



## Safer Together - frequently asked questions

### Why might you need to close stations?

Most of our fire stations were built at least 50 years ago and are based on historical locations of where people lived at the time. If we were to start from scratch and rebuild our fire service with new fire stations and duty systems to meet today's needs, it would undoubtedly look a lot different.

Some areas are really busy, whilst others have seen a very big reduction in incidents. Fifty six (including Lundy) of our fire station areas on average have fewer than 10 dwelling fires a year.\*

107 of our fire appliances (more commonly known as fire engines) are crewed by On-call Firefighters who are not located at the fire station. They are required to remain within five minutes of the station and when there is an emergency they will go to the fire station to get changed and pick up the fire engine before proceeding. This is usually with a minimum of four firefighters. Our On-call firefighters do their very best to be available to respond to emergencies, however as we currently require four people to be available and this is not their full time employment it means that sometimes there are not enough people available for the fire engine to be used. This means that sometimes, although there is a fire station in your local area, it is not available for emergencies, therefore, the emergency will be attended by crew from a nearby station.

The geography of our area has changed and continues to change. With large new housing estates in areas such as Cranbrook near Exeter, Sherford in Plymouth and Taunton Garden Town bringing large population increases and changes, we need to respond to these changing risks.

Along with shifts in population, there have been huge changes in our road networks. In some areas we have challenges navigating our fire engines through narrow or congested streets and busy traffic to reach emergencies, whilst in other areas, the new road networks actually help us to reach locations faster than before. This means we need to consider where fire stations are located and whether in fact we can reach areas more quickly by relocating firefighters to different locations.

We need to match the resources (firefighters, equipment and fire engines) we have available to the risks. At the moment, due to historic reasons we may have two fire stations located in two very similar small towns with similar risks, but who offer a very different service, through different crewing models and fire engines. For example, in one town we may have a wholetime crew with one fire engine, and in another similar sized town there may be on-call crews with two fire engines. We need to even this out so we can provide similar resources in similar areas.

We also need to make significant financial savings – our buildings, fleet and equipment all cost a considerable amount of money to maintain. Through our extensive analysis around current and future risk, we know that we may not need or be able to afford all of our historic buildings and vehicles.

\*Data is a 5 year average taken from April 14 to March 19 inclusive.

### What do the current crewing arrangements mean?

**Wholetime** – a station which has firefighters employed to work from a station 24/7. This will be made up of a number of firefighters who work in teams called a 'watch'. There are two watches over a 24 hour period – a day watch and a night watch.

**On-call (sometimes referred to as 'retained')** - on-call is when firefighters are not employed all the time at their station, but they need to be within five minutes of their fire station during the times when they are on-call. They may live, or work (in other jobs), near the fire station and 'turn out' to the fire station when they get a call. Even though On-call Firefighters are not employed as firefighters full time, they are still fully qualified firefighters, just the same as other crew members.

**Day-crewed** – this is when stations are staffed by Wholetime Firefighters during the daytime only, (e.g. 9am until 6pm), and crewed by on-call staff at night.

### **Why are you changing shift patterns for firefighters?**

Our wholetime duty system was introduced more than 40 years ago, (in 1977) and hasn't changed since, our on-call model has also been the same model for decades.

Everything else has changed: from the uniforms we wear and the incidents we attend, to the technology and vehicles that we use. We do a great job recruiting on-call staff, but keeping hold of these colleagues is a challenge with more than 100 leaving each year. With the requirements for on-call staff to live and work within five minutes of a station it's not surprising these staff find it difficult to work for us, often alongside their other jobs, and balance this with their lives outside of work.

We want to offer more flexible working to give more opportunities for employment to a wider group of potential applicants whilst retaining our current highly trained staff. We also need to make significant financial savings and by using flexible models we can employ less staff but still ensure we have the same amount of firefighters at an incident.

### **Why do you need to remove fire engines from my local area?**

Fires and incidents have dramatically reduced, particularly in the last decade. Our fire appliance locations are historical and based on requirements for fire cover designed soon after the Second World War. We have spent a lot of time analysing data and modelling future risk in different areas across the two counties. We have found that 27 pumps attend fewer than one incident per week\*. There are also other examples where we regularly do not have fire engines available to attend incidents because our on-call staff aren't always available in every area. This is why we need to change to ensure we have the right engines and crew in the right places.

\*Data is a 5 year average taken from April 14 to March 19 inclusive.

### **How have you assessed the risks in each area?**

We have been collecting and analysing data for many years and have used this to model current and future risk. We know there are certain factors that make people at greater risk of a fatal fire. For example, people aged over 85, those with mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems, people who smoke, living alone, limited mobility and poor housekeeping are all factors that increase the risk of fatal fire. We have also assessed the size and demographics of each community, the mix of property types in each area, as well as the road networks and the risks that they bring.

### **What things are you putting in place to support communities to stay safe following a station closure?**

Stations that are under threat of closure are in close proximity to another neighbouring fire station, and by calling 999 you will still have an immediate response from a local fire crew.

We are already carrying out a great deal of prevention work with individuals and within communities. We will be able to increase this support of at-risk groups and individuals to ensure our communities are as safe as possible. You are always able to access home fire safety advice over the phone from our community safety team, and if you (or a loved one) are a higher risk we will come and visit your home to carry out a full fire safety check.

In any area where we make changes we will make sure we send in our specialist prevention teams to work with the local community to help them reduce the risk of an incident occurring. In the meantime, if you need any advice in making your home or business safer call free now on 0800 05 02 999 or visit our website [www.dsfire.gov.uk](http://www.dsfire.gov.uk)

### **Why is there a consultation? Will you actually listen to my opinions?**

We are committed to involving our communities in designing our services and want to hear what everyone has to say. This means we are consulting our partners, stakeholders and communities to ask what they think about our proposed service options. We want to understand what is important to people and how they feel they may be impacted by any proposed changes to their fire service. All consultation responses on the proposed service

options will be considered and incorporated into a consultation findings report which will be presented to the Fire Authority for their final decision in the autumn (2019). If you don't take part, your opinion won't be heard.

### **Why haven't you decided on one option?**

We have been working on a number of proposed service options and in June the Fire Authority will decide which options will be included in the public consultation process. If we only consulted on one option, we would not be conducting a meaningful and transparent consultation process.

### **How have you arrived at these options?**

We use a variety of different methods and information sources going back several years, to help us understand the risks facing the communities of Devon and Somerset. By understanding where the risks are, we can develop our response model to best meet that risk. This isn't necessarily where our firefighters and fire engines are located now, so this is why we need to change. In addition, we have carried out extensive staff engagement activities, involving over 500 operational firefighters, managers and support staff who helped us to design and have subsequently been given the opportunity to comment on these options.

### **What is the Fire Authority and what is their role?**

The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority is an independent body made up of 26 Councillors (we call them Members) appointed by Devon and Somerset County Councils, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council. The Authority is responsible for ensuring we carry out our statutory duties to protect the public. This means that the fire and rescue service is answerable for its actions and performance to the public. You can find out more about the Fire Authority here <http://dsmodern/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

### **Why is my local station closing and not others?**

No decisions have been made yet – we are purely providing recommendations for feedback as part of the consultation. If your local station has been recommended for closure, it is likely to be because it is in an area of low-risk or is located close to an alternative station and we will be able to reach you from other locations.

### **What will happen to firefighters from stations that are recommended for closure?**

We will always look to provide alternative employment for our firefighters and those from stations recommended for closure will have the opportunity to relocate. If this does not suit their circumstances then we will offer alternatives of re-training or redundancy.

### **What is the process around the consultation?**

There is a 12 week period of public consultation (3 July – 22 September 2019) during which we will be holding informal 'drop in' events across Devon and Somerset. We would welcome you to attend these. There, you will be able to find out more about the proposed changes and ask questions. You'll be able to take part in the consultation either through completing a paper form, or by taking our [online survey](#).

Once all the consultation responses have been gathered, these will then be analysed and a report will then be presented to the Fire Authority who will make the final decision on what will happen.

### **When will all these changes happen?**

We will begin to implement these changes from 2020 onwards.

### **I have been reading through the supporting evidence and note that Colyton Station has apparently attended 107.8 co-responder calls. Please could you explain how this is possible considering they are not a co-responder station?**

The data shows the number of co-responder calls in Colyton's area but the attendances would have been from the nearest available co-responder station which in this case is Seaton.