

Cabinet
21 April 2026

Improving our Fire and Rescue Service

Report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

RECOMMENDATION

1. Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

Note the contents of this report and confirm its:

- i) support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.
- ii) support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the proposal to remove the On Call fire engine from Rewley Road Fire Station.
- iii) agreement to revisit at a later date the north of Oxford fire station proposal once further details are known.
- iv) withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.
- v) agreement to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.
- vi) Recognition of the financial implications of recommendations iv and v (as set out in Annex 2) and agreement to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 - 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28.
- vii) approval of any other actions required to enable continued engagement and consideration of the revised policy approach.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet (**Cabinet**) with an interim update on the “Improving our Fire and Rescue Service” public consultation and sets out a revised policy direction informed by consultation feedback, officers’ professional view and supporting evidence. While the consultation covered a wider range of proposals, this paper focuses on the implications for station closures, fire engine provision and investment choices, alongside the next steps for the main proposal and the potential future development of a new fire station in the north of Oxford.
3. Over the past decade, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) has experienced a 36% reduction in full-time equivalent on-call firefighters, resulting in significantly reduced daytime appliance availability at times of highest demand. Despite ongoing investment in recruitment, retention and overtime, on-call availability can fall to around 20% during the day, meaning that only a small proportion of the Service’s 34 fire engines may be available at peak times. This has placed increasing pressure on response performance, operational resilience and community safety.
4. In response, OFRS commissioned independent operational modelling to review its emergency response arrangements and developed a set of proposals aimed at improving daytime availability and overall system resilience. These included a main proposal to introduce 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call stations, alongside additional proposals relating to station locations, the number of fire engines numbers and potential investment options.
5. The consultation was extensive and independently analysed by the Centre for Consultation, providing assurance that it met good practice standards. Engagement levels were high, with around 1,500 people engaging overall, including 1,230 survey responses. Feedback demonstrated strong public interest and concern, particularly in relation to proposals involving station closures and the removal of fire engines. At the same time, consultation responses showed strong - often conditional - support for investment led alternatives, notably maintaining current firefighter numbers, retaining station support roles and protecting urban resilience.
6. Where opposition was expressed, it was driven primarily by concerns about loss of local fire cover, reduced operational resilience, workforce sustainability and confidence in the modelling’s ability to fully reflect local and worst-case operational scenarios. While some respondents acknowledged the challenges facing the Service and the need to modernise, there was a consistent emphasis on maintaining reliable 24hour protection, particularly for rural, edge of county and vulnerable communities.
7. Having considered the consultation feedback alongside financial information, equality and climate assessments and professional judgement, the report recommends a revised policy approach. This includes withdrawing proposals relating to station closures and the removal of the second fire engine at Thame, while continuing structured engagement with employees and their

representatives on the main proposal and further work on the potential north Oxford fire station.

8. The report also highlights a clear preference, expressed through consultation, for investment led solutions that address underlying workforce and resilience challenges. Cabinet is therefore invited to note the implications of these preferences as part of future budget planning and longer-term service sustainability.
9. The report concludes that while the underlying case for change remains strong, the consultation feedback has underscored the importance that respondents place in local resilience, workforce confidence and public trust. The recommended approach seeks to balance evidenced improvement of emergency response performance with meaningful engagement, clearer communication of the supporting evidence and the development of options that deliver long-term value and protection for Oxfordshire's residents.

Introduction and Background

10. This report provides Cabinet with an interim update following the "Improving our Fire and Rescue Service" public consultation that took place between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026 following Cabinet's approval on 21 October 2025 (see Cabinet report at annex 1). The public consultation sought the views of fire and rescue employees, the public and other stakeholders regarding a series of proposals primarily aimed at ensuring that we can consistently provide more fire engines during the day, enabling us to reach incidents across Oxfordshire faster than we do now.
11. The main aims of this report are to provide Cabinet with a general synopsis of the public consultation and to make recommendations with respect to the proposals for the closure of fire stations and the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station.
12. This interim report draws on an independent external analysis of the consultation feedback in the course of making recommendations regarding the proposals set out in the public consultation.
13. The 'Improving our Fire and Rescue Service' public consultation followed a review of the emergency response strategy that was partly initiated following a long term and continuing decline in on-call appliance availability. Over the past 10 years, the number of full-time equivalent on-call firefighters in Oxfordshire has dropped by 36%. As a result, the staffing hours they provide can be as low as around 20%, far below what's needed during the day. This can mean that during our peak times for incidents, only around 5 out of 27 on-call fire engines might be available.
14. A key part of the review comprised commissioning external consultancy support via ORH (Operational Research in Health), to conduct a comprehensive analysis

of the existing operational model and through an iterative collaborative process, to design the proposals that were taken forward to consultation.

Current emergency response operating model

15. Whilst they are not always available to respond to emergencies because of a shortage of staffing, we have 34 fire engines across Oxfordshire with the same crewing model's day and night:
 - 7 are crewed by full-time (wholetime) firefighters.
 - 27 are crewed by on-call firefighters.
16. We use both full-time (wholetime) and on-call firefighters to respond to emergencies. Wholetime firefighters work full-time and are always based at the station, ready to respond immediately. On-call firefighters are employees who generally live or work around five minutes from a fire station and who declare the times of the day that they can then respond if needed.
17. We have 25 fire stations across Oxfordshire, and these are shown on Figure 1 with their associated crewing models. 19 fire stations are in the smaller towns and villages in the county and operate on-call staffing. Six fire stations are in larger towns and Oxford city and operate 24/7 providing full-time staffing. These stations also have on-call crews.
18. Three stations (Oxford's Rewley Road and Slade Park, and Banbury) run a 24/7 shift pattern for full-time firefighters called "2-2-4" (two-day shifts, two-night shifts, four days off). Three stations (Abingdon, Didcot, and Kidlington) use a "day-crewing" model where full-time firefighters work during the day and live in nearby housing so they can respond quickly at night.

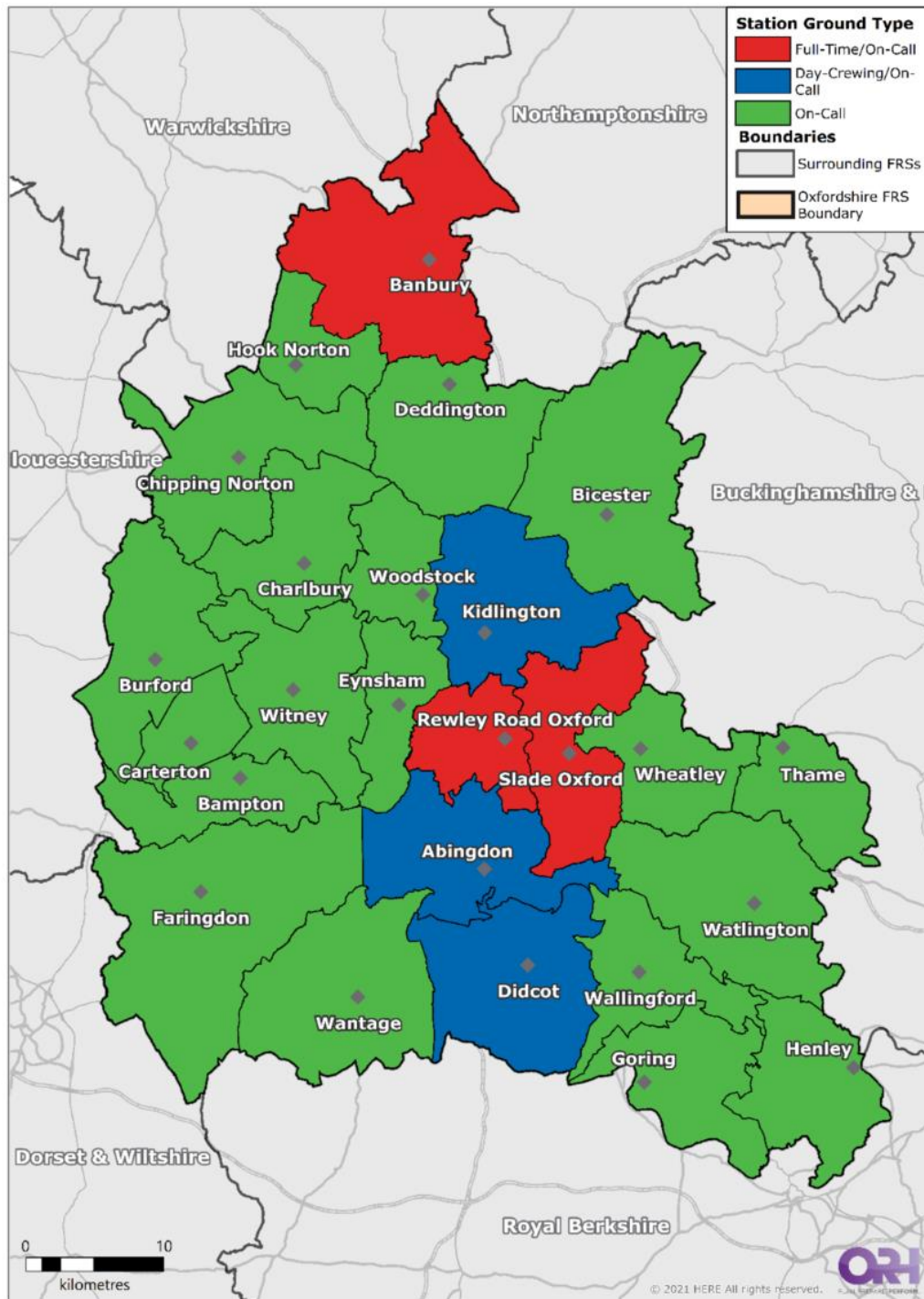


Figure 1 - Map of current crewing models at Oxfordshire fire stations

Public consultation proposals

19. The proposals taken forward to public consultation were aimed at ensuring that we have fire stations, resources, and people in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of communities and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of the service. Seven proposals were made comprising one main proposal with a further six proposals which were layered on top of and built on the main proposal.

These proposals were forecast overall to enable us to get to incidents across Oxfordshire more quickly than we can now.

20. The proposals were split into three themes:
 - i) Effectiveness - Changes that are designed to make us more effective.
 - ii) Efficiency – Changes that are designed to use our financial resources and our people differently to deliver improved services overall.
 - iii) Investment – Changes that are enabled by increasing the funding that the service receives

21. The main proposal (Option 1a and 1b from the original Cabinet report) comprised implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney (see Figure 2). The full-time firefighters would crew the fire engine during the day, while the on-call crews would crew the fire engine at night (with on-call firefighters also crewing a second fire engine during the day and night at Bicester and Witney). This would be done by reallocating firefighters from existing roles, including removing one of Rewley Road's full-time fire engines and reducing the number of firefighters on fire stations. This proposal also involved the removal of the single on-call fire engine at Rewley Road due to very low staffing hours.

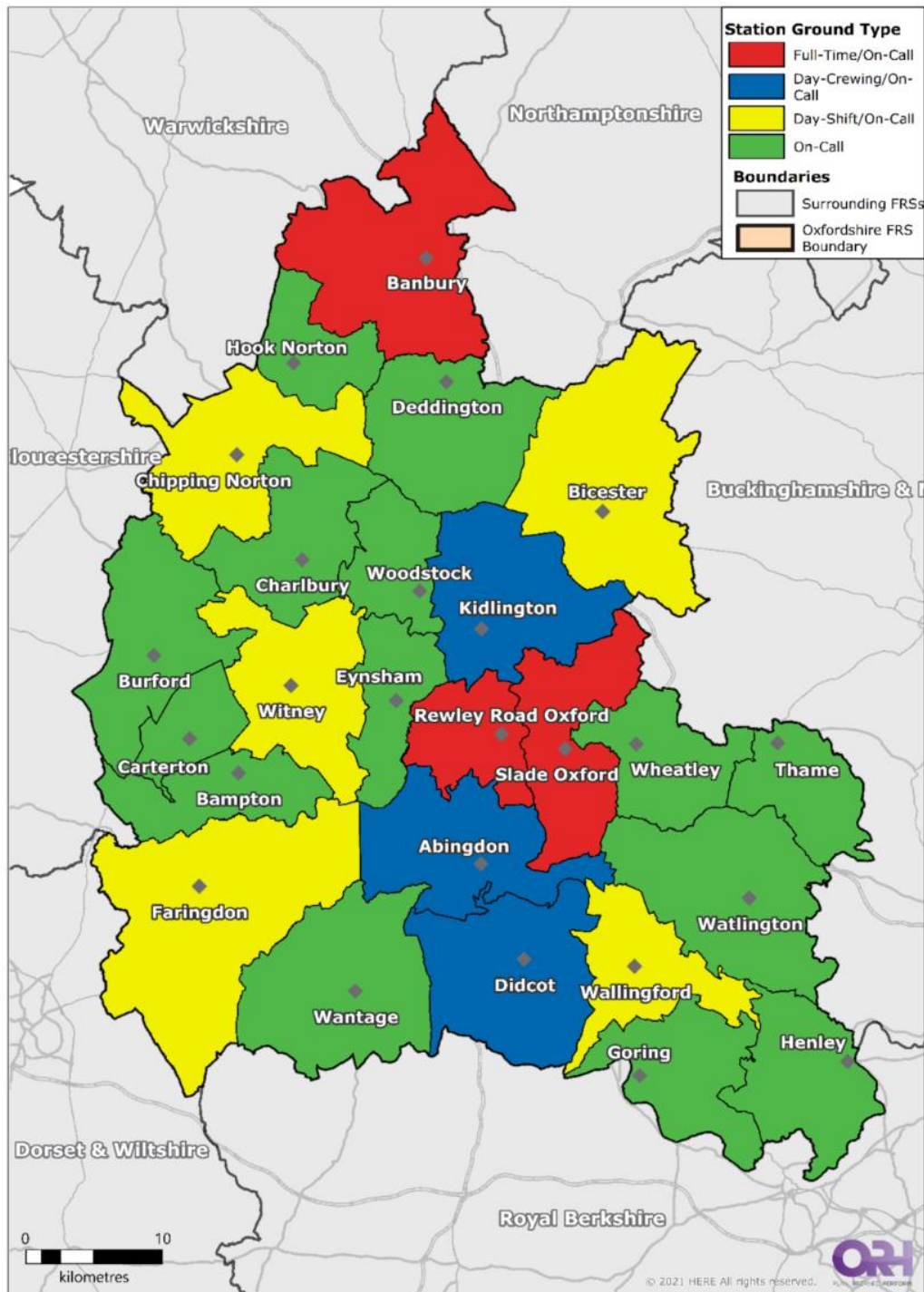


Figure 2 - Map of crewing models at Oxfordshire fire stations under the main proposal

22. The further six proposals were as follows with option numbers in brackets indicating the original Cabinet paper option numbers:

- i) Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station in Oxford and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2) including the removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road (Option 3)

- ii) Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station (Option 4)
- iii) Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal (Option 5)
- iv) Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal (Option 6)
- v) Invest to keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal (Option 7)
- vi) Closure of three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock (Option 8)

Why change is needed

- 23. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has a responsibility to provide a safe, reliable and sustainable emergency response for the communities it serves. To do this well, the service must regularly review how its resources are organised and be transparent about whether existing arrangements still work in practice. As part of the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026, OFRS is dedicated to *“providing services that reduce the likelihood of harm to people and their environment; services that put our community first, ensure equality in our provision and achieve greater value for money”*.
- 24. OFRS have invested significantly in the recruitment and retention of on-call employees. Despite this, on-call availability continues to decline in Oxfordshire, with a 36% reduction in the number full-time equivalent (FTE) on-call firefighters over the last 10 years. This change has seen fire engine availability become greater during the night when the number of incidents and the risk to our communities are at their lowest and then reduced during the day when emergency response demand and community risk are at their highest.
- 25. Across Oxfordshire for 2024/25, overall, on-call availability was 58% and closer to 20% during the day, continuing an ongoing decline in on-call appliance availability and negatively impacting response time performance. This often results in us having a far lower number of appliances available in the daytime, routinely down to twelve fire engines rather than the 34 that the service has in place, even with additional cover provided through overtime and additional support.
- 26. Currently, the only virtually guaranteed fire cover consists of seven fire engines staffed by full-time firefighters. The reduction in on-call availability hours has an impact on response times. Due to limited on-call availability during periods of high demand, the service may not be able to provide consistent support for routine operations or for events that require substantial resources, such as severe weather occurrences or prolonged large-scale incidents.

Urban growth

27. Strong population and economic growth linked to Oxfordshire's status as a leading global centre for science, technology, and higher education is driving urban growth in the county. The region is experiencing significant investment and development in key areas like the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor. However, whilst Oxford city itself has seen slower population growth, population growth in surrounding rural districts is greater, partly driven by the planning constraints that limit development in Oxford.
28. Importantly, increased housing and commercial development does not automatically mean that additional greater levels of fire and rescue resources are required. Both at a local level and nationally, data shows that there has not been a correlation between a growing population and incident numbers. Although overall incident numbers in Oxfordshire have risen in recent years, this is largely due to false alarms, which we continue to address through targeted prevention and engagement work and which was built into the modelling underpinning the consultation proposals. Serious fires have reduced by more than 30% since 2009/10, and road traffic collision rates have remained broadly stable over the same period. What is more important is how risk changes, how developments are designed, and how effectively resources can be deployed to respond to emergencies.
29. Over the next decade, population and housing growth in Oxfordshire will be concentrated in several key areas, in part to meet unmet housing needs from Oxford city. This presents challenges to OFRS on the basis that this growth will continue to create increased community risk in locations that are further way from our existing fire station locations. This will mean that there is a risk of our response times increasing over time unless we optimise our emergency response model to improve emergency response, particularly during peak daytime demand, by improving resilience and positioning our resources where they can deliver the greatest benefit.

Financial drivers for change

30. Whilst the primary driver for change is the long-term decline in on-call availability and increasing response times, the service is also committed to achieving greater value for money including constantly looking for ways to use its funding differently to improve the services it provides to the public.
31. The service spends significant money on overtime to improve the level of fire engine availability day-to-day. Recent refreshed analysis using improved internal data collection linked to internal policy changes tentatively suggests that the service is set to spend approximately £500k per annum on overtime under the current operating model. This equates to approximately 1.65% of the Fire and Rescue Service's overall net revenue budget, some of which could likely be put to a different use in support of a more effective and efficient operating model.
32. The Fire and Rescue net operating budget will increase by 2.52%% in 2026/27, rising from £31.7M to £32.5M. The service overspent against its budget 2024/25 by £623k and has a forecast overspend of £461k in 2025/26. As a result of the Fair Funding Review, the Council faces significant funding reductions in 2027/28 and

2028/29. In addition, rising demand and costs will put further pressure on budgets. Savings will need to be agreed in order that the Council can set a balanced budget for both 2027/28 and 2028/29. In addition, the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire could result in the requirement for a free-standing Fire and Rescue Authority ahead of a potential move to a Foundation Strategic or Mayoral Strategic Authority. It will be important therefore that consideration is given to the budget the Fire and Rescue service has in light of this position.

Community safety work capacity

33. The service is currently limited in its ability to deliver community safety work, particularly in Oxfordshire's rural and lower population density urban communities. Whilst the primary aim of the review was to identify proposals for a new emergency response model, it was considered that the review could also provide an opportunity to improve the service's capacity to deliver community safety work, such as prevention/protection activities as well as to assist with the management of operational risk information which supports our emergency response activity.

Consultation and Engagement

34. A public consultation lasting just under 14 weeks was carried out between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026. The consultation and associated public engagement sessions were designed to provide respondents with sufficient information, time and opportunity for people to understand the proposals and to express their views to be considered as part of any final decision-making processes.
35. The consultation included:
- Hosting of all information on the county council's online consultation portal, Let's talk Oxfordshire at <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ofrs-consultation>
 - Publication of a consultation document explaining the need for change and the proposals
 - A supporting set of documents that provided more detailed information to transparently demonstrate the methodology used to develop the proposals and to inform readers about the impact of the proposals.
 - Public engagement events held both online and at key in-person events.
 - Targeted engagement with the Fire Brigades Union, service employees, members, MPs. Parish/Town councils and other key partners.
 - Two-way social media engagement
36. The consultation approach was designed to be accessible, transparent and fair, with printed documents and surveys made available on request.
37. All responses were independently analysed by the Centre for Consultation¹ which helps to provide assurance that the process meets good practice in support of the Gunning principles.

¹ <https://www.centreforconsultation.org/>

Public engagement

38. To publicise the consultation widely, a range of online and offline communications channels were used, with a strong focus on local targeting for the public engagement meetings and internally on staff engagement. Externally focused activities included: news releases, organic social media posts, content in residents' newsletters and targeted stakeholder communications.
39. Social media engagement for the public consultation was approached with a strong commitment to public engagement, transparency, and community reach. Over the course of the consultation period, OFRS's Facebook channels have, in general, achieved significant growth and engagement.
40. The central marketing and campaigns team supported the consultation with a coordinated programme of social media activity. They shared posts from both the council's and OFRS Facebook pages throughout the consultation period. Area-specific posts were shared on local Facebook groups to extend reach and promote both the events and the consultation itself.
41. Targeted communications on Nextdoor.co.uk² were also used to promote the public events, signpost people to further information, and encourage participation in the consultation. Alongside this, the marketing and campaigns team invested in paid social media promotions to increase reach ensuring that residents received email notifications with full consultation details, with the aim of increasing engagement.
42. In addition, resident and stakeholder email communications were also used to maximise reach to people and businesses across Oxfordshire with stakeholder networks used to share the information with their own staff and colleagues to maximise awareness.
43. Both central and local fire station pages have been drivers for effective community engagement. Over the consultation period, we have received over 3.5-million-page views on our OFRS page with an average daily reach of 43,932 people which is an increase of 49%. Most of our content was focused on the public consultation. Total interactions during the period were 454,257, which is an increase of 51%.
44. The Fire and Rescue Service also delivered a programme of staff, stakeholder and public engagement events. This activity included extensive staff engagement sessions, briefing sessions for councillors and MPs, targeted meetings for local councils in areas identified as most impacted by the proposals, three online public engagement events open to all, and three in-person public meetings in areas most affected by the proposals. In addition senior fire and rescue service officers attended a range of other meetings where invited, including presenting the proposals to neighbouring fire and rescue authorities.

² <https://nextdoor.co.uk/>

45. Over 425 people attended one or more public meetings either online or in person. 16,200 people viewed the project landing page on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire portal and 3,987 people downloaded at least one of the accompanying documents.

Public and employee consultation

46. This section summarises the public and staff consultation carried out, and it explains how the consultation was conducted and the main themes raised by respondents.
47. The consultation was designed to ensure that communities, employees and other stakeholders were given a clear opportunity to understand the proposals, consider their potential impacts, and express their views to feed into the final decision-making process.
48. The public consultation took place between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026. It was originally intended for the consultation to last 12 weeks although an extension was later communicated to enable as many people as reasonably practical to engage meaningfully with the proposals. In all, around 1,500 people actively engaged with the consultation; some are likely to have engaged in more than one way. This level of engagement was considered to be a positive outcome.
49. A total of 1,230 responses were received via an online and postal survey. The survey included both closed questions (e.g. agreement scales and impact ratings), and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to explain their views in detail.
50. The Centre for Consultation applied a mixed-methods approach to the feedback analysis:
- Quantitative analysis to understand the distribution of opinion, and
 - Qualitative analysis to understand the reasoning behind responses.

This is to ensure that the findings reflect both **what** respondents think and **why** they think it. Their analysis is descriptive and evidence-based, aiming to reflect the range and nature of views expressed. Further detail regarding the methodology applied can be found in their full report (see Annex 3).

General feedback

51. The consultation received 1,230 responses, indicating strong public engagement. Across the main proposal, 65.6% of respondents expressed negative views and 68.2% perceived a negative impact on communities. Opposition was strongest in relation to station closure proposals, where 78.4% of respondents expressed negative views and 79.5% perceived a negative impact. In contrast, investment options attracted consistently strong support, particularly investment to maintain current firefighter numbers, which 82.6% of respondents rated as highly important. Investment in an additional 24/7 fire engine in Oxford and the retention of Station Support Officers were also strongly supported, rated as highly important by 66.6% and 68.9% of respondents respectively.

Main proposal - implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney

52. Responses to the consultation on the main proposal were predominantly shaped by concerns about how the proposed daytime-focused deployment model would operate in practice and its implications for service availability, workforce sustainability and operational resilience. While some respondents supported the principle of better aligning resources with periods of higher demand, this support was typically cautious and conditional and was outweighed by concern about reduced night-time provision and increased reliance on on-call availability.
53. A consistent theme across responses was the perceived trade-off between improving daytime cover and maintaining reliable 24-hour service provision. Many respondents expressed concern that gains in daytime availability could be offset by reduced certainty of cover overnight, particularly in Oxford and surrounding areas. Night-time was frequently characterised as a period of heightened risk, with respondents emphasising that incidents occurring at night may be more severe, detected later and require rapid intervention to prevent escalation.
54. Concerns were also raised about the proposed reliance on on-call firefighters overnight, alongside reduced wholetime availability. Respondents questioned the reliability of this model in practice, highlighting variability in on-call availability and the potential for mobilisation delays. There was a perception that this could reduce confidence in the service's ability to respond promptly and consistently to incidents at night, particularly during periods of concurrent demand.
55. Workforce sustainability and resilience emerged as a key driver of opposition or concern. Respondents frequently highlighted the proposed 12-hour day shifts as difficult to sustain over time, citing potential impacts on fatigue, wellbeing, work-life balance and retention. There was concern that these working patterns could exacerbate existing recruitment and retention challenges, weaken morale and, in turn, undermine the reliability of service delivery rather than resolve underlying capacity issues.
56. Across responses, there was scepticism about the extent to which the modelling underpinning the main proposal reflects real-world operational conditions. Respondents frequently questioned the reliance on averages, arguing that county-wide performance measures may obscure local variation, peak demand, concurrent incidents and the practical realities of travel, geography and appliance availability. Some also expressed concern that the modelling focused on incident frequency rather than severity and did not sufficiently account for future risk arising from population growth, development and changing risk profiles.
57. Overall, consultation feedback on the main proposal indicates that concern is driven less by opposition to improving efficiency or modernising deployment models in principle, and more by the perceived risks associated with reduced night-time certainty, workforce sustainability and operational resilience. Many respondents expressed the view that improvements to daytime cover should not

come at the expense of reliable 24-hour protection, and that addressing underlying workforce challenges was seen as central to achieving sustainable improvement.

Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station in Oxford and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2) including the removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road (Option 3)

58. Responses to the consultation in relation to the proposal for a new fire station north of Oxford were largely shaped by concerns about the proposed consolidation of existing facilities and the perceived impact on local coverage, response times and operational resilience. While some respondents recognised potential benefits associated with a modern, strategically located facility, this support was typically conditional and outweighed by concern about the loss of distributed, locally based provision within Oxfordshire.

Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station (Option 4)

59. In respect of the proposal for the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station, responses were primarily driven by concerns about the role of the second fire engine in maintaining local capacity, response reliability and continuous cover. Many respondents highlighted Thame's role in serving surrounding areas and the frequency with which the primary fire engine is already committed, with the second fire engine viewed as actively required rather than surplus capacity.
60. Respondents pointed to existing and increasing operational pressures in the area, including major transport routes such as the M40, population growth and evolving risk profiles. There was concern that removing the second fire engine would increase response times when additional resources are required and would reduce resilience during concurrent or high-impact incidents.
61. As with station closure proposals, respondents questioned the extent to which modelling adequately reflects local conditions in Thame, including variability in demand and real-world operational constraints. There was a strong view that average performance measures do not capture worst-case scenarios or the cumulative impact of reduced capacity on local and cross-border resilience, particularly given parallel proposals consulted on by Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.
62. Across the station closure and removal of the second fire engine from Thame proposals, respondents expressed mixed views on workforce and financial considerations. While some acknowledged underlying crewing challenges and supported the principle of reallocating underused resources, many argued that investment in recruitment, retention and alternative crewing models should be explored as a means of maintaining provision rather than reducing it. Concerns were also raised about the potential impact of closures or removals on workforce morale and longer-term resilience.
63. Overall, the consultation feedback indicates that opposition to this proposal is driven less by resistance to system optimisation in principle, and more by the

perceived loss of immediate local protection, reduced operational resilience and concerns that important local risks and functions are not fully captured through modelling alone.

Closure of three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock (Option 8)

64. Responses to the consultation in relation to these proposals were largely shaped by concerns about the potential loss of local fire and rescue provision and the perceived implications for community safety, response times and system resilience. While some respondents expressed support for elements of the proposals on efficiency or value-for-money grounds, this was limited and was outweighed by concern about reduced local availability of fire engines and increased reliance on more distant resources.
65. In relation to the proposed closure of fire stations, respondents consistently emphasised the importance of immediate, locally available response. Many expressed concern that the removal of stations would increase travel distances and reduce the visibility and reassurance provided by a local fire service presence. Particular concern was raised about impacts on rural and peripheral communities, which respondents felt could be disproportionately affected.
66. A recurring theme was scepticism about the extent to which average response time modelling reflects real-world conditions. Respondents frequently highlighted that small changes in county-wide averages could mask more significant local impacts, particularly during peak demand, periods of concurrent incidents or where road conditions, traffic, geography and appliance availability affect response. There was also concern that modelling did not fully capture the wider roles played by fire stations, including prevention, community safety activity and the value of local knowledge.
67. Respondents also raised concerns about operational resilience and system capacity. The removal of stations was widely perceived as reducing the service's ability to respond to simultaneous incidents and to provide surge capacity during major or prolonged events. Some respondents expressed concern that this would increase reliance on neighbouring stations and support from other services, potentially weakening resilience across the wider system.
68. As before, opposition to station closures is driven by the perceived loss of immediate local protection, reduced operational resilience and concerns that important local risks and functions are not fully captured through modelling alone.

Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal (Option 5)

69. Responses to the proposal to invest in retaining an additional fire engine in Oxford 24/7 were predominantly supportive and contrasted sharply with feedback on proposals involving reductions in cover. A clear majority of respondents rated this proposal as highly important, reflecting a strong desire to maintain response

capacity within Oxford, particularly given the city's high incident demand, dense population and concentration of heritage buildings and complex risks.

70. Qualitative feedback emphasised the importance of resilience and surge capacity in the city, with respondents viewing an additional permanently available appliance as a necessary safeguard against concurrent incidents, prolonged operations and nighttime risk. Many respondents framed this investment as an appropriate mitigation for other elements of the proposals, particularly where modelling indicated that response performance in Oxford could worsen. There was a recurring view that, where trade-offs are required, investment to protect high risk urban areas represented a more acceptable and equitable approach than removing resources.
71. Overall, support for this proposal was driven by confidence that it would enhance operational resilience, public safety and reassurance, and by a belief that targeted investment in Oxford would address some of the concerns raised about reduced coverage under other proposals.

Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal (Option 6)

72. The strongest and most consistent support across all investment options related to the proposal to invest in maintaining current firefighter numbers at each station. An overwhelming majority of respondents rated this proposal as highly important, reflecting widespread concern that workforce capacity, rather than station footprint alone, is fundamental to service reliability, resilience and safety.
73. Respondents frequently argued that staffing shortages underpin many of the risks identified elsewhere in the consultation, including appliance unavailability, reliance on overtime, pressure on on-call crews and reduced resilience during peak or concurrent demand. Maintaining firefighter numbers was therefore seen as a preventative measure that could stabilise the system, improve availability and reduce the likelihood that reductions in infrastructure or appliances would be required.
74. Qualitative feedback also linked this proposal to workforce wellbeing, morale and retention. Respondents expressed concern that reducing establishment levels could exacerbate fatigue, undermine safety and increase attrition, while investment in maintaining numbers was viewed as supporting both firefighter welfare and community outcomes. Overall, the proposal was widely seen as addressing the root causes of service fragility rather than managing its consequences.

Invest to keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal (Option 7)

75. Responses to the proposal to invest in retaining Station Support Officers were predominantly positive, with a clear majority of respondents identifying this as a high importance investment. While often discussed less prominently than frontline

staffing, respondents consistently recognised the role of Station Support Officers in supporting recruitment, retention and day-to-day operational readiness, particularly within the on-call system.

76. Respondents highlighted that Station Support Officers play a key enabling role in maintaining availability, reducing administrative burden on operational staff, and sustaining engagement with local employers and communities. In this context, the proposal was frequently linked to concerns about declining on-call availability, with respondents viewing this investment as a practical means of strengthening capacity without reducing physical infrastructure.
77. Support for this proposal was often framed as part of a wider preference for investment-led solutions. Many respondents argued that retaining Station Support Officers would help address the underlying workforce challenges identified throughout the consultation and would be more effective than pursuing efficiency measures that reduce stations or appliances. Overall, the proposal was seen as offering good value for money by supporting long-term sustainability and resilience across the service.

Equality impact assessment

78. Respondents raised a range of concerns regarding the potential equality impacts of the proposals, particularly in relation to how changes to fire cover may affect groups with higher levels of vulnerability or dependency on timely emergency response. Many respondents highlighted that reductions in local provision, changes in response times, or increased reliance on more distant resources could have a disproportionate effect on older people, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those with limited mobility. There was a recurring view that these groups are less able to self-evacuate, may be more reliant on rapid intervention, and therefore face heightened risk if response times increase, even marginally.
79. A further theme related to place-based inequality, with respondents expressing concern that rural, edge of county and more isolated communities could experience greater adverse impacts than urban centres. These areas were often described as having older population profiles, fewer alternative emergency services nearby, and road networks that make response more sensitive to distance and travel conditions. Respondents argued that countywide averages risk obscuring these unequal local impacts and that communities with higher needs or greater vulnerability could be disproportionately affected by a reduction in nearby fire and rescue provision.
80. Respondents also raised equality considerations in relation to the workforce. Changes to duty systems, relocation of stations and the loss of tied accommodation were seen as having potential disproportionate impacts on firefighters with caring responsibilities, family commitments or health needs. In particular, extended or altered shift patterns were described as more difficult to accommodate for those with childcare or other caring roles, raising concerns about fairness, morale and workforce retention. Some respondents also linked these

workforce impacts back to community outcomes, arguing that destabilising the workforce could indirectly affect service reliability in areas already at higher risk.

81. Several stakeholders, including representative organisations, explicitly questioned whether the Equality Impact Assessment went far enough in identifying and addressing these issues. While acknowledging that equality impacts were recognised in principle, respondents expressed concern that the assessment did not fully reflect the cumulative or distributional effects of the proposals, particularly where response performance in Oxford City was forecast to worsen or where multiple changes could interact to heighten risk for specific communities. There was a strong theme that where adverse impacts were identified, respondents expected a clearer explanation of why these were considered acceptable, what alternatives had been explored, and how mitigations would be secured in practice.
82. Overall, consultation feedback indicates that equality considerations were a material concern for respondents and closely linked to wider views about risk, fairness and public protection. Opposition in this area was driven less by challenge to the need for change in principle, and more by concern that some communities and groups could bear a greater share of the impact, and that these effects may not be fully captured through high-level modelling or average performance measures alone.

Implications for Policy Direction

83. The service recognises that consultation must be meaningful and capable of influencing decision-making and the public consultation was approached with that principle firmly embedded.
84. Following the close of the consultation, feedback was reviewed in full and it has been considered alongside a range of other information, for example financial information, the equalities impact assessment, climate impact assessment and professional judgement.
85. Given the central importance of the main proposal, alongside the proposed new fire station north of Oxford, to the future effectiveness of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, it is considered appropriate to take additional time to reflect on the consultation feedback and to continue engagement with employees and their representatives. These proposals are fundamental to improving the consistent availability of fire engines and ensuring that resources are positioned to reach the highest-risk incidents as quickly as possible across the county.
86. The consultation feedback demonstrates the strength of feeling associated with these two proposals and highlights the importance respondents place on maintaining confidence in 24-hour emergency cover. In light of this, further consideration will be given to the feedback received, alongside additional discussion with employees, to ensure that the proposed approach is both operationally robust and clearly understood in terms of its intended outcomes and underlying evidence.

87. It is also important to note that many respondents expressed strong concern about the implications of any reduction in night-time wholetime cover, particularly with regard to incident severity, detection delays and the potential for escalation during the night. While night-time incidents can be particularly serious and time-critical, incident data for Oxfordshire does not support the assumption that overall risk to communities is consistently higher at night when assessed across the full range of incident types, frequency and outcomes. This distinction could have been communicated better through the consultation information that we provided and, as a result, was not always reflected in consultation responses.
88. Respondents also commonly questioned the validity of the modelling used to assess the impact of the proposals, arguing that the use of averages could obscure local complexity and variability. In particular, respondents questioned whether modelling could adequately capture concurrent incidents, local geography, traffic conditions and worst-case scenarios. These concerns were a significant factor in shaping opposition to the proposals and reflect a broader scepticism about whether modelling can adequately capture operational reality.
89. However, the modelling underpinning the proposals was explicitly designed to account for local complexity rather than smooth it out. It is based on real-world Oxfordshire incident data and simulates service operation under the proposed arrangements across 200 modelled runs, using randomised conditions to reflect variation in incident timing, location, appliance availability and concurrent demand. This approach is intended to test performance across a wide range of plausible operating scenarios rather than relying on a single average outcome.
90. Notwithstanding this, the consultation feedback highlights the need to further explain how the modelling reflects local conditions and operational realities, and to ensure that employees and stakeholders have confidence in how evidence has been interpreted. The additional time being taken will therefore be used to consider both the substantive feedback received and how the supporting evidence and assumptions are communicated, alongside continued engagement with the workforce.
91. The closure of fire stations and/or removal of fire engines is understandably concerning for sections of our communities particularly those local to where the changes are proposed to take place. Survey respondents raised detailed concerns about response times; concurrent incidents; workforce sustainability; modelling limitations; worst-case scenarios. Many respondents viewed proposals as a cut to the existing service rather than efficiency measures. Although the proposals were mainly framed around challenges with on-call recruitment, many respondents expressed concern about the longer-term implications for investment in the service and the potential cumulative impact of reductions in infrastructure, staffing or appliances.
92. There was a range of reasons expressed for opposition to the proposals to close fire stations including concerns about local response capability, operational resilience, concurrent incidents and the wider role of stations in prevention and community safety. The service has clearly stated that on-call fire stations that provide a high-level of fire engine availability generally present excellent value-for-

money for taxpayers. Local support for them therefore presents the service with an opportunity to encourage people to become firefighters in their local communities.

Cabinet Recommendations

Main proposal

The main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney.

93. Officers still consider the main proposal to create 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters a critical aspect of future emergency fire engine response in Oxfordshire. Despite strong views from some consultation respondents, this proposal, with or without some redesigned aspects, remains key to helping to consistently increase fire engine availability in the day and reducing response times.
94. Based on the information and estimates, the main proposal (options 1a/1b) are not self-financing from a capital perspective and to enable delivery of Rewley Road, rebuild costs requires the adoption of the recommendation to Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2).
95. The potential of Options 1b and Option 2 from the original report are not included in the existing capital programme
96. However, ongoing consultation to gather insight from our employees and negotiation with the Fire Brigades Union remains essential to the main proposal. This continued internal dialogue is therefore critical to help review and, if necessary, redesign the main proposal.
97. **Recommendation i) Cabinet is recommended to give their support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.** This will be with a view to final proposals being brought back to Cabinet for further debate and decision in Summer 2026.
98. If elements of the main proposal are redesigned, it is acknowledged that this might result in changes to the revenue or capital cost modelling. If the required revenue and/or capital costs increase, this could be compounded by recommendations iv) and v) (below) which, if supported by Cabinet, would create a new and lower cost envelope within which to deliver the main proposal.
99. The main proposal included the removal of the On Call fire engine at Rewley Road which would impact a small number of employees. The service wishes to further

explore the impact of this change and how best to retain the skills of the individuals that could be impacted.

100. **Recommendation ii) Cabinet is recommended to give their support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to this proposal.** This will be with a view to the proposal being brought back to Cabinet for further debate and decision in the summer.

Additional proposals

Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station (in Oxford) and Kidlington Fire Station

101. A north of Oxford fire station location offers significant benefits in terms of improving county-wide average response times whilst also aiding the service to ensure that it has a building estate that is fit for purpose. Despite some negative feedback from some consultation respondents, we are minded continuing exploring this proposal as Officers believe it to offer positive opportunities for emergency fire and rescue response and the wider service in Oxfordshire.
102. Proposals for the north of Oxford fire station depend on developer negotiations for the potential release of the Rewley Road site coupled with planning complexities associated with identifying a new site towards the north of Oxford. Both of these aspects are complex and will take significant time to negotiate. Officers remain optimistic about its long-term potential.
103. **Recommendation iii) Cabinet is recommended to revisit the north of Oxford fire station proposal once more details are known.** A further paper will be brought to Cabinet when the details are clearer. The current strategy for the redevelopment of Rewley Road will continue to be regularly reviewed in line with the wider developer negotiations.
104. Within the consultation, the future of specialist rescue provisions was referenced as the current crewing model is linked to Kidlington Fire Station which could be impacted by this proposal. It has been agreed that further work is needed to explore the provision of the different types of specialist rescue provision and that this needs to be done separately to this proposal given the significance of any changes in this area and the importance of our specialist rescue capability to Oxfordshire and the surrounding areas.

Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station

105. In parallel with our own public consultation, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service also ran a public consultation which included changes to fire station/engine provision including at Haddenham. Whilst our two services were aligned on proposals heading into our respective consultations, it is important that we now collectively reflect on the feedback and consider long term proposals collaboratively given the proximity of Thame and Haddenham Fire Stations.

106. **Recommendation iv) Cabinet is recommended to withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.**
107. As set out in Annex 2, the financial implication of this recommendation is a reduction in annual revenue savings compared to the report to Cabinet in October 2025 of £31,600 per year plus a reduction in one off savings of £10,000.

Closure of three on-call fire stations three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock

108. Strong community support for the fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock has been demonstrated throughout the public consultation which could be a catalyst for us undertaking further structured engagement and targeted recruitment in those communities.
109. **Recommendation v) Cabinet is recommended to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.** This would be with the aim of achieving improved and sustainable fire engine availability, reducing emergency response times and improving the value that taxpayers receive from these stations. The success of this would be evaluated over coming years through a structured evaluation framework to enable the service to revisit and review the effectiveness and efficiency of stations in the future.
110. As set out in Annex 2, the financial implication of this recommendation is a reduction in capital receipts of £1.2m compared to the report to Cabinet in October 2025 as well as a reduction in annual revenue savings of £579,000 and avoidance of one-off costs of £147,500.

Further investment in the Fire and Rescue Service to deliver one of the following:

- **Option 5 - Keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost between £670,500 and £1,280,000 (per Annex 2)**
 - **Option 6 - Keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost of £1,260,000 (per Annex 2)**
 - **Option 7 - Keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost of £621,000.**
111. **Recommendation vi) Cabinet are recommended to continue to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 – 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28.**

Corporate Policies and Priorities

112. Whilst the original consultation proposals and the recommendations outlined in this paper are intended primarily to result in improvements in Fire and Rescue emergency response, wider benefits that align with the county's corporate priorities could also result.
113. **The climate emergency** - The reduction in fire engines coupled with the rationalising and improvement of the fire station building portfolio could result in net reductions in the council's carbon footprint. However, with the recommendation in this paper to pause on the closure of Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock fire stations, coupled with the pausing of the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station, these opportunities are going to be impacted. Any subsequent opportunities to deliver change in support of the climate emergency will then be deferred until the decision-making with respect to the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.
114. **Inequalities** – The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas under the main proposal if subsequently taken would provide the fire and rescue service with resources to help drive community safety initiatives in these areas and potentially provide the council with resources to help deliver to initiatives to address social, economic, health and educational inequalities. This will be reevaluated in the deferred decision-making papers associated with the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.
115. **Health and Wellbeing** - The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas would provide the fire and rescue service with greater resources to deliver the service's 'Safe and Well' interventions, supporting the council's drive to improve our residents' physical and mental wellbeing. This will be reevaluated in the deferred decision-making papers associated with the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.

Legal Implications

116. The 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 have 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). This report provides an interim update on the results of the public consultation that took place following the Cabinet Decision of October 2025 and sets out a revised policy direction informed by consultation feedback, officers' professional view and supporting evidence.
117. This approach is in line with the Council's powers and responsibilities as a Fire and Rescue Service under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and related legislation and in line with its powers and duties under the Localism Act 2011 and in line with the Gunning principles on public consultation.

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Financial Implications

118. Annex 2 provides summary of the capital and revenue financial implications and the changes compared to the original proposals as set out in the report to Cabinet in October 2025. Costs and estimates are based on the current (operational) view. For the purposes of the financial analysis, the option naming/numbering used in the October 2025 Cabinet paper has been retained to help illustrate the amended financial position. The changes between the 2 proposals are:

Item	Value £	Notes
Capital Receipt	(£1,200,000)	Reduction in receipt through withdrawal from station closure
Revenue One-Off	(£147,500)	Net costs avoidance from withdrawal from station closure
Revenue PA Ongoing	£610,600	Future annual savings no longer deliverable from withdrawal from station closure and Thame appliance

119. The recommendation set out in this report to remove the proposed closure of three fire stations and the removal of the second fire engine at Thame increase the risk that the service will continue to overspend against its budget as has been seen in 2024/25 and 2025/26. In addition, recommendation vi seeks consideration of further investment in the service of between £621,000 and £1,280,000 per year. This needs to be seen in the context of the Council's overall financial position as set out in paragraph 32, as well as the possibility of the need to create a free standing Fire and Rescue authority prior to a move to a Foundation Strategic or Mayoral Strategic Authority.

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Equality & Inclusion Implications

120. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken as part of this work and informed the development of the original proposals (see annex 4). The EIA considered the impact that the proposals would have on our communities and our employees, and its purpose is to identify and mitigate any disproportionate impacts.
121. The service considers the EIA to be a critical component of the public and employee consultation process to surface impacts that the service is not fully sighted on. This process helps to ensure that we meet our statutory duties in the

course of carrying out public consultation but also that we reflect best practice to prevent or minimise disproportionate impacts.

122. Given that the nature of the recommendations within this paper do not change the status quo at this time, the EIA has not yet been revised. However, the equalities impact feedback we have received via the consultation is valuable and will be used to strengthen the EIA as part of the next phases of the project, helping to support the discussions with our employees and any future Cabinet decision making regarding the implementation of changes.

Sustainability Implications

123. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) was created as part of this work to capture and inform the impact stemming from the proposals (see annex 5).
124. The recommendations made in this paper do not involve new development or property changes. The proposals are not expected to increase harmful emissions or resource consumption, but they do remove the immediate opportunity to reduce emissions through pausing on fire station closures and fire engine removals.

Risk Management

125. The following risks have been identified and assessed by the service in developing the recommendations presented for Cabinet approval in this paper.
- (a) **Future growth and emerging risk** - Significant housing and infrastructure growth is planned across Oxfordshire. There is a risk that future development could increase incident demand or change risk profiles in ways that require additional fire and rescue resources. Growth has however been considered and it forms a part of the rationale for change. The recommendations presented in this paper also do not limit the service's ability to expand or relocate resources in the future should evidence demonstrate that this is necessary.
- (b) **Impact on staff, morale and wellbeing** – The original set of proposals always carried the clear risk of adversely impacting employee morale and damaging industrial relations and this was certainly heard throughout the consultation with perceptible trust between the senior members of OFRS and the wider service negatively impacted. Deferring the decision regarding the main proposal and the north of Oxford fire station proposal risks prolonging the anxiety that some employees will be feeling regarding these specific proposals. To that end, the service recognises the need to engage and support affected employees. The recommendation to remove any station closures as part of this programme or the removal of the second fire engine at Thame will hopefully, however, be welcomed by affected employees. It will be imperative that the service takes immediate steps to resource further recruitment support for Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock fire stations and that we pursue further discussion about collaborative opportunities with

colleagues in Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service as far as Thame is concerned.

- (c) **Increased emergency response times in Oxford City and at night** – Given the recommendation in this paper that any final decisions regarding the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal are deferred, there remains a risk that subsequent decision-making as part of this project could result in increased emergency response times in Oxford City and across Oxfordshire at night. A key part of any subsequent decision-making will involve further consideration of consultation feedback and other relevant matters with respect to these proposals and weighing up the impact on community safety overall.
- (d) **Reduced fire engine resilience at night** – Similarly, whilst deferred, the reduction in fire engines being crewed by full-time firefighters at night under the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal means that there is still the possibility that the service recommends that greater reliance is placed on fire engines crewed by on-call firefighters at night. If supported by Cabinet, there is a risk that this increased reliance on on-call resources could result in fire engine availability challenges if on-call availability reduces at nighttime in the same way as we see it currently trending in the day.
- (e) **Financial challenges** – Both revenue and capital funding remain a challenge for the council. Whilst the original proposals were never intended to save money, the recommendations contained within this paper will prevent the ability for the council to realise capital receipts from the disposal of fire stations and prevent OFRS from the cost avoidance that closing the stations would have enabled. However, neither the capital or cost avoidance opportunities associated with the station closures or removal of Thame's second fire engine were originally required to deliver the main proposal or north of Oxford fire station proposal. Nevertheless, the financial viability of any decisions associated with these deferred decisions will need to be evaluated separately and the ability to deliver effective redesign could be constrained by the recommendations within this paper.

NAME

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex:

Annex 1 – October 2025 Cabinet Report: Improving our Fire and Rescue Service (consultation approval)(main report and exempt annex)

Annex 2 – Cover Model Finances - April 2026 final

Annex 3 – Consultation analysis report

Annex 4 - Fire and Rescue Cover Model Equality Impact Assessment

Annex 5 – Fire and Rescue Cover Model Climate Impact Assessment

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April 2026