

## Fire Service Chaplaincy

### Chris Warren

On April 1<sup>st</sup> Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services joined together. There was a major event at the new H Q in Salisbury. At this event one Chaplain from each of the two services spoke about their work to the invited guests.

On the previous day Dorset had a special event giving thanks for 68 years of service to the country. Prayers were led by one of the Chaplains and another had the privilege of being part of the flag changing party.

Traditionally Dorset had one Chaplain for the whole county who would appear at a few specific and special events. Gill Warburton the Equality and Diversity Manager has a vision to recruit Chaplains connected to some of the bigger stations. There are now nine in place.

My original expectation was of firefighters waiting at the station for a 'shout'. They would therefore have plenty of time to sit around and chat. The reality at most Dorset stations is very different as staff members are 'retained'. This is a bit like lifeboat crew and they are called in as needed. At Dorchester, the county town, there are two 'watches' one training on Monday evenings and the other on Wednesday evenings. They have full programmes from checking the engines (pumps) to exercises to lectures to training for qualifying firefighters. This makes contact more challenging. A Chaplain needs to look out for opportunities to ask about what is being done to begin engaging and seek to listen.

Our chaplaincy work is as with all others – a recognition that we are in people's place of work and so they need to take the initiative in conversations. Being a firefighter is very challenging not only in terms of the nature of the work but on balancing their day job and family life with their firefighting. This means that some very meaningful conversations take place.



Our role is not something that has quick results but over time with consistency and commitment trust builds and now I am known as 'our Chris'. The plan is to expand my role in the near future to the office staff that remains on site.



One of the amazing things about Dorset is that we have 100 volunteers who do amazing work representing the service at events and doing home safety checks as prevention is increasingly important.

I also like the new slogan on the side of the engines 'passionate about changing and saving lives'. A very Christian concept!

