

Mutual exchange of duties policy

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Owner:	Assistant Commissioner, Fire Stations
Responsible work team:	Central Operations

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the arrangements for mutual exchanges of duty between station based operational staff up to and including the rank of Station Officer. This policy applies to operational employees.
- 1.2 This policy should be applied in line with the Brigade's values:
 - Service – We put the public first.
 - Courage – We step up to the challenge.
 - Learning – We listen so that we can improve.
 - Teamwork – We work together and include everyone.
 - Equity – We treat everyone fairly according to their needs.
 - Integrity – We act with honesty.

2 Mutual exchange of duties

- 2.1 Exchange of duties will take place under the following conditions:

Prior to change of watch (early relief)

- Early relief of duty may be allowed before the end of a shift but may not be allowed at any time during a shift that is being worked as pre-arranged overtime.
- The person relieving must be someone coming on duty at the following change of shift, who should report to the officer in charge of the watch and obtain their approval for the early relief of duty.
- The person being relieved must inform the officer in charge before they come off duty.
- Early relief of duty is not permitted earlier than two hours, nor later than 30 minutes prior to the end of a shift.
- The person relieving a member of staff will relieve only a person whose job they would have taken over at the change of watch in the ordinary way. However with the express permission of the officer of the day (OOD) a person may relieve another person who has similar attributes.
- The early relief of duty facility is not to be used to facilitate regular alternative shift patterns for staff or for whole watches. It is designed to assist individual members of staff to manage their caring responsibilities and personal commitments. For more regular arrangements, a permanent change of contract should be applied for.

Whole shift

- Exchanges of duty for a whole shift will be allowed when other arrangements to facilitate a person's required absence cannot be made.
- No person is permitted to perform two consecutive shifts as a result of an exchange of a whole shift.
- The exchange of duties must be authorised by your leading firefighter, sub officer or station officer (the 'authorising officer'). In addition, exchanges of duty can be authorised by the base station commander, a station commander within the borough/neighbouring borough or OOD

or above. The authorising officer must be in a more senior role to the individual requesting the exchange of duties.

- The two persons exchanging duties must be of the same rank (as set out in the five groups below) and both have matching skills as applicable to the station(s) where the mutual exchanges are taking place. However a mutual exchange between staff who do not have the same rank or matching skills will be permitted, providing the exchange will not cause a standby requirement, an unacceptable shortage of skills or an appliance to come off the run; and that the request is made no more than 28 days from the date of exchange.
 - Group 1 – FF(D), FF
 - Group 2 - LFF(D) and LFF
 - Group 3 - LFF and Sub(O) and SubO (D)
 - Group 4 - SubO, SubO(D) StnO and StnO(D)
- The provision that staff should have matching skills will be relaxed between a FF and MD, as well as consideration being given when the FRU or Aerial skill is involved.
- If a LFF, undertaking long-term acting up to SubO(D), makes an exchange with a SubO and their long term temporary ends, the following will apply:
 - If the acting ends before either exchange duty takes place, then the mutual exchange will be cancelled unless the first exchange duty is due to take place within the proceeding 7 days, in which case the appropriate point below will apply.
 - If the acting ends when the SubO exchange duty has taken place, but before the LFF exchange duty has taken place, the LFF will undertake their exchange duty as a T/SubO.
 - If the acting ends when the LFF exchange duty has taken place, but before the SubO exchange duty has taken place, the SubO exchange duty will not be cancelled, but this may involve the SubO undertaking a standby duty in accordance with para. 2.6.
- Similar arrangements will apply to a FF acting up long term to LFF(D) who arranges a mutual exchange with a LFF(D), and therefore for the equivalent third sub-bullet point the LFF(D) exchange duty will not be cancelled, but this may involve the LFF(D) undertaking a standby duty in accordance with para. 2.6.
- The reciprocal arrangement should take place within 6 months of the initial exchange of duty taking place. That date should not be entered on StARS or agreed more than 28 days before the exchange is due to take place. In exceptional circumstances this 6 month period may be extended with the agreement of the authorising officer.

2.2 It is the responsibility of the person desiring the exchange to identify someone willing to exchange duty. Once an exchange of shifts has been agreed by two staff and approved by the authorising officer, then both staff are committed to carrying out the exchange and will be responsible for ensuring that they cover those shifts agreed as an exchange. Should they **wish** to withdraw from the agreed exchange this must be by mutual agreement/acceptance and the authorising officer must be advised. Should the agreement break down for any reason e.g. sickness. at any time prior to the exchange taking place, then the person who should be on duty should be notified by an officer from within the borough that they must either:

- (a) Find a suitable alternative replacement; or
- (b) Report for the duty in question.

In the event that these are not possible, and the person initiating the mutual exchange fails to report for duty, the sub officer or above will:

- (c) Investigate the circumstances why the breakdown occurred and remove the privilege for further mutual exchanges from whoever is found to be responsible (if appropriate) until such time as deemed appropriate by the sub officer or above.
- 2.3 At the discretion of the sub officer or above, staff can be prevented from undertaking mutual exchanges if it is apparent the system is being abused.
- 2.4 An exchange of duties for a whole shift effectively means the staff involved are attached to the appropriate watch for that duty (StARS will reflect this).
- 2.5 A person performing an exchange of duties may be required to undertake standby duties as determined by the Control Operational Resourcing and Event (CORE) team.
- 2.6 Following an announcement of strike action, if a person requires a mutual exchange on a strike affected shift, once approved by the appropriate officer, the mutual exchange will be considered by the Establishment and Performance Team who will be responsible for final authorisation.

3 Authorisation process

- 3.1 You should email your request for an exchange of duties for a whole shift providing at least 7 days notice so that it can be approved by an authorising officer before the mutual exchange takes place. A shorter period of notice may be accepted in exceptional circumstances.
- 3.2 Authorisation must be given by your leading firefighter or above, who must be in a more senior role to the applicant.
- 3.3 The authorising officer must ensure that there is prior agreement from a leading firefighter or above for you to carry out the reciprocal duty, and that both you and the person due to carry out the reciprocal duty are not on any planned training courses on the mutual exchange dates. Mutual exchange will not be permitted where training courses have already been planned and the staff formally advised.
- 3.4 Staff performing an exchange of duties will assume all responsibilities and undertake the duties of the person they exchanged duties with. Authorising officers must satisfy themselves that the exchange is appropriate in relation to any outstanding action plans or on-going managerial action.
- 3.5 Additional time that is worked as a result of a mutual exchange of duties cannot be claimed as overtime. However if whilst carrying out the exchange duty you are detained at the end of the shift due to operational reasons e.g. detained at an incident, overtime will be payable in accordance with the overtime policy.
- 3.6 USAR personnel who are level 3 responders who wish to undertake a mutual exchange of duties on a recall day should first contact the Establishment and Performance Team to ensure there is virtual leave available. Once virtual leave is agreed, a request for a mutual exchange can be processed by the authorising officer.
- 3.7 For staff seeking a mutual exchange who are either:
 - (a) Supernumerary;
 - (b) On leave and wish to perform a mutual exchange;
 - (c) Working a non-standard shift pattern.

The authorising officer should email EstablishmentandPerformanceTeam@london-fire.gov.uk confirming their agreement to the request, for StARS to be amended.

4 Records

- 4.1 Responsibility for keeping proof of an agreed exchange lies with the staff in receipt of each exchange. They must create an email chain involving all parties, the appropriate line managers, and the agreed exchanger. All must have clearly stated their agreement to the proposed exchange including details in advance in line with the time frames in paragraph 3.1 above.
- 4.2 A failure to secure this in email form will leave the person liable should there be any disagreement or break down of the exchange. Authorising officers must note any agreement to exchange duty on the StARS record of the person who has requested the exchange, i.e. a comment must be made on the individual's PARC to reflect the agreement, including the name, station and watch of the other employee involved.
- 4.3 Authorising officers are responsible for the mutual exchange to be entered on StARS with the exception of those detailed in paragraph 3.7 which can only be entered by the Establishment and Performance Team.
- 4.4 Station Commanders will review this process on a regular basis, looking at all aspects of exchanges and can refuse an exchange duty request if the process is not correctly followed as described in this policy.
- 4.5 Personal data shall be processed in accordance with Policy number 351 – Data protection and privacy policy.

5 Help and support

- 5.1 Please contact the Establishment and Performance Team by email to EstablishmentandPerformanceTeam@london-fire.gov.uk.
- 5.2 This policy may also be available on request in other alternative accessible formats as set out in Policy number 290 – Guidance note on translation and interpretation. Please contact Communications on extension 30753 and by email to communications.team@london-fire.gov.uk to discuss your needs and options.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	25/04/24	SDIA	L - 10/05/23	HSWIA	10/05/23	RA	NA
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 5, para 4.5 and para 5.2	Data protection details added. Access to alternative policy format details added.	09/04/2024
Page 6	Equality impact assessment date updated.	26/04/2024
Throughout	Establishment and Performance Team details added, ownership of policy transferred to Central Operations.	07/05/2024
Page 4, para 2.5	Reference to RMC changed to CORE team.	23/07/2025

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Duties	Employment
Mutual exchange	

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification