



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee Annual Meeting

Monday 17th July 2023 at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) Headquarters,
Sterling Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2DU

Minutes

Present: Councillor Kate Gregory, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Glynis Phillips, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Simon Rouse, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Matthew Walsh, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Simon Werner, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Councillor Peter Frewer, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

In

Attendance: Rob McDougall, Chief Fire Officer (OFRS)
Jason Thelwell, Chief Fire Officer (BFRS)
Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance (BFRS)
Simon Tuffley, Area Commander – Senior Responsible Officer (BFRS)
Jim Powell, Area Manager - Senior Responsible Officer (RBFRS)
Simon Harris, Group Manager (TVFCS)
Ryan Maslen, Deputy Head of Finance (RBFRS)
Chris Barefield, Personal Assistant/Committee Administrator (OFRS)

01. ELECTION OF 2023/24 CHAIR

Due to the recent change of Cabinet Member for Oxfordshire it was proposed and seconded that:

RESOLVED – that Councillor Rouse be appointed to preside over this meeting.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Gregory be elected Chair of the TVFCS Joint Committee for 2023/24.

02. APPOINTMENT OF 2023/24 VICE-CHAIR

It being proposed and seconded that:

RESOLVED – that Councillor Werner be appointed as Vice-Chair of TVFCS Joint Committee for 2023/24.

03. APOLOGIES

Councillor Matthew Walsh – late arrival
Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS)
Jason Thelwell, Chief Fire Officer (BFRS)
Gabby Heycock – Area Manager – Senior Responsible Officer (OFRS)
Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (RBFRS)

04. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The were no declarations of interest received.

05. MINUTES AND RECORDED ACTIONS OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2022

Area Manager (RBFRS) has shared the slide regarding training cost but will re-share due to new committee membership.

SRO's had covered Industrial Action planning at the March Workshop.

Area Manager (RBFRS) will bring the results of the staff survey in respect of health and well-being to the Committee upon completion of the staff survey.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting on 15 December 2022 were an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

06. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

None received.

Councillor Phillips asked for an update on the pay award negotiations and Rob MacDougall (OFRS) advised that the offer of 7% for 2022 and 5% from July 2023, was accepted by the membership.

**07. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.5
(QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC)**

None received.

08. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Area Manager (BFRS) presented the report to provide a high-level summary of Thames Valley Fire Control (TVFCS) activity during 2022/23 and a look forward to 2023/24 along with key areas of work to continue making improvements to the TVFCS.

The following notable activity was highlighted:

- Impact of the weather conditions in summer 2022 where calls volumes were 45.53% higher in July and 70.74% higher in August.
- The involvement of TVFCS in the arrangements for the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with colleagues from a wide range of partners across the Thames Valley.
- A refresh of the TVFCS lighting solution was completed in Q1 2022/23 and has been very well received by staff with a reduction in the incidence of migraine headaches noted.

Cllr Gregory noted the call volume increase the previous year and asked whether the Service has the capacity to deal with increases if the weather continues in a similar vein. The Group Manager (TVFC) advised that the Service are trained for call taking in spate conditions recognising that the summer of 2022 was un-precedented. The Group Manager (TVFC) went on to say that when a spike in call volume occurs there is a corresponding dip in the speed of answering calls and there is a piece of work taking place to look at staff resilience which will include looking at how the Service responds to spikes.

Councillor Phillips congratulated all involved on the final budget position which saw a variance of 0.50%. Councillor Phillips went on to ask about the adoption of the Control National Operational Guidance and what more work was required to complete this. The Area Manager (RBFRS) referred back to the last Workshop where capacity had been discussed and Members had agreed that, as this was an operational matter, it was deferred to the Officers. Following the Workshop, Officers have worked together and secure a fixed-term Watch Manager post to work on a range of activities including the National Operational Guidance; however, new guidance does continue to be released. Councillor Phillips went on to ask if this guidance involved significant change and, the Area Manager (RBFRS) confirmed this was the case in terms

of Control standards and ways of working. He went on to say that any changes with costs attached would come back to the Committee.

Councillor Walsh asked how the attrition rate in TVFC compared to the national picture and, the Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that the turnover is indicative of the national picture with the North-West having the highest rate currently. He went on to say that there is work being undertaken by the NFCC to look at recruitment which, we are involved in and, this work is currently at the information gathering stage looking at causes, overtime costs etc. TVFCS will remain aligned and adopt best practice where suitable. Staff turnover has slowed down this year and, the Group Manager (TVFC) was hopeful that the previous year had been an outlier albeit, the situation continues to be monitored. Councillor Rouse stated that it would be good to drive our own actions in this area rather than await an NFCC report. The Area Manager (RBFRS) advised the Committee that the recruitment advert for the last two occasions had been revised to focus on different parts of the job as it was found that those applying did not fully understand the role, therefore the focus has shifted to focus on the more challenging areas and, this appears to be working

RESOLVED – the annual report was noted.

09. TVFCS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 AND Q1 FOR 2023/24

Area Manager (BFRS) presented the performance report which was following the new range of key performance measures introduced to improve and enhance the monitoring of the Service. Members were asked to confirm that they were comfortable with the format and, this was confirmed.

The report contains different types of target and methods of comparison. Some targets are aspirational, some are there to ensure minimum standards are met and others are there to identify exceptions within trends, allowing the service to identify possible needs for change/reaction.

Area Manager (BFRS) advised that of the 31 identified measures, 11 are currently reportable with further work taking place to report on measures such as, mobilisation times according to the type of incident and, calls per FTE call handler. The Q1 report for Members in September will include these measures.

Area Manager (BFRS) went on to detail the following performance highlights:

- Increased cumulative number of emergency calls taken which was heavily influenced by the summer pressures during July and August 2022 and, the busy period in December.
- The Service has consistently performed well in answering emergency calls within five seconds achieving a target of 94.6% which is above the target of 92% set by the Joint Coordination Group.

- Safeguarding referrals and the need to manage threats of arson increased significantly over the year when compared with the previous five-year average, increasing by 48% and 21% respectively.
- Employee headcount remains stable, however, staff turnover remained higher than our target and work continues to improve staff turnover.
- Long term absence levels have improved during the second half of the year whereas, short-term absence levels have remained higher than desired.

Councillor Phillips asked whether the report would be fully populated in September and the Area Manager (BFRS) advised that this is a work in progress to achieve this.

Councillor Rouse expressed surprised that the report did not include any Health and Safety statistics as these should be automatically available. Group Manager (TVFC) advised that the data is available but need to be separated from the overall RBFRS data and this had not been possible in time for the paper.

Councillor Rouse highlighted and error with 1.3 on page 17 as the amber stat should be greater than 3 and green should be less than 2.9.

With reference to the increase in safeguarding referrals and threats of arson, Councillor Rouse asked what was driving this and whether there was a need to be concerned. The Group Manager (TVFC) advised that safeguarding training is now much more embedded with staff able to recognise and refer to the right agencies through increased awareness. Whilst these referrals have increased, they do not take much capacity as they can be processed after the contact has been made in slower time. This is a societal issue and, the Service are seeing more calls from vulnerable people who may have spoken to many agencies already and then call the Fire Service. In respect of the threats to arson, the approach to gathering intelligence has matured and the report is showing a more accurate reflection. Councillor Rouse went on to ask whether safeguarding referrals are broken down to each Service and shared and the Group Manager (TVFC) confirmed this is the case. Area Manager (RBFRS) advised the Committee that the increase overall is indicative of what RBFRS are seeing in service which an increase by 1000% over the 5 years. The Chief Fire Officer (OFRS) raised the issue of the Police Right Care, Right Person Policy which is likely to lead to an increase in 999 calls to Fire as the Police will not be taking action. The Group Manager (TVFC) advised that the Control Room do refer back to the Police as the calls are often connected with Mental Health and the individuals will have called a number of agencies who, whilst taking actions, does tend to leave a period where the vulnerable person is still making emergency calls. The Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that this issue is being picked up through the Thames Valley Collaboration Board to understand the impact and how Services can work around it, as operational crews are left on scene for longer. Councillor Rouse asked whether Thames Valley Police has introduced this policy and that there would be benefit in discussing this further at the next session to understand the impact more fully.

**Area
Manager
(BFRS) to
review the
stat.**

Councillor Phillips suggested that it would be beneficial to highlight any changes whether good or bad.

Councillor Rouse thanked the Area Manager (BFRS) for the report which was much clearer in presentation.

RESOLVED – the Committee noted the report.

10. BUDGET 2022/23 OUTTURN

The Deputy Head of Finance (RBFRS) provided the Committee with an update on the 2022/23 revenue budget outturn position for TVFCS and provided an overview of the budget process for the new members. Work will commence in September to build up a detailed position for 2024/25, which will come to Committee in December and, the pay award for the coming year will be estimated as part of the process.

For 2022/23, a 2% pay award was built in and, due to careful management and staff turnover, the budget was able to absorb the 7% awarded. Provisional work shows service is on target to absorb the pay award of 5% this year.

Outside of staffing costs, there was an unexpected requirement in year to replace a number of touchscreens connected to the DS3000 ICS, which led to a small overspend against this budget allocation.

Councillor Gregory asked whether current inflation figures are taken into account when looking at salary increases. The Deputy Head of Finance advised that this is discussed on a national basis and with Finance colleagues from the three partners and included in the budget forecast. As part of the budget setting process, approval is gained from the three partners for a £50,000 variance (in total £150,000) meaning that the estimate for pay can be set slightly lower as there is headroom to use Chief Fire Officer discretion.

Councillor Rouse asked whether the starting salary is a key element with recruitment and retention in TVFC. The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that pay had been sighted by some previous leavers who felt that it was not cognisant of the responsibility of the role; however, he is hopeful that the pay award will help this position and no leavers this year, have highlighted pay as the issue. Councillor Rouse went on to ask where the leavers were going to and the Group Manager (TVFCS) stated that, the worst month for leavers had been when Services were recruiting Wholetime Firefighters and individuals had chosen to join. In addition, some leavers have gone to London Fire Control but primarily it is to other industries.

Councillor Rouse added his congratulations to TVFC for coming in so near to budget.

Chief Fire Officer (OFRS) highlighted that, one of the agreements within the pay ward, was an equalisation between the salary of a Firefighter and a Control Member and those conversations are ongoing. It was noted that this would be a positive position for individuals although would bring a negative impact from a budget point of view. Members would like to understand this impact through the Workshop.

RESOLVED – that Joint Committee noted the budget outturn position for 2022/23 as detailed.

11. PAYMENT OF 2023/24 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

Area Manager (RBFRS) provided an overview of the Capital Expenditure programme (Capex) and advised that, as part of the annual budget setting process, the SRO's will bring an annual profile of the monies that they wish to spend in the following year. As the technical equipment is getting older elements now require replacing and over the past two years, TVFC have started to draw down from the fund.

The Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) stipulates that Capex may only be expended in the relevant year the spend is profiled in. Due to a number of complicating factors with the replacement of the Vision system, due to a contractual issue it has not been possible to make all of the payments in 2022/23 and the committee were asked to agree that the remaining balance be paid in 2023-24.

Councillor Phillips noted the funds held in the Revenue Programme and asked how the money is being invested due to the current inflation rates. The Deputy Head of Finance (RBFRS) advised that all 3 Services contribute to the Revenue pot and Oxfordshire hold this on behalf of the Joint Committee. The Deputy Head of Finance will arrange for a breakdown on how much interest has been accrued to be made available to the Committee.

Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that the legal agreement stipulates that the forecast and profiled expenditure comes to the Committee as part of the budget setting process in December.

Councillor Rouse asked if the price was already set for the Vision replacement or whether it would increase and, the Area Manager (RBFRS) confirmed that there was an indexation clause in the contract and we have paid half of the figure quoted with the remainder to be paid and this will be included in the December report.

AGREED – the remaining actual balance of the Capital Expenditure Programme from 2022/23 can be paid in 2023/24.

**Deputy
Head of
Finance
(RBFRS) to
ensure
breakdown
of interest
is available
for
December.**

**SRO's to
draft
content for**

14. SUMMARY OF TVFC JOINT COMMITTEE WORKSHOP – MARCH 2023

September workshop and share with Cllr Gregory.

Councillor Rouse advised the new members that, at the previous workshop, it was felt that there had been insufficient items to hold two workshops per year and, that the Committee would benefit from more formal meetings to deal with business.

Officers will work with Councillor Gregory on the content for the September workshop.

RESOLVED – to hold three formal meetings and one workshop as the meeting format going forward.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 14th September 2023 – 2pm at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Sterling Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2DU.

Please note: This is the TVFC Members Workshop.

(The meeting closed at 14:50pm)

