

Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Briefing to Cliffe and Cliffe Woods' Residents Association – 1 June 2011

Residents of Cliffe, Cliffe Woods and Cooling will have seen an issue of 'The Clarion' about the future of Cliffe Fire Station. This is a note to set out the position of Kent Fire & Rescue Service.

1. Is Kent Fire & Rescue Service going to close Cliffe Fire Station "by stealth"?

We have not had any discussions about closing Cliffe Fire Station.

We are in the process of completing a review of all emergency cover across the whole of Kent & Medway. This has been a three-year project to ensure we have the right stations, in the right places, with the right equipment to meet the needs of the Service countywide. This was begun before the economic downturn with the sole objective of maintaining public safety – which is our top priority.

Facts about about Cliffe Fire Station before 1 June

- 40% of the time during a typical day Cliffe's engine is not available. So, as you will see, Cliffe's engine is frequently not on the run during the day as firefighters are not available to crew it. When this happens incidents in Cliffe are typically dealt with by the Strood fire engine, which on blue lights gets to Cliffe in under 10 minutes.
- Cliffe does however generally have good availability at night. Typically 94% of the time Cliffe's fire engine is available
- In the last five years (2005/09) there was less than one incident a week on the station ground covered by Cliffe (about half the average for a retained station)
- After 1 June 2011, using the new part-time contracts, Cliffe's fire engine will form part of the new arrangements on the Peninsula. This will be an improvement as availability will be guaranteed.

2. I have heard that retained fire-fighters are moving to part time contracts? What does this mean?

We have changed the retained duty system used at 43 of our stations to make these staff part-time firefighters with the same rights and access to training as whole-time firefighters. Firefighting is a dangerous job, and the safety of our staff is a top priority for Kent Fire and Rescue Service, so we were concerned that a couple of hours a week for drill nights was not adequate to complete vital safety training. In addition new legislation and a national tribunal ruling on terms and conditions, meant that contracts had to be updated. Every retained firefighter was offered a part time contract that for the first time gave them the same benefits as full time firefighters. The change to contracted hours now means the Service can guarantee having staff available when they are most needed.

This is vitally important for an emergency service.

Part-time contracts started today [1 June 2011].

3. Does this mean Cliffe Fire Station will be available less?

The issue for us is that under the old arrangement, we could not control, nor predict whether a station was going to have enough crew available to get the fire engine on the run or not. It was entirely up to retained staff to choose whether to turn out to work for us or not. And with a

moment's notice they could make themselves unavailable, and then take the fire engine out of service, because of too few fire-fighters to crew it. This was not an acceptable way for a modern emergency service to operate.

4. So are you going to recruit more fire-fighters in Cliffe?

At the moment, we do not need to recruit any more firefighters in Cliffe. Because the new system means we now employ staff on guaranteed hours, we can be far more precise than in the past about exactly how many firefighters are needed. When the county review is finalised by members in February 2012, we will look to see if we need to recruit any more fire-fighters to any station across the county.

5. How do decisions get made in the Fire & Rescue Service?

Like a parish council, we have elected members that make decisions, based on recommendations from officers. The process is that we will ask our members to approve a document called the Integrated Risk Management Plan in October 2011, which will then go out to public consultation. The outcomes are then considered in February 2012, and any proposals from the plan will be approved or otherwise at this point.

6. So why couldn't you come and say that at this meeting?

That's because we are unable to come and discuss any future issues until we have taken a report to the Fire Authority – this is the same process that all local government must follow. We have already offered to come to the Parish Council meeting in July or August to discuss the fire and emergency issues in your area. And when the IRMP is published, we can return again.

7. Where can I find out more about Kent Fire & Rescue Service?

You can find out more by visiting www.kent.fire-uk.org. And on the homepage there is a 2 minute video about how fire & rescue services across the county work.