

Staff and Pensions Committee

10 March 2025

On-Call Retaining Fee

Recommendation

That the Committee approves the modifications to the NJC pay scales for On-Call Firefighters as set out in the body of this report, subject to local agreement with the relevant Representative Bodies:

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 From 1st January 2025 the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services implemented a new pay structure that amended the retaining fee for on-call firefighters.
- 1.2 Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) adopted the new nationally agreed structure.
- 1.3 In the new national pay structure hours of on-call availability have been grouped into 'bandings', and a percentage of a fulltime salary applied to each band.

Hours of availability (Per week)	Percentage of fulltime salary
Up to and including 30 hours per week	5%
from 31 hours per week and up to and including 60 hours per week	7.5%
from 61 hours per week and up to and including 90 hours per week	10%
from 91 hours per week and up to and including 119 hours	12.5%
Full cover (120 hours a week)	15%

- 1.4 WFRS is moving to a new operational response model that will see five on-call fire stations operate at night only (19:00 – 07:00). The minimum contract offered to an on-call firefighter will be 24-hours, and the maximum will be 60-hours per week.
- 1.5 For operational purposes on-call firefighters will have contracts ranging between 24, 36, 48 and 60-hours to provide on-call cover.

- 1.6 The new national pay structure means a Firefighter contracted to 36-hours per week would receive the same retaining fee as a Firefighter contracted to 48-hours and 60 hours per week – 7.5%.
- 1.7 This means there is no incentive for an on-call Firefighter to contract to a 48-hour or 60-hour contract, over a 36-hour contract.
- 1.8 The service is in the process of consulting with current Firefighters to undertake new contracted hours.
- 1.9 If more Firefighters opt for a 36-hour contract, as there is no incentive to undertake a 48-hour or 60-hour contract, an increased headcount will be required to provide full cover and ensure appliance availability, increasing costs to the Authority.
- 1.10 There is also the question of fairness by asking employees to provide more on-call availability for the same retaining pay.
- 1.11 To overcome this, WFRS recommends making two local changes to the newly agreed pay structure:
- Implementing an additional pay banding for 48-hour contracts. This additional banding would be paid at 8.75%.
 - Increase the starting threshold for the 10% banding by 1-hour, meaning staff would receive 10% for a 60-hour contract.

Hours of availability (Per week)	WFRS Proposed Contract	Percentage of fulltime salary
Up to and including 30 hours per week	24-hours	5%
from 31 hours per week and up to and including 60 hours per week	36-hours	7.5%
Recommended pay band to be introduced	48-hours	8.75%
from 61 hours per week and up to and including 90 hours per week	60-hours	10%

- 1.12 By introducing these changes, each location will require fewer on-call Firefighters to provide the required cover. Consequently, this will reduce the overall on-costs including, training, personal protective equipment and uniform.
- 1.13 This proposed structure is an improvement to the already agreed national structure and will have several benefits for our people. It will provide greater opportunity for employees to be remunerated fairly for the hours they are contracted.

- 1.14 By having an improved pay structure it will improve the attraction and retention of staff on the on-call duty system. This will create efficiencies when considering the resources required to recruit and train new members of staff.
- 1.15 These changes make the on-call duty system more cost effective as fewer employees will be required to maintain establishment levels at each location.
- 1.16 These changes provide a more sustainable model moving forward that will maximise benefits to the communities of Warwickshire.
- 1.17 The proposed changes are factored into existing operational budgets.

2 Financial Implications

Introduction of a new 48-hour contract:

- 2.1 Within the new operational response model there are 5 on-call fire stations in WFRS. Each station will have 600 hours to appropriately staff the station.
- 2.2 Each fire station will be crewed with staff on a mixture of 24, 36, 48, or 60 hour on-call contracts, based on the availability they are able to give.
- 2.3 The 8.75% banding gives each member of staff an additional £470* pa over the 7.5% banding
- 2.3 For illustrative purposes, if all staff were to undertake 36-hour contracts, there would be a headcount of 17 required at each station, paid £2825.63* pa each (7.5%). Across all 5 stations, the cost would be **£240,178** pa.
- 2.4 If all staff were to undertake a proposed 48-hour contract and provide 48-hours of on-call availability per week, there would be a headcount of 13 required at each station paid £3296.56* pa each (8.75%). Over all 5 stations, the total cost would be **£214,276**.
- 2.5 Based on the information provided in 2.3 and 2.4 - Provided WFRS can attract staff to a 48-hour contract, it will cost **£25,903** less.

*All financial analysis is indicative of an on-call competent Firefighter.

Increasing threshold of 60-hour contract to 61-hour banding at 10%

- 2.6 If all staff were to undertake a proposed 60-hour contract at the higher banding of 10%, each on-call location would need 10 Firefighters to establish each location.
- 2.7 The 10% banding gives each member of staff an additional £941* pa over the 7.5% banding.
- 2.8 This has the potential to cost approximately £47,000* extra across 5 on-call locations.

2.9 Applying the same principle applied in 2.4, each location would only require a head count of 10 to fully establish each location. The combined salary cost of 10 members of staff on the proposed 60-hour contract is **£188,375***.

2.10 If WFRS can attract more staff to a 60-hour contract on the increased pay banding, it will cost **£25,901*** less than 13 members of staff working a 48-hour contract and **£51,803*** less than 17 members of staff working a 36-hour contract due to the overall headcount being less.

*All financial analysis is indicative of an on-call competent Firefighter

2.11 For completeness, the below table provides a variation of potential establishments at the 5 on-call locations using the NJC pay structure. This is compared against the WFRS proposals.

2.12 The table also illustrates an optimal establishment of 13 which would be of significantly lower cost, when applying the WFRS proposals, than if all staff were on a 24 36 or 48 contract only.

2.13 Until establishing the 5 locations it is difficult to forecast establishments, but the introduction of new bandings incentivises the adoption of increased contracts, reducing the number of staff required.

Potential WFRS Establishments	Establishment Required	NJC Cost	WFRS Proposed Cost	WFRS Proposed Cost 5 Locations	Variance Proposed Cost 5 locations
All staff 24-hour contract	25	47,090	47,090	235,450	0
All staff 36-hour contract	17	48,040	48,040	240,200	0
All staff 48-hour contract	13	36,730	42,860	214,300	30,600
All staff 60-hour contract	10	28,260	37,680	188,400	47,100
Mixture of 2 x 24, 3 x 36, 3 x 48 & 5 x 60	13	34,850	40,970	204,850	30,600

3 Environmental Implications

- 3.1 If WFRS can encourage staff to agree to a 48-hour or 60-hour contracts, fewer staff will be required to fully establish each location. Consequently, there will be a small reduction in commuting for people attending courses and training events.

4 Supporting Information

- 4.1 On-call firefighters must live or work within 5-minutes of their nominated on-call fire station.
- 4.2 On-call firefighters receive an annual retainer for providing cover based on a pre agreed contract.
- 4.3 On-call firefighters are then paid hourly when mobilised to operational incidents or for other purposes such as training.
- 4.4 Retention and recruitment of on call staff has been and still is a challenge for all Fire and Rescue Services in the UK. This is due to several reasons, including pay and commitment challenges.
- 4.5 Prior to the introduction of the new pay bandings, WFRS had a local agreement for a clear pay structure which differentiated between the number of contracted hours. On-call Firefighters were paid incrementally in blocks of 10-hour contracts.
- 4.6 The locally agreed pay structure has had to be changed to accommodate the new NJC pay agreement which is overall more favourable for on-call firefighters.
- 4.7 This recommendation, whilst still operating within the parameters of the nationally agreed pay structure will give each contract its own unique pay scale making the higher contract more attractive than the lower. This will also support attraction and recruitment across the organisation.
- 4.8 This recommendation will provide a sustainable, more economical duty system and will see a reduction in on-costs for all employees.
- 4.9 These changes offer a fairer pay structure, recompensing on-call Firefighters for time they have spent providing availability.
- 4.10 Financial analysis has identified that these changes are low in cost when considered against the benefit which it returns.
- 4.11 There is a risk that recruitment and retention of on-call Firefighters will be more challenging moving forward. These recommendations will support WFRS in ensuring that it has a sustainable on-call model now and into the future.

5 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 WFRS is currently consulting with staff over new contracts in the new service model. We would like to be a position to offer a 48-hour and a 60-hour on-call contracts at an agreed enhanced rate, as part of those consultations. This is planned to take effect from 1 July 2025.
- 5.2 We have discussed this proposal with Fire and Rescue trade unions for a local agreement to vary the NJC framework. Early indications are positive that a local agreement would be entered into by representative bodies.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

- [Local Government Association \(LGA\) - Guidance](#)

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): not applicable county wide report

Other members: