

Cabinet
21 October 2025

Fire and Rescue Cover Model Review

Report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet are RECOMMENDED to Support the Fire and Rescue Cover Model being taken forward to public consultation with a view to authority being delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety Services (CSS) to undertake a 12-week employee, stakeholder and public consultation on the proposals and to report back to Cabinet thereafter.**

Executive Summary

“As Oxfordshire grows and changes, we need to ensure that our fire stations, resources and people are in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of our communities and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of our service”

2. The primary duties of the Fire and Rescue Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) are contained within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004¹. This requires the provision, training and equipping of the service to provide:
 - Firefighting
 - Protection of people and property from fire
 - Fire Safety promotion
 - Road Traffic Collision rescues
 - Other emergency responses to civil emergencies
3. In addition to these statutory obligations, there are approved National Fire Standards² which Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) are required to give due regard to. This includes making decisions about the deployment of resources based on prioritised risk levels and planning assumptions. To achieve this, consideration should be given to internal and external resource availability (people, financial and physical), this should include collaborative, cross-border and national resilience assistance. As part of the standard, OFRS are also required to consider strategic influences, such as consultation feedback, stakeholder engagement and political objectives.
4. The Fire and Rescue Service in Oxfordshire is at a crossroads. The traditional on-call firefighter model has become increasingly difficult to sustain, especially during

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents>

² <https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/>

daytime hours. This is largely due to changes in how people live and work, making it harder to find individuals able to commit significant time to on-call duties. As a result, there are periods when many of our on-call fire engines are unavailable, even during peak demand, forcing the service to rely on reactive measures like moving crews and paying overtime just to maintain minimum coverage and impacting response times. This not only strains resources but also limits the ability of firefighters to engage in vital preventative and community safety work, which is essential for reducing incidents and keeping Oxfordshire safe.

5. Yet, this challenge presents an extraordinary opportunity to reshape the service for the future. By adopting a new cover model, the service can better align resources with when and where emergencies are most likely to occur, ensuring faster response times and a more resilient workforce. The proposed changes will allow the service to draw on the strengths of both the on-call and whole-time teams, creating a more balanced and effective approach. This will not only improve emergency response but also free up capacity for essential prevention and community engagement, making Oxfordshire safer for everyone. Through consultation with the public, workforce, and partners, the service can build a model that is fit for the future, one that supports the dedication of our people while meeting the evolving needs of the community.

Sustainability Implications

6. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) has been drafted and will remain a live document throughout the internal and public consultation and decision-making process. The assessment has indicated that the proposals would have a net positive contribution on the climate with reductions and environmental improvements in the council building portfolio, the reduction in Fire and Rescue Service fleet and the reduction in commuter mileage for employees.

Legal Implications

The legal implications section should be completed by a member of the legal service

7. The County Council's powers and responsibilities are principally set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Fire and Rescue Services have a duty to regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 (the Framework) when carrying out their functions (s21 of the Act). One of the priorities of the Framework is to be accountable to communities for the services they provide (paragraph 1.7 of The Framework). This includes providing the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement and to have scrutiny arrangements in place (paragraph 7.1 of the Framework). Whilst it is not an absolute duty to adhere to the Framework, in practice this means that a compelling case would need to be made to justify a departure from the requirements laid down in the Framework.

8. One way to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service is accountable to its communities may involve engaging with the public, including by way of public consultation, to ensure any policy decision/ change aligns with the needs of the community.
9. Under the Localism Act 2011, there is a duty to promote community engagement. Although this act primarily focuses on local governance, the FRS, as a public body, is encouraged to consult and involve the public in decision-making processes related to policy changes.
10. The Gunning consultation principles criteria for public consultations as laid out in 1985 are:
Gunning Principle 1: Consultations must occur while proposals are still at a formative stage.
Gunning Principle 2: Sufficient information needs to be supplied for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'.
Gunning Principle 3: There needs to be an adequate time for the consultees to consider the proposal and respond.
Gunning Principle 4: Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before decisions are made.

Comments checked by:

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Financial Implications

The financial implications section should be completed by a member of the finance service

11. The paper covers several options, including linked options. For the purposes of financial considerations this has been separated in table 2 within the exempt sections annex to show both revenue and capital impacts. Costs have been included at the current (operational) view, including estimated costs.. Based on the information and estimates included both option 1a/1b are not self-financing from a capital perspective and to enable delivery of Rewley Road rebuild costs requires adoption of option 3.
12. The potential of options 1b and option 2 are not included in the existing capital programme.
13. It is also important to consider the existing annual pressure the service currently has of between £500k-£750k and depending on the options selected could allow the mitigation of this deficit.
14. It should be recognised that the approach taken by the service has not run scenarios to understand the financial versus performance impact of changes in

operating locations; It is based on improvement to performance using the existing budget.

15. From a pure financial option 8 would contribute to addressing the current financial pressures in the service and as stated not have a significant impact on performance levels. For clarity, a table summarising and comparing the options are provided in the **Error! Reference source not found.**appendix within the exempt section annex.
16. All fire and rescue services have strategically committed to enhancing wholetime firefighter productivity by 3% and achieving 2% non-pay efficiency savings (Section 36). If both were cashable savings it would equate to £821k & £127k based on the 2025/26 budget.
17. The detail behind the summary positions have been worked through with the Service and the Property & Assets Team. These are only indicative capital values at this stage.
18. The options presented do not create a balanced capital position and to achieve them, additional funds would be required to be generated.

Comments checked by:

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NAME

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex:

Exempt annex: Exempt report sections

Exempt annex: FRS Cover Model Equality Impact Assessment

Exempt annex: FRS Cover Model Climate Impact Assessment

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