

**Communities Select Committee 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

**Item 4: Public questions**

**Submitted by: Fire-fighter Tim Jones via Spelthorne Councillor Ian Harvey**

**Question:**

Since the availability of Retained Crews is currently woeful (and has been for some time now), where used in Surrey, will you guarantee that Spelthorne will have a full 24/7 response from IT'S Retained Crew, especially when the vast majority of the proposed catchment area is non-residential, non-commercial?

**Response:**

Historically Surrey, its boroughs, districts and parishes all have a long tradition of drawing on people from local communities to support the fire service in delivering its services and today retained fire-fighters, who are employees just like full-time fighters, play an important role in Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. There are 10 retained fire stations across Surrey providing a cost effective, reliable and vital on-call cover where members of the local communities respond via a pager system to the full range of emergencies just as their whole-time colleagues do. Depending on the type of cover provided and the time of day retained staff may respond from home or a place of work.

Anyone can be a retained fire-fighter, as long as they meet the entry criteria and are able to respond to the station within the required time. That can and does include staff who work as whole-time fire-fighters and there are a number of whole-time fire-fighters in Surrey who work both systems either for Surrey or other Fire and Rescue Services. Being a retained fire-fighter can complement many different lifestyles but it does require a range of personal skills such as understanding, reliability, flexibility and the ability to work within a team. While prospective candidates don't need any qualifications there is a selection process which includes physical and practical tests and a medical.

As a borough Spelthorne has a population which provides a large number of people to draw upon to establish a retained unit at the new location. With an average population density of about 17 people per hectare the demographics of Spelthorne offer distinct advantages when considering retained fire-fighters. The estimate is that for the required response time there are 27,517 people in the 18-59 age categories. In comparison Cranleigh (Waverley Borough Council's website records a population of 11,241) and Oxted (Tandridge District Council website states a population of 11,000), both of which are successful retained units, only draw from a catchment in the order of 5,000 people each.

As with the current arrangements and the new proposed “On-call” contracts for retained staff Surrey Fire and Rescue Service will continue to work to ensure that delivery against the response standard is achieved and in doing so will seek to ensure that the right people with the right skills and equipment operating out of appropriate locations is secured to make the people of Surrey safer in their communities.

**Mrs Denise Saliagopoulos**  
**Chairman of Communities Select Committee**