquarters

There was reasonable and strong consensus throughout the Group that there was not a necessity for the provision of hot food at Headquarters – as highlighted by the current situation of the kitchen and dining facilities being out of use. However, due to the isolated nature of HQ some provision would be seen as positive.

Although there was much speculation that the almost completed extension to HQ would be used to attract external meetings and potentially fee earning meetings and events, such conjecture was not substantiated.

It was also considered that although the stated management fee was low, the external contract was not managed to our advantage and a greater flexibility was potentially required with the opening of the extension.

The staff survey received 110 responses from HQ based staff.

70% thought the current provision to be acceptable or very acceptable
45% do not consume hot meals at work
33% consume hot meals at work once or twice per week.
32% considered that Hot Meals brought in would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
52% considered that pre-packed meals brought in to be heated locally would be unacceptable or very unacceptable

37% considered that a vending machine providing food would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
35% considered that an external trolley service would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
47% considered that 'microwave facilities only' would be unacceptable or very unacceptable.

Although these views may change, in either direction, dependant upon experience of quality, cost and consistency.

9% thought that the public would support a 100% subsidy of meals at HQ, 17% thought that the public would support a subsidy of 50% or more.

The options proposed by the Best Value Group for Headquarters are:

HQ Option 1

No internal provision at Headquarters. However, actively facilitate (but not guarantee⁹) an external provision of a 'trolley'¹⁰ Service and the use of an external provider for cold and hot buffets as is the case at Government Office and Gedling Borough Council.

There was some discussion as to whether a sandwich vending machine could be provided instead of or as well as a 'trolley' Service.

Existing facilities could be offered to enable a local small business to prepare cold food on site – but this is probably an unnecessary complication. However, the staff survey indicated that 64% considered that an externally provided trolley service would be unacceptable or very unacceptable.

HQ Option 2

Continuation of current style of service - if so this should be combined with a number of changes to enhance efficiency and to act as a central point of expertise and management for catering across the Service thus encompass some of the Service wide management issues discussed earlier in this report.

11.2 Service Development Centre

There were strong and largely unanimous views concerning the provision of Catering at SDC. It was considered that:

Meals should be provided for New Fire-Fighter Trainees, many of whom may be living in temporary, possibly B & B accommodation (the Fire Authority does not provide accommodation for Trainees). Trainees need to be properly nourished as they will be under continuous stress and pressure for the duration of the course (not just a day or two). There are also the issues of the Fire Authority's image and Trainee Fire-Fighter retention to consider.

⁹ The two options considered were **No Provision but with external provider for meetings** and **external sandwich provider for staff and external provider for meetings** - these are combined here

¹⁰ By a trolley service is meant an external provider coming to HQ and selling cobs etc at various locations within the building from a basket or temporary table (with or without wheels), not walking past each office with a trolley and a tea urn as in industry in a by-gone era

However, the meals do not have to be hot and the menu should reflect the content and demands of the training programme on that day.

It was also felt that all course participants should be provided with a free meal – as there is no nearby and readily accessible alternative and this option allows a ‘quick turnaround’ to enable the afternoon sessions to commence quickly and promptly. However, again meals do not have to be hot and the menus should reflect the course programme – i.e participants alertness, energy levels and the content of meals.

There was a strong and unanimous view concerning whether staff based at SDC should pay for their meals or not. The view was that **all** staff (uniformed or not, trainers or administrators) should **either** pay or should not pay for their meals. All other staff in the Service provide their own food or pay for their meals at their place of work.

The two options would therefore be:

SDC Option 1

To keep the Cook, taking into consideration the points raised in the above paragraphs and in the section on management of Catering throughout the Service.

SDC Option 2

Formally market test provision by an external provider.

11.3 Clifton, Edwinstowe and Retained

It was considered that there should be no change in the provision of catering facilities at these locations other than,

Proposals

- 1. Ensure adequate and appropriate quality and range of self catering facilities**
- 2. Retained stations be included in the planning provision for emergency catering, to enable crews and others to return to the nearest station (retained or full-time) to recuperate and to have cold and locally heated pre-prepared meals when required. – See Emergency Catering Section, below.**

It should be noted that in the staff survey some 70% of staff would find the provision of such basic facilities unacceptable or very unacceptable.

11.4 Wholetime Stations

Within the Best Value Review Group; there was support for maintaining the current position from the FBU in addition UNISON was justifiably concerned about the position of their members. Comments around the table and from staff responding to the survey suggested that if cooks were taken off stations then community safety

and other work would decrease as time would have to be spent preparing hot meals. However, if cooks were removed, any meal preparation and consumption would have to be undertaken during rest periods as is the case elsewhere within and outside the Service - not in 'works time'.

Discussions and the statistics show that not all fire-fighters consume hot meals prepared by Fire Authority Cooks, many must therefore bring in their own food. Also in discussions about various options the issue of preparing and storing salad meals especially in the summer, was raised on various occasions. Other than the FBU and with some reservations by UNISON, the Group considered that the current situation was untenable for a range of reasons including the difficulty of management (which gave rise to issues such as those noted in the early part of the report, particularly around hygiene and agency staff), the unit cost/diseconomies of small scale, the lack of universal 'take up' within Nottinghamshire and across other Fire and Rescue Services.

The staff survey received 244 responses from Station based staff

83% thought the current provision to be acceptable or very acceptable
11% do not consume hot meals at work
7% consume hot meals at work once or twice per week. (Although 13% reportedly consume 6 or more hot meals at work per week) and 17% bring in food to reheat between once and 3 times per week
67% considered that Hot Meals brought in would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
79% considered that pre-packed meals brought in to be heated locally would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
82% considered that a vending machine providing food would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
80% considered that an external trolley service would be unacceptable or very unacceptable
84% considered that 'microwave facilities only' would be unacceptable or very unacceptable.
23% thought that the public would support a 100% subsidy of meals on Stations,
49% considered that the public would support a subsidy of 50% or more.

Although these views may change in either direction dependant upon experience of quality, cost and consistency.

The options are:

Wholetime Option 1

Maintain the current situation, but with enhanced management and guidance. There would also have to be a threshold of number of meals prepared that would trigger the removal of this service.

There was both very strong support and very strong opposition to this option within the Best Value Group.

Wholetime Option 2

No provision: staff to make their own arrangements, with an external provision for appropriate meetings involving external visitors. This would be combined with the facility to provide hot food under certain circumstances along the lines outlined in the section on emergency catering, below.

There was both very strong support and very strong opposition to this option within the Best Value Group.

Wholetime Option 3

Provide cooks on 'alternate' days, but with enhanced management and professional guidance;

Monday Midday Cook would cook for the Monday Crew and prepare meals that could be reheated or eaten cold by the crew on Tuesday. No Cook attending Tuesday.

Similarly

Wednesday Midday Cook would prepare food for Wednesday and Thursday, with no Thursday Cook.

Friday Midday Cook would prepare meals for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. No Saturday or Sunday Cooks.

This was the favoured option based on a broad consensus across the group.

The Fire Authority could remove funding for the cooks but allow the Mess Clubs to fund a cook to utilise Fire Authority kitchens, if they wished. However, if an option is chosen that leads to the retention of cooks then there should be a cut off point in the number of meals prepared, below which the retention of a cook is untenable. Reaching such a cut off point should trigger further review as should the need for significant refurbishment of any Kitchen facility. **This cut off point as a percentage of the possible take up of meals or the absolute number should be determined.**

11.5 Hassocks Lane

Appendix IIIa shows the potential customer base of each location and the actual number of meals prepared – the demand. The decision whether to provide cooks and hot meals, or not, at Hassocks Lane should consistent with the decisions made concerning HQ and Full-Time stations whether based on meal preparation volumes or the overall direction that the Service takes with regard to the provision of meals and associated facilities.

Due to the issue of trainee fire-fighters SDC is seen as a special case thus excluded from this determination.

Hassocks Lane Proposal

It was not felt that it could be justified in having cooks and hot meals provided on existing stations and not at Hassocks Lane, which has a much larger customer base (the second highest in the Service). That is unless it was agreed that cooks would be phased out in the short to medium term from across the operational service (i.e when a cook or a kitchen needed replacing, numbers dropped below a certain level or if the fall in standards became untenable)

11.6 Emergency Catering

The wider distribution of purchase cards within our Service was discussed in some detail by the Review Group, as was the storage and provision of emergency catering from stations, which would involve issues of stocking, suitable storage, turnover and record keeping etc. Renewing the lapsed agreement for support from the Salvation Army (and similar providers) was also considered. This option has merit and had been largely successful in the past. However, it was not felt to be a resilient solution as it is based upon the use of Volunteers, whose availability could not be guaranteed, also in the case of the larger incidents other agencies would be aiming to draw upon the same resource.

Emergency Catering Proposal

As a result of our deliberations, it is proposed that, according to the environmental conditions and with an increasing duration and scope of incident we progress through the following levels of Emergency Catering provision:

For minor incidents:

Maintain the current principle of crews being self sufficient through water and hot cans on appliances which are replenished from Service Stores.

As the incident becomes more protracted and/or under detrimental environmental conditions,

Maintain the principle of replenishing Hot Cans and water on appliances. Currently sandwiches can also be provided on or close to the incident scene, these are either obtained from a sandwich producer in Workshop or through local outlets. However, whether we use the current Hot Cans or a suitable alternative needs to be considered in detail elsewhere.

Then, according to the above parameters, we currently obtain sandwiches, fish and chips etc from supermarkets and various outlets. In situations where hot food beyond Hot Cans is required, it is considered that, when appropriate, we could,

Obtain frozen ready meals from supermarkets to be heated on stations ready for our and potentially crews from other Services, to arrive and consume at the closest, most accessible station to the incident.

This will also enable staff to wash, be provided with clean clothing, replenish equipment etc at the same time.¹¹

The ready meals could be obtained from Supermarkets on the same basis that sandwiches are currently. Hence we will not have the issue of storage and stock rotation within the Service. Using pre-

¹¹ It should be noted that the Review Team viewed the provision of Microwave ovens to be of the commercial, not the domestic, type which would allow a greater volume and speed of heating.

packed ready meals will require the maintenance of appropriate food heating facilities on stations (ovens or suitable capacity of microwaves) but not the presence of a cook at such times. The use of SDC and retained stations should also be considered for such circumstances.

In order to facilitate this solution we should, review, renew and extend our arrangements with supermarkets to enable crews to obtain frozen ready meals as well as sandwiches from all the key supermarket chains across Nottinghamshire, perhaps with a confirmatory phone call from the store to Control to ensure that this is an authorised order. Control will also need to be able to direct crews to the nearest location and pre warn the store duty manager on the crews behalf.

Discussion could also take place with other food outlets and transport cafés at various strategic locations throughout the County to enable food to be purchased/provided under certain circumstances with a confirmatory phone call to Control. As a guide such locations should be along the 3 main north – south transport routes through the County the M1, A1 and the Grantham to Bawtry A52 – A6097 - A614 route

If required, (for example for prolonged incidents involving out of County Services), we should ensure that we have the facility to bring any of the commercial standard kitchens (and our employed cooks) on our premises into operation at any time to provide any emergency catering that requires professional level of skills beyond the heating of ready prepared pre-packed meals described above. In addition we should discuss major contingency food provision with established suppliers who operate a 365 day operation across the County, such as County Enterprise Foods, a long established County Council business unit based in Worksop.

It should be noted that as the situation escalates through the above stages then the interests and work of the Local and Regional Resilience Forums come in to play – we should liaise and integrate our solutions, with the relevant Resilience Forums as appropriate.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1. The provision of Catering within the Service has developed with custom and practice over the years with the current provisions and resultant staff expectations being well embedded. The only recent review of catering being in 2006 – as reported in section 3 of this report. Management and the Fire Authority will need to consider whether they wish to maintain the current levels of subsidy and the additional costs associated with the provision of cooks at Headquarters and on Stations as when reviewed from an economic base neither, particularly the provision of Station Cooks is viable in current circumstances or indeed any foreseeable circumstances at most locations. If scale and customer base, hence potential economic viability at each location is considered then the outcomes for Hassocks Lane should be aligned with the decisions reached for Wholetime Stations and Headquarters
- 12.2. Further work can be undertaken to detail the economic and other consequences of further shortlisting of the options presented above.

- 12.3. Should the decision be to maintain the provision of cooks and hot meals then an improved management regime needs to be introduced to maintain some form of control, ensure high standards of quality and hygiene, to manage costs and to ensure that the level of subsidy is transparent and kept under review.
- 12.4. Should the decision be made to remove cooks and Fire Authority provision of Hot meals from stations then issues such as Mess Managers allowances and clarity surrounding any preparation of meals on site will need to be addressed.
- 12.5. A further concern within the review team was the disparity in the treatment of uniformed and non-uniformed staff based at SDC with regard to eligibility for free meals at their place of work.

INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<i>Section</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Date of Assessment</i>	<i>New or Existing</i>
SMT	CFO SWANN	January 2008	N/A
Name of Report to be assessed		BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CATERING	
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the report.		The report presents to Authority the outcomes of the Best Value review on Catering. It gives options for future provision and presents management response to those options.	
2. Who is intended to benefit from this report and what are the outcomes?		All staff employed are intended to benefit from this report. The provision of catering throughout the organisation was included.	
3. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the report?		Management, Trade Unions, Employees	
4. Who implements and who is responsible for the report?		Management at a senior level will be responsible for the implementation of the outcomes of the report.	

5. Please identify the differential impact in the terms of the six strands below. Please tick yes if you have identified any differential impacts. Please state evidence of negative or positive impacts below.

<i>STRAND</i>	Y	N	<i>NEGATIVE IMPACT</i>	<i>POSITIVE IMPACT</i>
Race		X		
Gender		X		
Disability		X		
Religion or Belief		X		
Sexuality		X		
Age		X		

6. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group?	Y	N	7. Should the policy/service proceed to a full impact assessment?	Y	N
					X

I am satisfied that this policy has been successfully impact assessed. I understand the impact assessment of this policy is a statutory obligation and that, as owners of this policy, we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this process.

Signed (completing person) CFO Frank Swann

Date January 2008