



Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service

Confidence level up to

96%



Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service saves £2.9m per year and improves confidence levels to 96%

Summary

Political and budgetary pressures which all Fire Services have been subject to, especially since the HR Modernisation project inception in 2004, left Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMF&RS) needing to find significant savings in their staffing budget and at the same time maintain or improve service levels. Using WorkPlace Systems Consulting Services, a new Demand-Led approach to rostering operational firefighters was developed and implemented in January 2006 with significant and immediate benefits. The most noticeable in the first year being a reduction of £2.9 million in staffing costs and an increase in confidence levels. This was achieved without reference to the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) and was accepted by the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) without dispute.

The Service

GMF&RS is the third largest service in the UK with over 1600 full time firefighters and around 550 supporting personnel concentrated in a geographical area of 110 sq miles and a population of 2.3 million people. The service is deployed over 41 fire stations which house 66 pumping appliances and 29 special appliances. Staffing of these stations was achieved using a proven 4 Watch, 2-2-4 roster structure which had been in place for over 3 decades.

The Problem

Increasing pressure for change emanated from a variety of sources such as Local Government Acts, the Gershon Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review. At the same time there was a move to modernise the Fire Service with the Bain Report, the National Framework and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The ongoing targets to provide consistent levels of emergency cover coupled with agreement to meet the pay award funded by improved efficiencies in the Service meant that change was unavoidable. This was brought to a head by a projected deficit of £5m in the 05/06 budget.

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Finding Subject Matter Experts

In summer 2004, Steve Beckley ACFO of GMF&RS took responsibility for the project and was given a clear mandate from Barry Dixon CFO to find an innovative solution to these issues, and for GMF&RS to be seen as the leader in such change. Steve comments on his task,

"My challenge simply stated was - how to deliver the same or better quality of service more efficiently. It soon became apparent that the only possible way to solve this problem was to get less people working more flexibly to deliver an improved service."

Steve Beckley ACFO, GMF&RS

To do this Steve looked outside the Fire Service into other Public and Private sectors, particularly Retail who's success he knew relied on providing the best customer service at the lowest cost of delivery, a difficult balance to achieve. To help with the process, Steve looked into the market to find an experienced Workforce Management specialist to help them develop a new approach and implement the solution. Giving reasons for their choice Steve stated.

"WorkPlace Systems was chosen due to its significant commercial success in such consultations in a wide variety of sectors, as well as recent work with the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority."

Steve Beckley ACFO, GMF&RS

The Solution

With the Chief's objectives clearly laid out, WorkPlace Systems commenced a feasibility study in October 2004 to establish where efficiencies could be made and how they could be implemented. The feasibility study identified several issues inherent in the 4 watch system and current contracts of employment. The 4 Watch system assumes a static level of absence (holiday, sickness, training, transfers, etc) and each duty roster is designed to cover an average level of demand. This naturally results in each station being over or under resourced throughout the year, with a net surplus (inefficiency) in the number of shifts required to crew all fire appliances. Reducing this inefficiency was virtually impossible with the existing duty system without affecting quality of service. Using this knowledge and historical data on incidents to size demand, WorkPlace developed a Demand-Led Rostering Model using the following principles.

- 1) **Roster a net contract of employment** - Provides a more realistic view of the hours each firefighter provides, having removed all known absences.
- 2) **Cover absence on a one for one basis** - Use unrostered hours to cover absence as-and-when it occurs.
- 3) **Roster only the correct number of riders** - Remove all over resourcing by planning to have only the correct number of riders on shift.
- 4) **Adjusting the level of firefighting resources based on variable operational demand** - Rather than using consistent 24/7 fire cover based on outdated standards.

WorkPlace were mindful that retaining the 2 days, 2 nights, and 4 rota days shift pattern as well as retaining the shift start and end times of the Watches would be fundamental to the acceptance of any change by the workforce. WorkPlace determined that moving from a 4 Watch to a 5 Watch structure would meet both the needs of the workforce and the needs of the organisation.

(NB - for more information about this approach, please refer to the 'Demand Led Rostering' White Paper from WorkPlace Systems)

Yearly *saving* of

£2.9m

Implementation

Identifying the principles of the solution provided the proof Steve Beckley needed to proceed with the project. However he knew that to implement a new rostering solution would require significant and fundamental change to the way GMF&RS had operated over the last 3 decades and would need full acceptance and support from both the firefighters and the FBU.

The findings of the WorkPlace feasibility study were presented to a working party team in November 2004 and it was agreed that WorkPlace should develop an operational solution which was completed in December 2004. So in January 2005, a complex and detailed process of negotiation commenced which involved wider discussion and consultation with the FBU, firefighters and station management to gain acceptance and secure support.

"We knew we were asking a lot of our employees to accept this new way of working, but with the considerable help and support of WorkPlace Systems and a programme of continuous communication, we were able to convince the Firefighters that this new scheme would benefit them and that the service would realise improvements they needed to meet their goals"

Steve Beckley ACFO, GMF&RS

"The change GMF&RS has been through has been significant and the benefits clear to see for all stakeholders. Whilst all team members contributed to the end result, WorkPlace were pivotal in developing an operating model that was both practical and would deliver the improvements we had to achieve. They demonstrated a solid understanding of the Fire Service and the process and challenges we had to contend with."

Steve Beckley ACFO, GMF&RS

The Results

In January 2006 the project went live and through the measurement process implemented at the start of the initiative the following benefits have been realised.

- £2.9m annual and recurring savings in labour budget
- Performance standards maintained and improved
- Confidence levels range between 85 to 96%
- Increase in funding for Community Fire Safety by £1m
- No reference to TAP in the process
- Complete approval by the FBU
- Reduction in sickness absence levels
- Scope for continuous improvement and further efficiencies

As a result of the success of the project GMF&RS are now looking to refine the existing model and extend new working practices to other parts of the organisation.

The initial concerns from the firefighters and their management can be summarised as follows

Management Concerns

- Understanding flexible contracts
- Industrial relations
- Risk to efficiency targets
- Loss of comfort factor through having less staff on duty
- *Fear of change*

Firefighter Concerns

- Understanding flexible contracts
- Working at different stations
- Total predictability removed
- Loss of jobs and appliances
- Change to holiday procedures
- Call-in procedures
- *Fear of change*

Through the process of discussion and negotiation these concerns were allayed and a better understanding of the benefits gained.

Management Benefits

- Reduced and consistent labour costs
- Increase in team working
- Reduction in under-utilisation of labour
- Reduced absence
- Scope for flexible working
- *Increased empowerment and motivation of staff*

Firefighter Benefits

- Potential for reduced working hours with an opportunity to 'win' unrostered hours
- Increased leisure time periods
- Greater control over leave planning
- Scope for flexible working
- *Increased empowerment and motivation of staff*

Reduction in sickness and absence levels



About WorkPlace Systems plc

WorkPlace Systems is based in Milton Keynes with 20 years experience in Workforce Management solutions. It is listed on the London Stock Exchange (WSI). WorkPlace is a world-leading supplier of Workforce Management software and of consulting solutions which reduce staff costs and increase staff utilisation, leading to improved organisational performance.

WorkPlace Systems has specific experience in Emergency Services sector and has carried out numerous Workforce Management consulting projects and implemented software solutions in the following organisations: Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service, Cleveland Fire Brigade, Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service, Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, Dorset Fire & Rescue Service, Fife Fire & Resuce Service, Grampian Fire & Rescue Service, Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service, Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue Service, London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority, Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service, North Wales Fire & Rescue Service, South West Region Fire Control, South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service.

WorkPlace Systems is based in Milton Keynes with regional offices in the USA.

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