National Survey - Implementation Status of WRC Agreement

A snapshot of progress to date – January 2024

Survey Overview:

During the month of January 2024, Retained Firefighters participated in this survey on a voluntary basis. The survey is a snapshot of our collective understanding of the WRC agreement's implementation status at this point in time.

Data Collection and Collation:

Conducted independently and voluntarily by Retained Firefighters in their personal capacity, this survey reflects a genuine effort to share information. The data was collected diligently between 9th of January 2024 to the 1st of February 2024.

How Your Insights Underpin Progress

Purpose of the Survey:

The primary goal is to foster a better understanding of both successes and challenges in the implementation process nationally. By sharing these insights, we aspire to create a roadmap for implementation committees, helping them navigate and overcome obstacles.

Hope for the Future:

The findings are not just data; they are a tool for progress. Our collective hope is that these insights will be instrumental in steering implementation committees nationwide, enabling them to deliver the WRC agreement comprehensively across all 201 retained stations.

Survey Response

This survey was distributed to 201 Retained Fire Stations in the Republic of Ireland.

184 Retained Fire Stations responded.

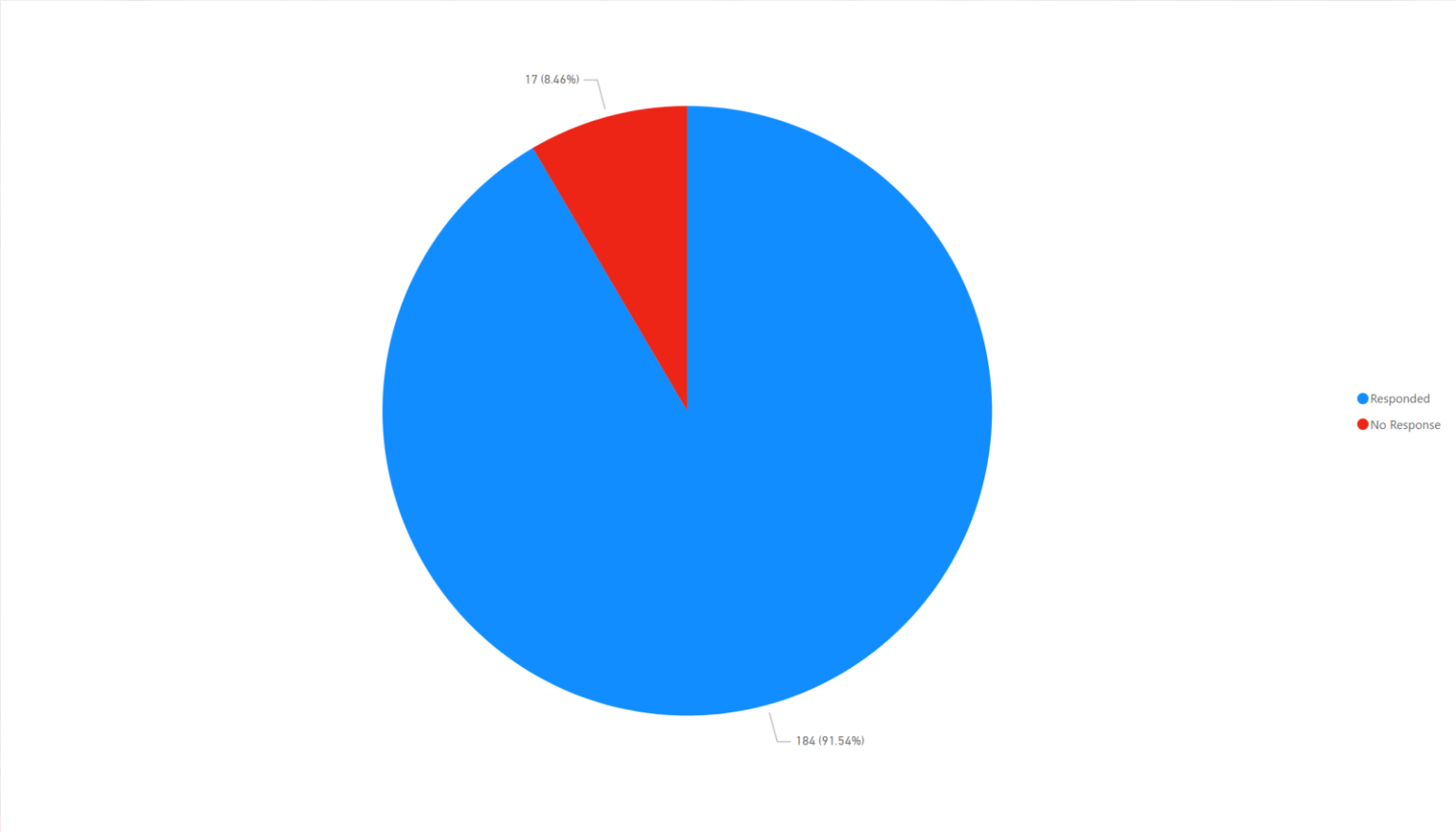
17 Retained Fire Stations did not respond.

The survey was completed by 91% of Stations nationally.

The survey was managed through Microsoft Forms. This allowed the survey be conducted online.

All completed surveys are anonymous.

Note: Survey questions in slide 16 for reference.

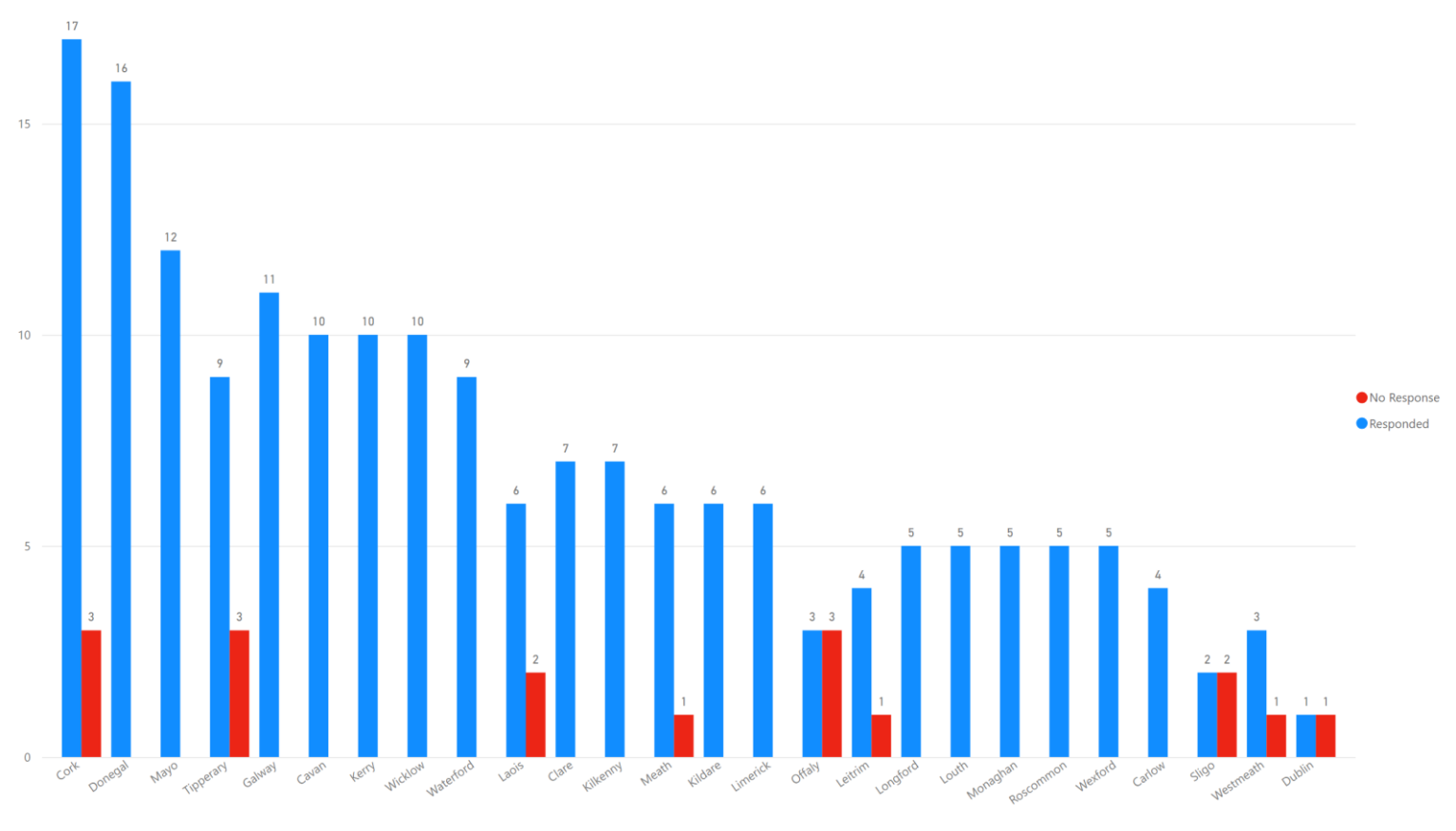


Survey Response by County

This slide illustrates the number of Fire stations by Fire Authority noting the stations that replied and those that did not.

It is positive to note that all Fire Authorities are represented.

The survey was completed by 91% of Stations nationally giving us a high sample case of detail to collate.



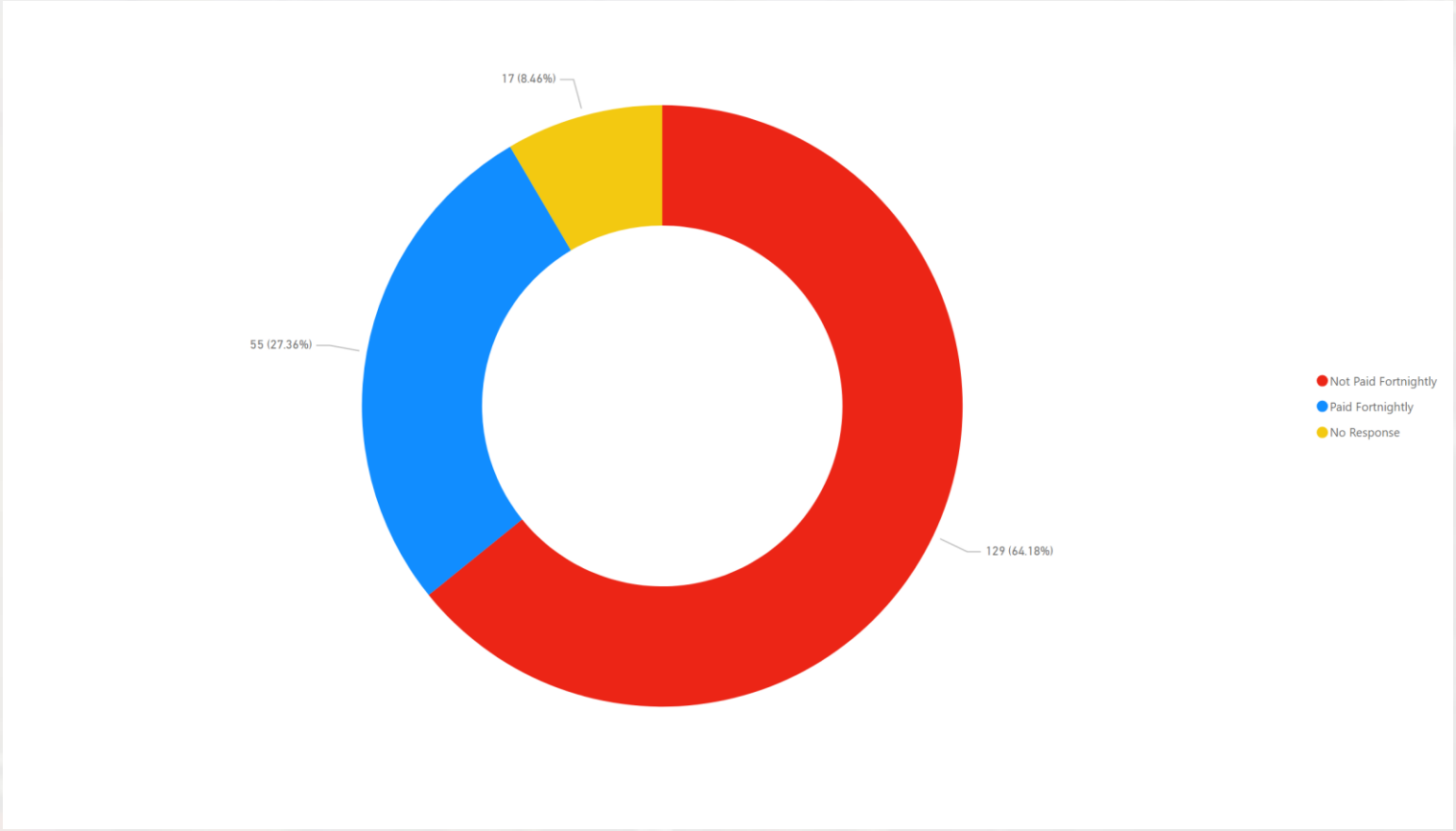
Survey Response to Payroll

It is stated within the WRC agreement that the payroll will change to a Fortnightly payroll.

This chart highlights the numbers and % of stations that are currently being paid (or not) under the new system.

64% of Stations have indicated they are not being paid Fortnightly.

Implementation committees nationally should consider this as one of their priorities.



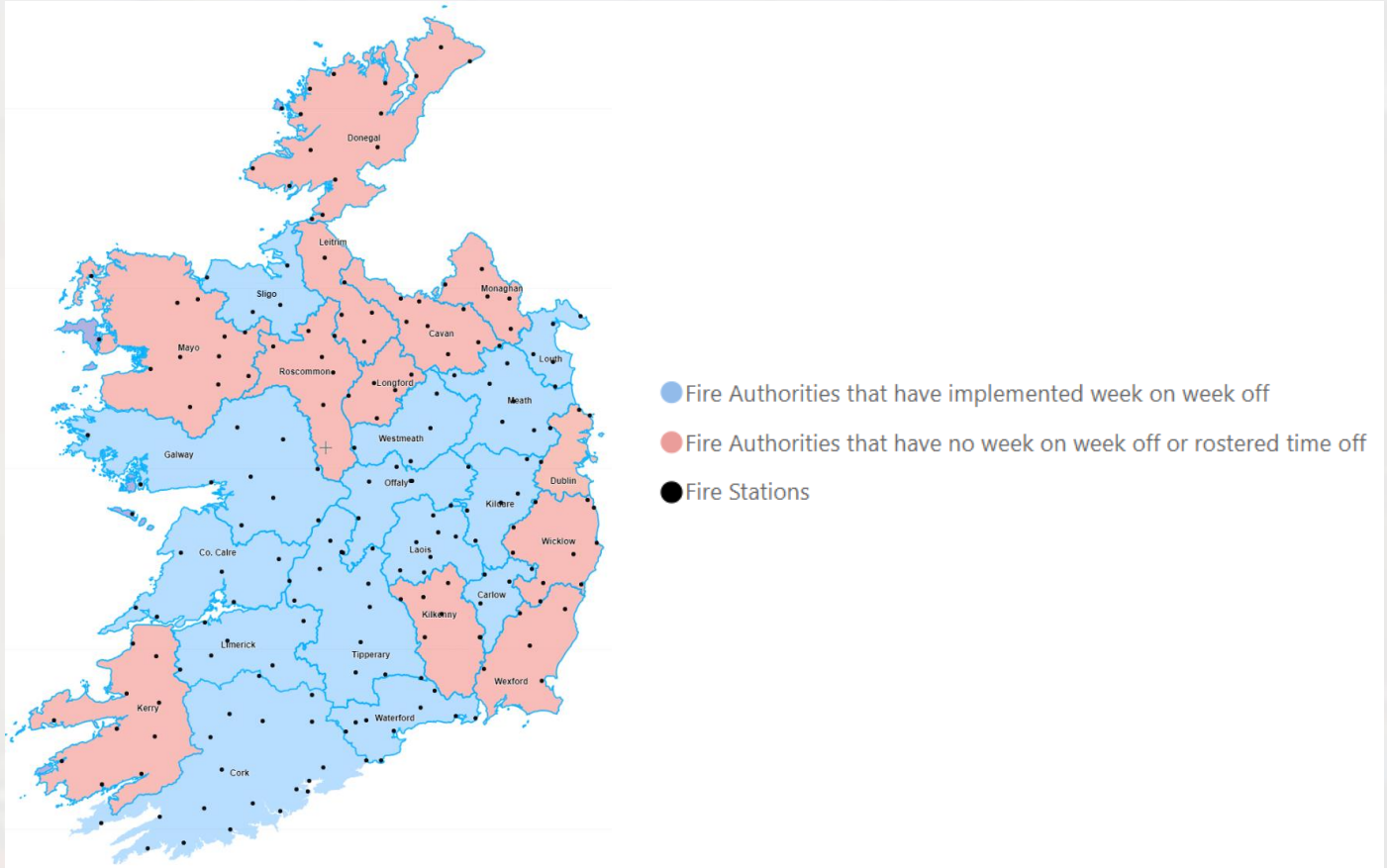
County's working Week On Week Off

A substantial transformation in the Fire Service nationally involves transitioning to a week on, week off roster. It is acknowledged that this specific provision within the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) agreement is anticipated to considerably enhance both retention and recruitment within the service.

This slide highlights Fire Authorities that have implemented a week on week off structure within one or more of their stations.

Unfortunately, many Fire Authorities have not moved on this with any urgency. With some shared knowledge across authorities this is a very big and important part of the agreement that could be implemented quickly.

Please refer to working solutions on page 10, 11 & 12.

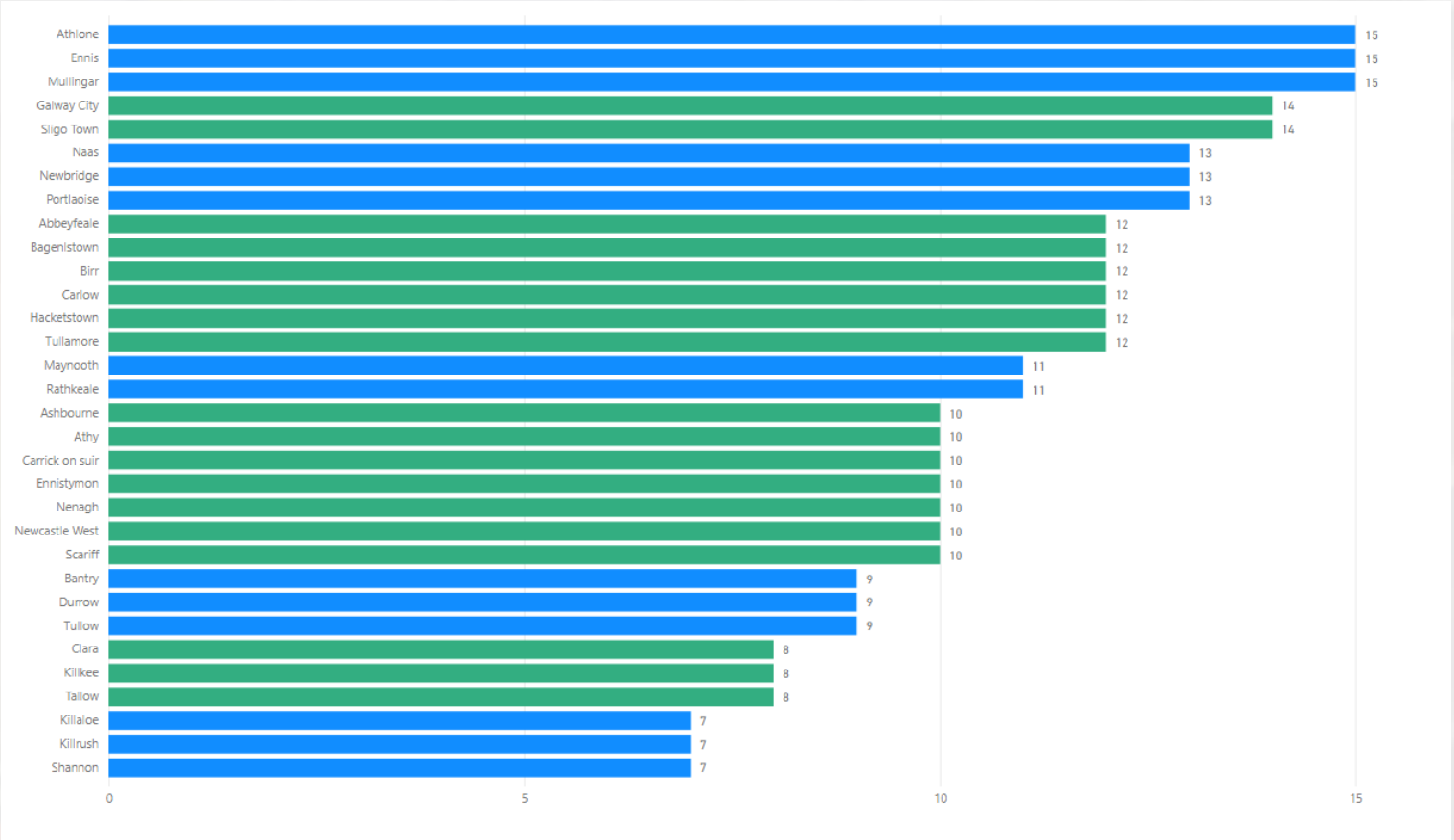


Stations working Week On Week Off

We can look at Fire Stations individually that are now working week on week off. This reveals that some are successfully operating on a week on, week off schedule with as few as 7 crew.

Solutions can be identified within these Fire Authorities, as they address station management challenges and strive to enhance the work-life balance for their Fire crews and their families.

Implementation Committees, Fire Authorities and their Senior Management need to implement the solutions found within these stations.



Tables

The following information highlights other areas that need attention.

Driver Mechanic

Only 29% of stations state that DM roles are filled.

Technology as a solution

Technology can assist in many areas, particularly in managing numbers for SO's implementing rostered time off. iFire is an app working successfully in 19 stations the majority of which are week on week off stations.

You are a Council employee

Merely 12% of stations indicate awareness of employee benefits provided by the council, their employer. County Councils should enhance their engagement with Retained Firefighters. A case in point is the Human Resources department, which holds a pivotal role in moulding and fortifying the organizational culture. Implementation committees should maintain a working relationship with the council on behalf of the Fire crews.

Renumeration and back pay	Stations
Fully paid and up to date	91
Partially paid	73
Not Paid	20
No Response	17

Driver Mechanic (DM Role)	Stations
Positions Not Advertised	106
Positions Filled	59
Positions Advertised	19
No Response	17

Does your station use an app to manage time off?	Stations	iFire	Whats App	Online Spreadsheet
Yes	34	19	19	1
No	150	0	0	0
No Response	17	0	0	0

Are you aware of your employee benefits via your council?	Stations
No	160
Yes	24
No Response	17

Recruitment	Stations
Campaign Started	84
Campaign Completed - Interviews to be scheduled	54
Campaign Not Started	46
No Response	17

Are you obliged to stay at the station for the duration of a red weather warning?	Stations
No	157
Yes	27
No Response	17

Wicklow Firefighters Survey

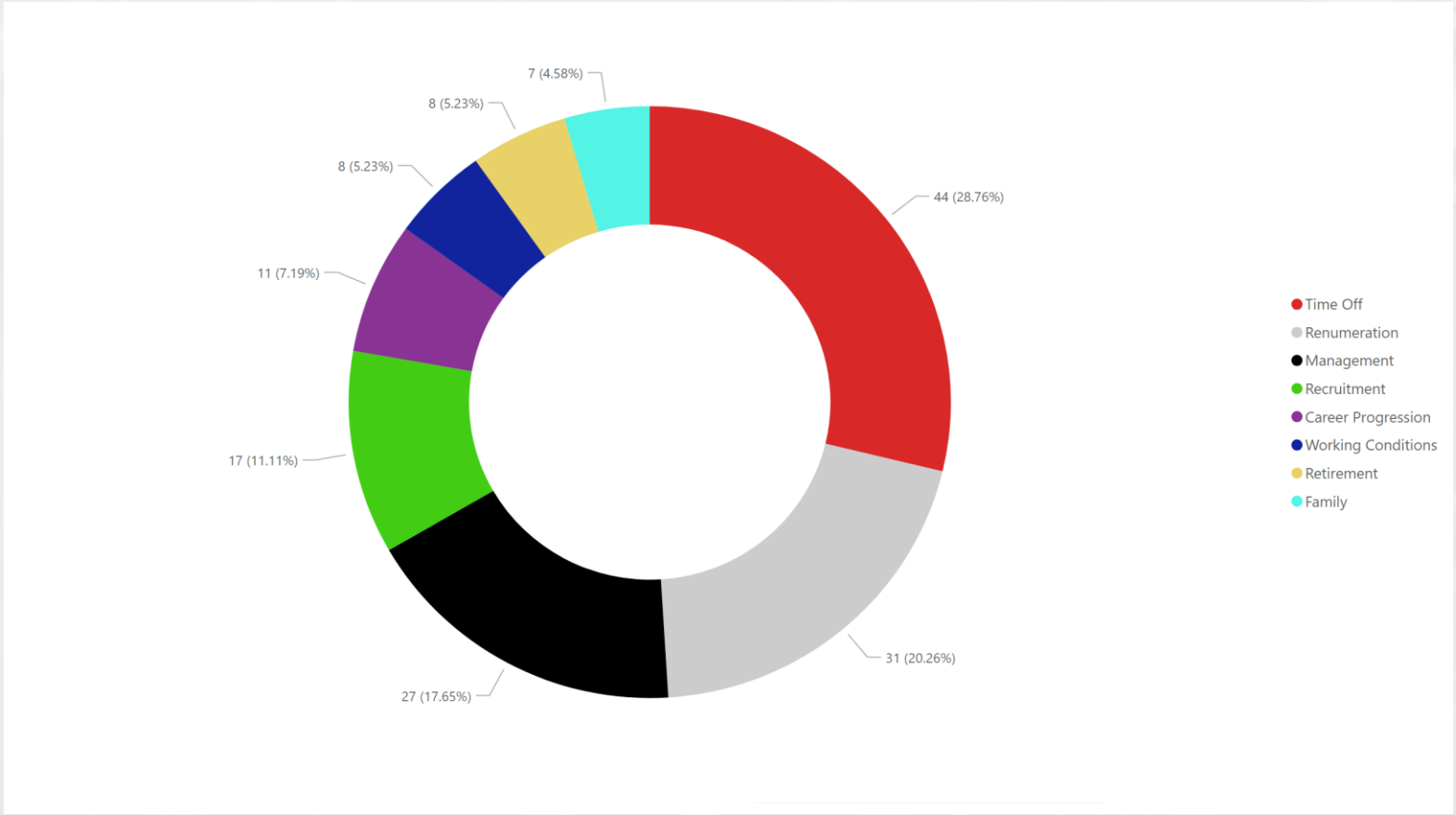
Wicklow Firefighters conducted a survey in October 2023. This chart is one of its findings.

This chart outlines the reasons why firefighters in Wicklow would leave the service.

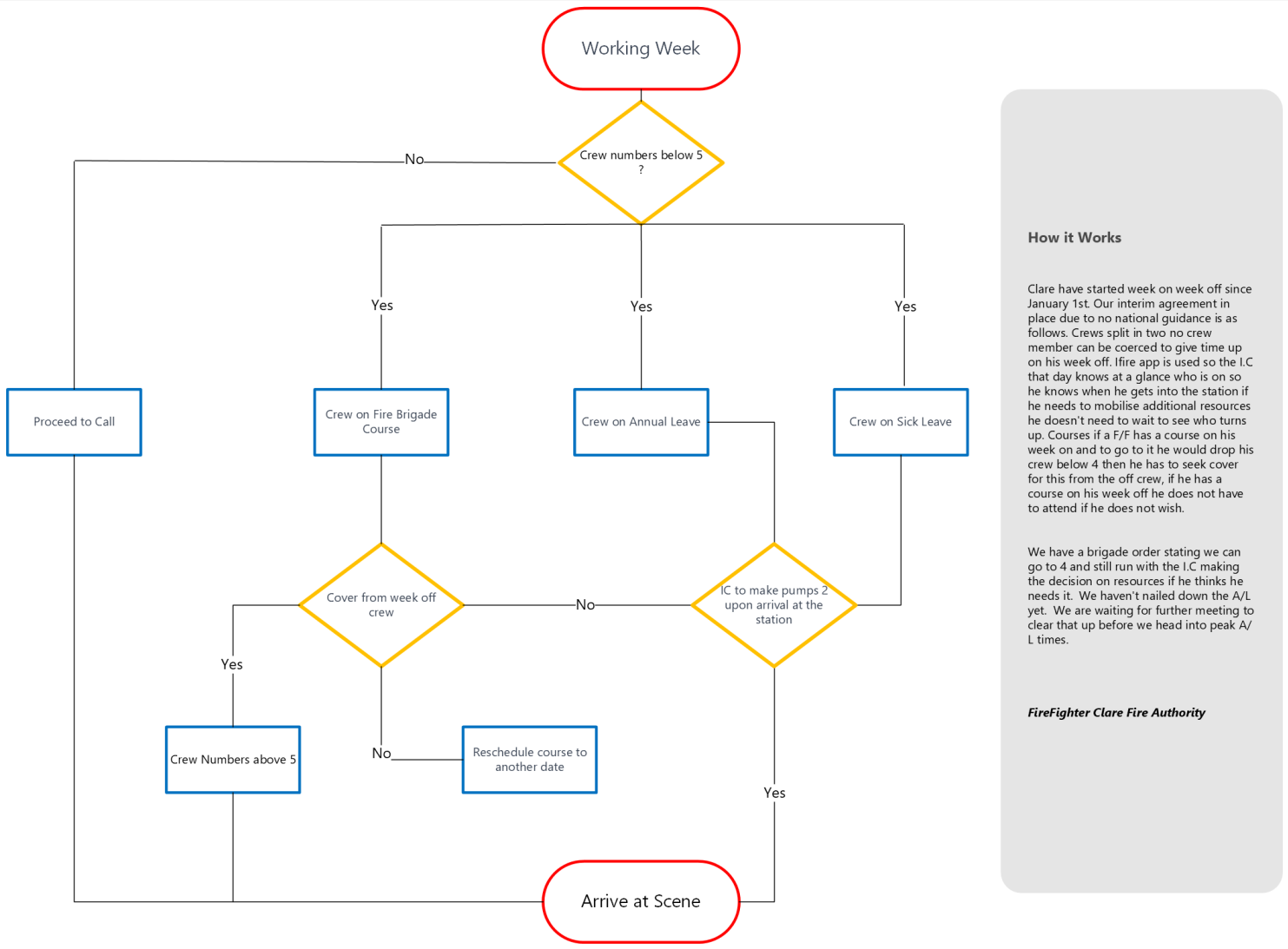
Time Off and Renumeration represents 49.02%, clearly the most difficult issue facing RFF in Wicklow.

Both issues are big issues for firefighters on the ground. This is the reason why Fire Authorities need to work with the implementation committees to deliver week on week off and fortnightly pay as a matter of urgency.

The following slides outline the existing solutions to week on week off in Clare, Carlow and Tipperary. These solutions should be used as templates elsewhere.



Clare Week On Week Off Solution



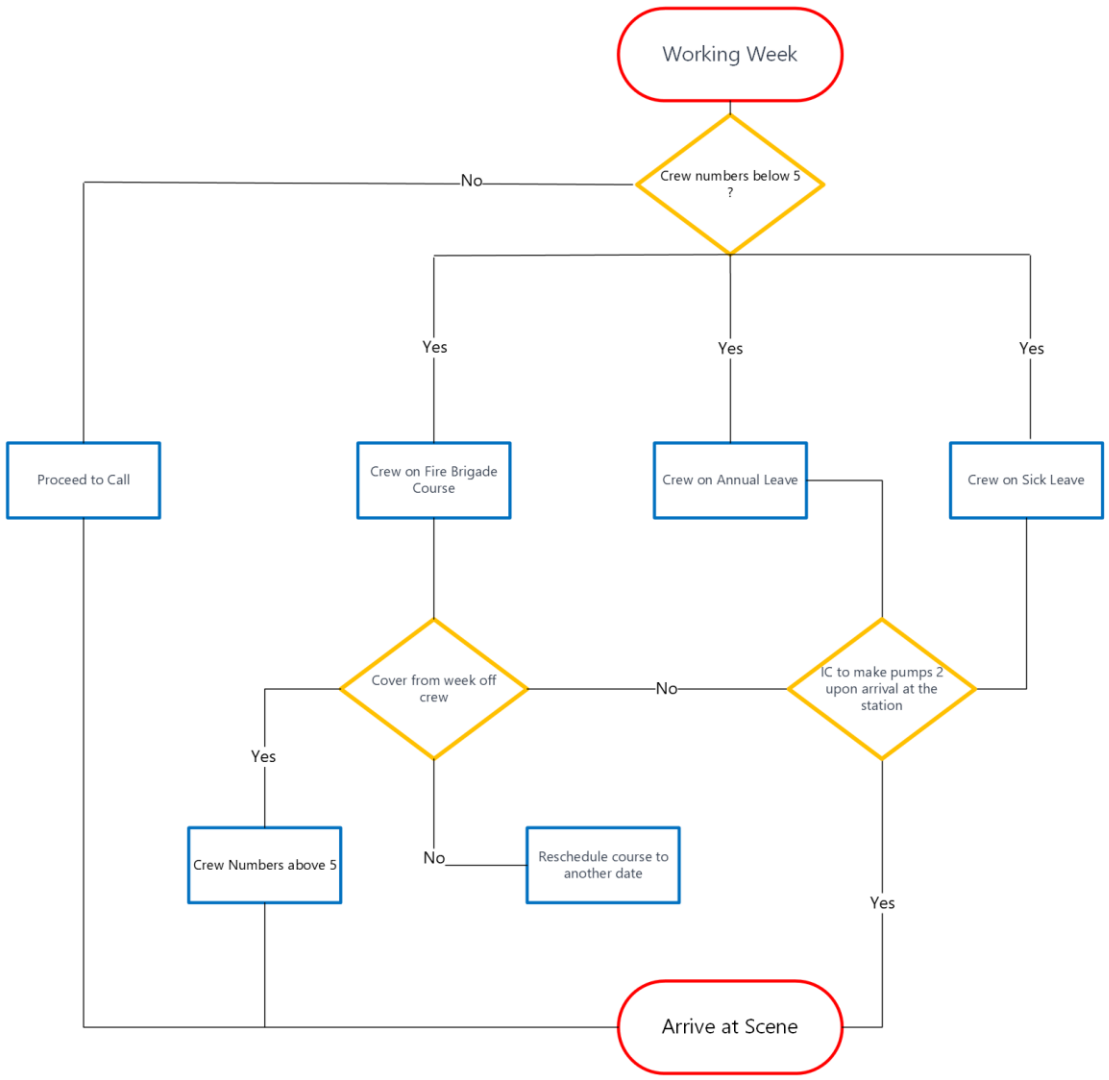
How it Works

Clare have started week on week off since January 1st. Our interim agreement in place due to no national guidance is as follows. Crews split in two no crew member can be coerced to give time up on his week off. Ifire app is used so the I.C that day knows at a glance who is on so he knows when he gets into the station if he needs to mobilise additional resources he doesn't need to wait to see who turns up. Courses if a F/F has a course on his week on and to go to it he would drop his crew below 4 then he has to seek cover for this from the off crew, if he has a course on his week off he does not have to attend if he does not wish.

We have a brigade order stating we can go to 4 and still run with the I.C making the decision on resources if he thinks he needs it. We haven't nailed down the A/L yet. We are waiting for further meeting to clear that up before we head into peak A/L times.

FireFighter Clare Fire Authority

Carlow Week On Week Off Solution



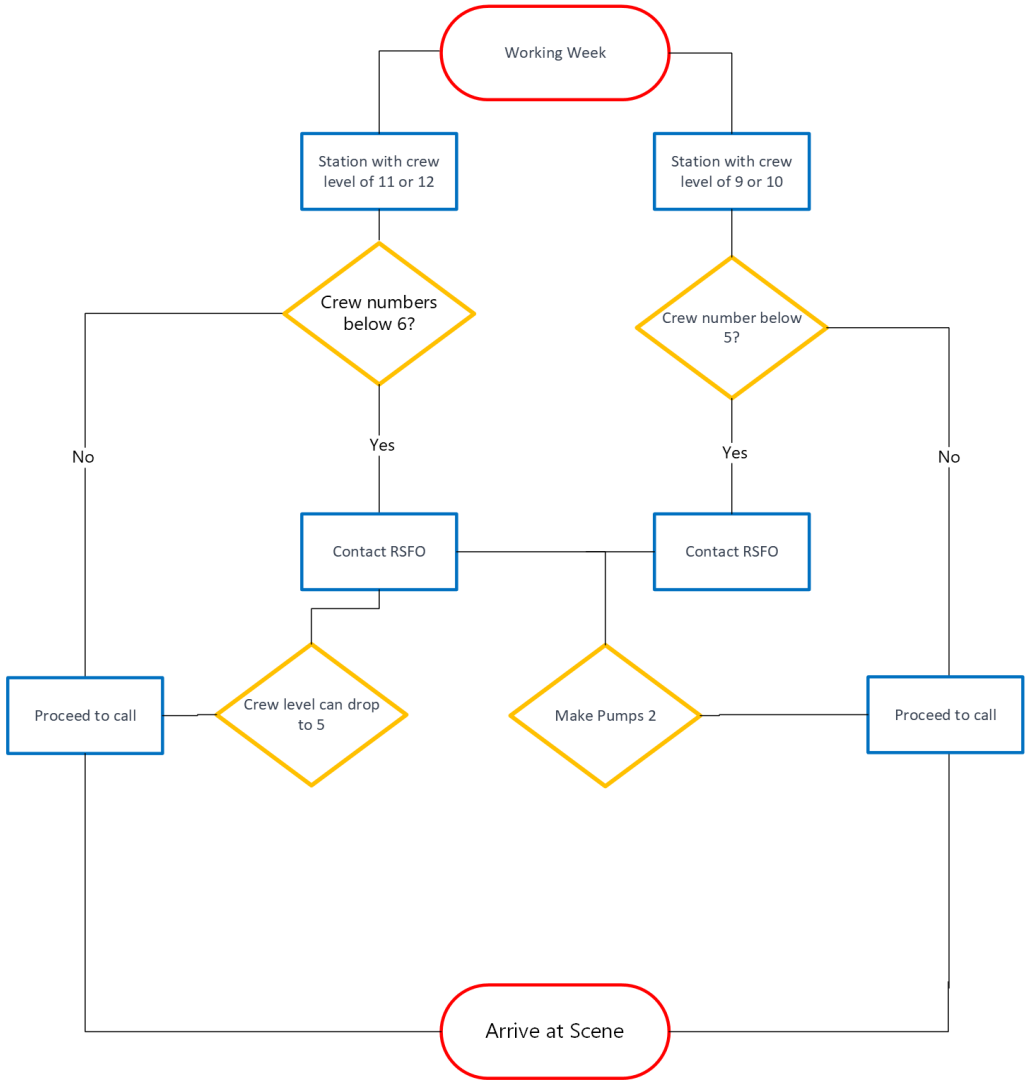
How it Works

Total of 9 Crew inclusive of the Station Officer. We have been operating a week on week off since January 2024. Our SACFO has agreed to this week on week off provided we guarantee him a minimum of 5 personal every week. Our SACFO has provided us with a week off week on calendar to help us maintain this system. We are currently running an aggressive recruit campaign. management have made every effort to recruit in Carlow and continue to do so. That's the current situation, stations with 9 men are working on off roster providing 5 men per week. If it drops to 4 due to courses, they are cancelling the course for the students to keep it at 5. If it drops to 4 for any reason due to sickness next pump is made up.

Regarding dropping to 4, our SACFO has not given permission to do so however should we find our crews dropping to 4 due to sickness or annual leave it's the responsibility of the station officer to inform the rostered officer and make arrangements with control regards attaching another pump, should we drop due to courses our SACFO has removed students and placed them on the next available course to maintain minimum manning levels, our SACFO has also organised courses on Saturday to accommodate lads working and availability.

Station Officer Carlow Fire Authority

Tipperary Week On Week Off Solution



How it Works

Following on from a "strike committee" meeting held in Templemore Fire Station on the morning of Dec 3rd it was discussed that in the absence of national guidance an interim arrangement be put in place to facilitate fire stations that wish to transition to the "week on / week off" model of an interim / trial basis. The arrangement is non-binding on any station, and it is envisaged that this arrangement will only remain live until such time as national clarification / guidance around the topic of the "week on / week off" is received and implemented locally, or otherwise by local agreement.

In stations that have a complement of 11 or 12, if due to a training course the crewing level of the station is adversely affected and the provision of the full crew of 6 is not possible then discussions with RSFO may permit the crew level to drop to 5 for the duration of the course. Similarly in stations with a complement of 9 or 10 all efforts shall be made to ensure a minimum crew of 5 available during training periods.

It is paramount that this arrangement servers a positive purpose. The above list is not envisaged to be exhaustive but rather a basic guidance to allow station crews and management to navigate this transition. If any substantive issues arises on either side that is not covered in the above and a decision is made that it needs resolution then agreement between management and the strike committee will attempt to be reached, if the issue is not substantive then it shall be parked pending the expected national guidance.

Station to make all efforts to maintain a crew of 6 available for calls at all times where they have a complement of 11 or 12 to draw from. Crews that have a complement of 9 or 10 will be required to provide a minimum crew of 5 at all times. Fire Service management & HR will endeavour to recruit all stations to 12 fire personnel.

Annual leave will be managed at station level, every effort should be made to maintain the respective crew level of 5 or 6 depending on complement (9/10 or 11/12) in the station however at no stage should the crew numbers drop below 5.
Where available crew levels are expected to drop below minimum stated above consultation with RSFO will be undertaken.

Station Officer Tipperary Fire Authority

Conclusion

In conclusion, this survey, encompassing over 91% of all Fire Stations nationwide, presents a comprehensive overview, with representation from all 26 Fire Authorities employing Retained Firefighters. Notably, Cork City, the 27th Fire Authority without Retained Firefighters, was not included in this study.

As Firefighters, our earnest desire is for the full implementation of the WRC agreement. We advocate for this process to be executed in good faith and promptly. Urgent attention is sought for addressing significant issues, particularly the perceived inequities in time-off policies among different Fire Authorities. Additionally, frustrations arise from third-party contractors like MyPay and Gartan, who have not yet provided solutions for the reasonable request of transitioning from quarterly to fortnightly payments.

This document aims to foster cohesion among Fire Authorities, encouraging them to embrace established, effective solutions and address issues impacting their workforce. It is crucial for Fire Authorities to comprehend and actively seek resolutions for challenges affecting their employees.

Now is the time for Retained Firefighters to set aside their frustrations and focus on their essential role in ensuring community safety. This can only be achieved when decisions aligning with the WRC are endorsed by Chief Fire Officers and Local Authorities. We call upon Chief Fire Officers and County Councils to take the lead, facilitating the necessary changes and fostering a safer and improved environment for all.

Disclaimer

This survey and its corresponding report have been undertaken and compiled in a personal capacity by a small group of Retained Firefighters. The information presented herein reflects the views and feedback gathered from Fire Stations across the country regarding the implementation of the WRC agreement. It is important to note that this document is not an official representation of the Retained Fire Service, Senior Management, or Local Fire Authorities.

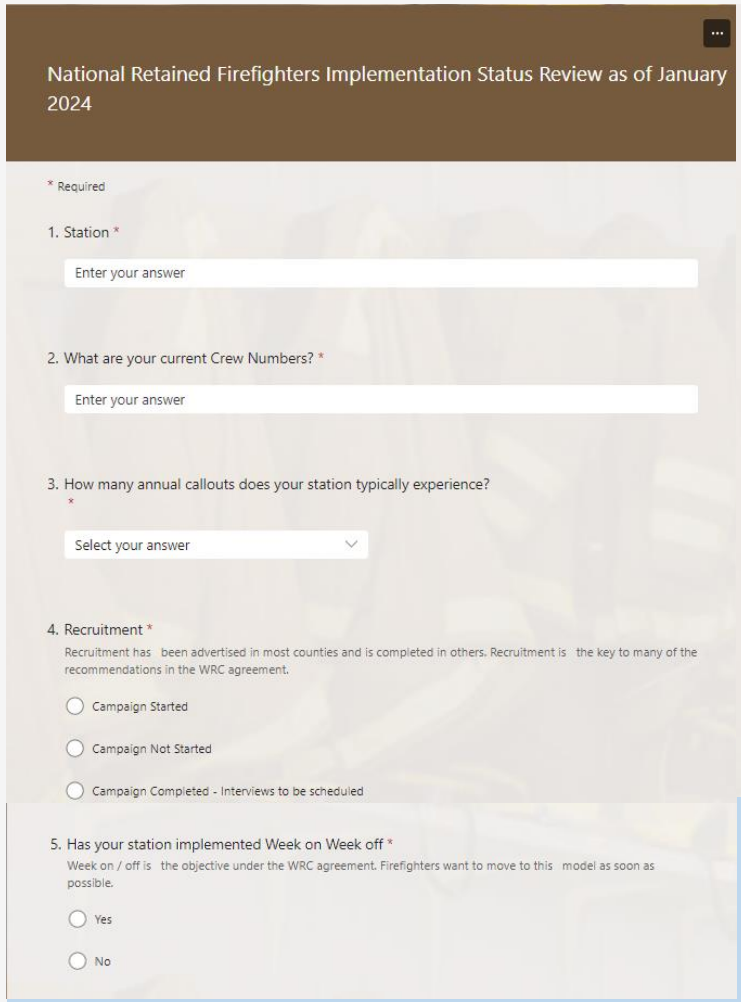
The purpose of this survey was to create a snapshot of the status nationwide, aiming to empower Retained Firefighters to advocate for the agreed-upon changes that are yet to be implemented. The findings are presented in various charts and will be shared with all Retained Firefighters, as well as anyone interested in reviewing the information.

It is acknowledged that the content may not align with the perspectives of Senior Management within the Retained Fire Service and Local Fire Authorities. This report serves as an independent initiative to foster awareness and discussion within the Retained Firefighting community.

Readers are encouraged to interpret the information with the understanding that it does not carry official endorsement. Any concerns or discrepancies with the data should be addressed to the individuals responsible for the survey, rather than being attributed to the official stance of the Retained Fire Service or Local Fire Authorities.

This disclaimer aims to clarify the context and origin of the information presented in the report, emphasizing its unofficial nature and the personal capacity in which it was compiled.

Survey questions



National Retained Firefighters Implementation Status Review as of January 2024

* Required

1. Station *

Enter your answer

2. What are your current Crew Numbers? *

Enter your answer

3. How many annual callouts does your station typically experience? *

Select your answer

4. Recruitment *

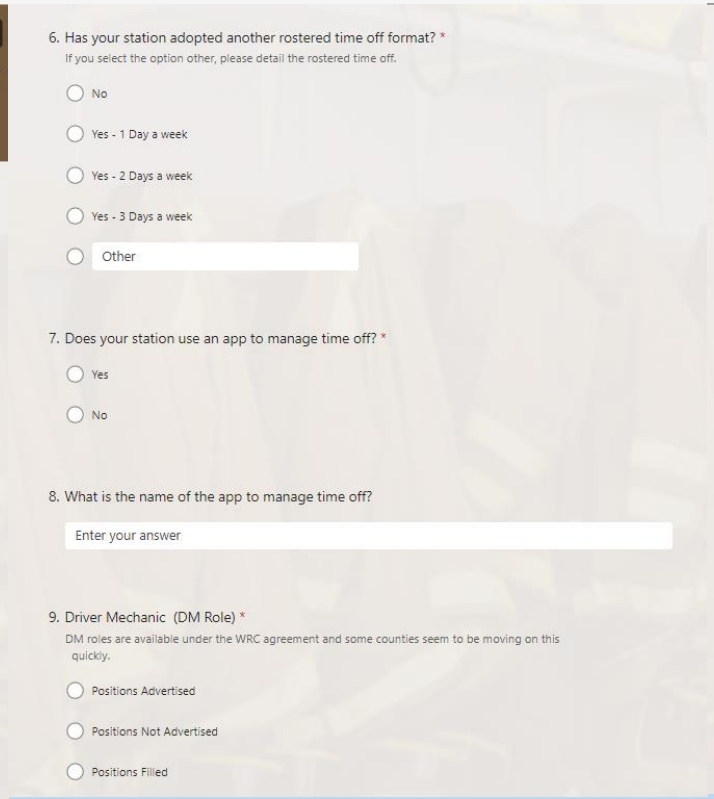
Recruitment has been advertised in most counties and is completed in others. Recruitment is the key to many of the recommendations in the WRC agreement.

- Campaign Started
- Campaign Not Started
- Campaign Completed - Interviews to be scheduled

5. Has your station implemented Week on Week off *

Week on / off is the objective under the WRC agreement. Firefighters want to move to this model as soon as possible.

- Yes
- No



6. Has your station adopted another rostered time off format? *

If you select the option other, please detail the rostered time off.

- No
- Yes - 1 Day a week
- Yes - 2 Days a week
- Yes - 3 Days a week
- Other

7. Does your station use an app to manage time off? *

- Yes
- No

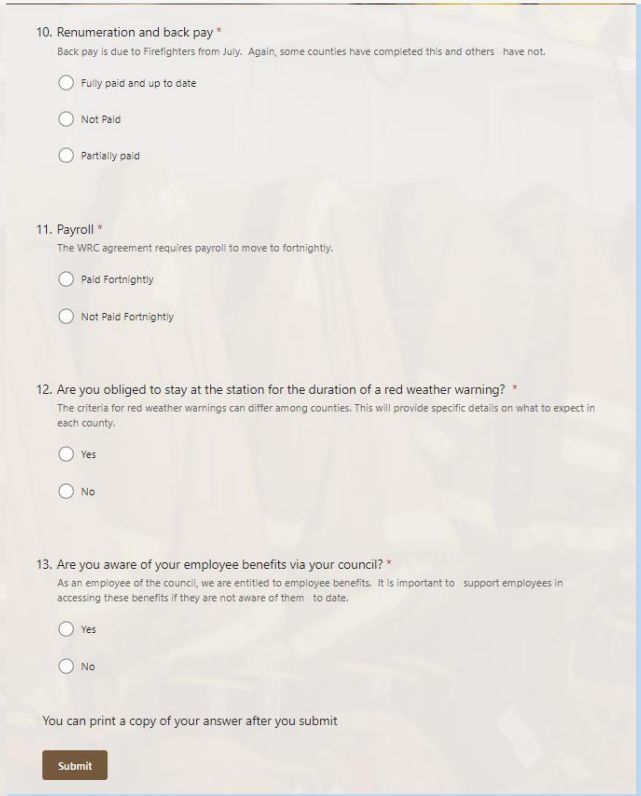
8. What is the name of the app to manage time off?

Enter your answer

9. Driver Mechanic (DM Role) *

DM roles are available under the WRC agreement and some counties seem to be moving on this quickly.

- Positions Advertised
- Positions Not Advertised
- Positions Filled



10. Renumeration and back pay *

Back pay is due to Firefighters from July. Again, some counties have completed this and others have not.

- Fully paid and up to date
- Not Paid
- Partially paid

11. Payroll *

The WRC agreement requires payroll to move to fortnightly.

- Paid Fortnightly
- Not Paid Fortnightly

12. Are you obliged to stay at the station for the duration of a red weather warning? *

The criteria for red weather warnings can differ among counties. This will provide specific details on what to expect in each county.

- Yes
- No

13. Are you aware of your employee benefits via your council? *

As an employee of the council, we are entitled to employee benefits. It is important to support employees in accessing these benefits if they are not aware of them to date.

- Yes
- No

You can print a copy of your answer after you submit

Submit

References

The following references were researched to validate the information for the survey. This report has been submitted to SPITU on the 07/02/2024.

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- Email from Sligo County Council
- Email from Kerry County Council

Documents:

- Waterford Fire Service - Retained Fire Stations – Working Arrangements document.
- Wicklow County Survey conducted by Firefighters from Wicklow

References

Websites:

1. Fire Ireland Website: https://www.fireireland.ie/ (*Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage site that lists all 27 Fire Authorities*)
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21. Westmeath County Council - Fire Service: https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/emergencyservices/fireservice/
22. Wexford County Council - Apply to Visit Your Local Fire Station: https://wexford-self.achieveservice.com/service/Apply_to_visit_your_local_Fire_Station
23. Wicklow County Council - Fire Stations: https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Environment/Fire-Services/Fire-Stations