

**CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES –
13 February 2012**

**FUTURE ARRANGMENTS FOR CALL RECEIPT, MOBILISING AND
INCIDENT MANAGEMENT FOR THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY
COUNCIL FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Introduction

1. Following the termination of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) national FiReControl project, Cabinet approved Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service the work jointly with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authorities to create a Strategic Outline (business) Case for the provision of their collective Fire Control functions. This examined the feasibility of the creation of a joint "999" call receipt, mobilising and incident management function for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and its partners.
2. In September 2012 both Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority supported the proposal and authorised actions to proceed with the programme. However, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority chose to pursue another option outside of the Thames Valley Sub-Region.
3. In the case of either Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes or Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authorities failing to approve the further progression of the Joint Thames Valley Approach, Cabinet required the Chief Fire Officer to instigate appropriate actions to progress an alternative contingency plan, subject to the approval of the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities.
4. In addition the Cabinet resolution required the Chief Fire Officer to report back to the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities on a regular basis concerning:
 - (a) progress with the joint DCLG bid for the resilience grant funding
 - (b) progress with Thames Valley partnership working arrangements
 - (c) progress on the creation of a suitable governance structure
5. This report identifies the contingency arrangements and gives details of further progress for items (a), (b), and (c) above.
6. It should be noted that the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA), in this case the Oxfordshire County Council, remains fully responsible for its statutory

obligations under the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 for call receipt and mobilising irrespective of any future collaborative or joint approach.

Exempt Information

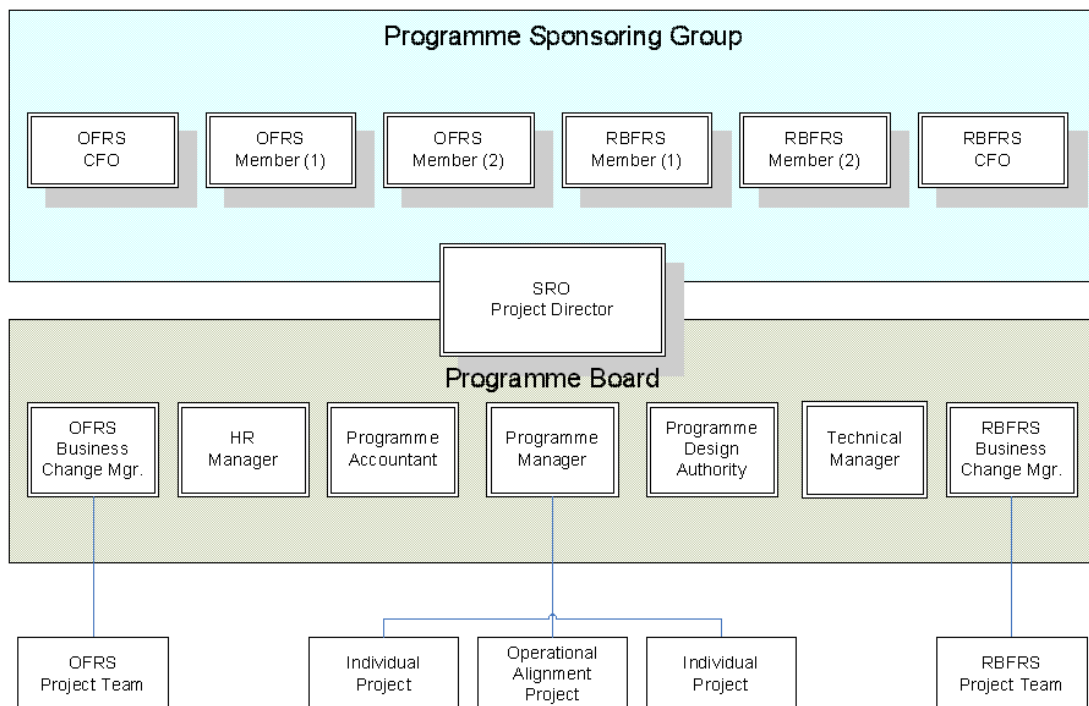
7. None

Contingency Arrangements

8. Following the decision of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Authority to pursue an alternative strategy, Officers from Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS and OFRS) have been working to examine alternatives.
9. Oxfordshire considered increasing the scope of activity of the current control and also networking with other control rooms in a “virtual” control arrangement. However, following additional assessment and further dialogue with RBFRS and DCLG, the most appropriate option is considered to be continuation of a Fire / Fire Joint Control approach which will in due course deliver a single control room, a secondary control and further disaster recovery arrangements. This option was identified in the options appraisal presented on the 20 September and ranked as the equal second option behind a full three service approach.
10. Work has progressed on this basis and it is anticipated that the Outline Business Case for a move to a single control will be presented to the OCC Cabinet meeting on 17 July 2012 and for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFRA) at its meeting on 28 June 2012 or, at a special meeting of the RBFRA to coincide with the OCC Cabinet Meeting.
11. The Cabinet report will, subject to the details provided in the Outline Business Case, propose the formal adoption of recommendations to move the Thames Valley Fire Control Programme forward with the creation of a single control.
12. It is proposed that this decision point will be subject to the following caveats:
 - (a) The acceptance of the Outline Business Case and the later provision of a satisfactory Full Business Case;
 - (b) Confirmation by the CFO of the operational effectiveness and resilience of the solution;
 - (c) The identification of a legally compliant and effective governance model; and
 - (d) Completion of effective stakeholder consultation incorporating a Service Impact Assessment.
13. At this point it should be noted that the location of a single control and the staffing arrangements required have not yet been determined. Work is underway to fully examine both of these issues which will be central to the Outline Business Case to be presented to Cabinet on the 17 July 2012.

Programme Governance Arrangements

14. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the commencement of the programme has been drafted and the details are being discussed further for later agreement of the Programme Sponsoring Group (PSG) and final endorsement of OCC Cabinet and the RBFRA.
15. It is suggested that the PSG includes two elected Members from each Authority and the two Chief Fire Officers (or their nominated Principal Officer representative), as well as the Programme Director (Senior Responsible Owner).



16. The PSG is part of the Programme Governance Structure. However, it is not a Committee or Working Party of the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) or the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (RBFRA). It is not a Joint Committee and is not required to be politically balanced.
17. It is suggested that the OCC Members in the PSG include the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities and the Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
18. The roles and responsibilities of the Programme Sponsoring Group include (but are still subject to further discussion):-
 - (a) To appoint, advise and support the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) (Programme Director).
 - (b) To establish the organisational context of the Programme.
 - (c) Authorise the Programme Mandate.

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- (d) Approve in principle the Outline and Full Business Case, investment decisions and the cost apportionment and benefits realisation models for the Programme.
 - (e) Resolve strategic and directional issues that need the input and agreement of senior stakeholders.
 - (f) Confirm the strategic direction against which the Programme is to deliver.
 - (g) Approve progress of the programme against the strategic objectives.
 - (h) Champion the Programme, providing continued commitment and endorsement to the programme and, where appropriate, lead strategic communications.
 - (i) Confirming successful delivery and sign-off at the closure of the programme.
19. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the Programme Sponsoring Group will take place during February. Apart from consideration of the Programme Mandate and Terms of Reference, it will be necessary for the Sponsoring Group to give early consideration to the appointment of a Senior Responsible Owner/Programme Director and look at options for the steady state governance of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service, as many other critical decisions flow from the decision on Governance. It is intended that the County Council would be able to make a final decision in this regard on the 17 July 2012 with the RBFRA undertaking this on 28 June 2012.
20. It is recommended that the focus for the deliberations of the Programme Sponsoring Group on steady state governance should be on establishing a Joint Committee as the most appropriate vehicle for strategic supervision and governance of the joint control. This will be constituted from Members from the two respective authorities. Work is underway to examine the details of this approach.

DCLG Resilience Grant Funding

21. A joint bid for Section 31 DCLG Resilience Grant funding was submitted on the 4 November 2011. Recent communication with DCLG Officials has confirmed that the joint bid has been evaluated by the Department. There has been no need for further information or clarification on the bid and oral feedback has indicated that the bid was considered the exemplar. It, along with 24 others, is currently being presented for Ministerial approval which is expected in early February. Payment of the Grant is expected before the end of March 2012. OFRS and RBFRS Officers consider that the bid has a high probability of success.

Communications

22. A draft communications strategy and a draft initial communication have been produced and will allow for co-ordinated release of information to all stakeholders, including Fire Control staff who are considered as key stakeholders. Although yet to be finally agreed between OFRS and RBFRS,

the messages are based on those used by OFRS throughout the FiReControl project, namely:-

- We will to increase our resilience to provide 999 call receipt and mobilising
- We will maintain or enhance existing service levels to the public and our fire-fighters
- We will reduce overall expenditure, protecting operational budgets
- We will support our staff through the changes
- We will keep all stakeholders informed

Phase 1 and other Resilience Works

23. Meanwhile phase one work, as previously agreed by Cabinet in September 2011, is progressing to allow the implementation of mutual fall-back arrangements that will allow each of the existing Control Rooms to take over from the other and mobilise the resources of the other FRS.
24. This will further enhance OFRS resilience and for the first time enable a third party to take calls and mobilise OFRS resources directly without referring the calls back to Oxfordshire for our actions using secondary or tertiary systems.
25. As a separate precursor OFRS project, supported by OCC funding, the upgrade of the Oxfordshire Integrated Call Concentrator System (DS3000) has been successfully completed. This allows Control Operators to manage a range of communications including radio, 999 and administrative calls on a single device. OFRS is the second FRS in the Country to install this technology.
26. This is a very significant upgrade improving the resilience of the OFRS having replaced software that was installed in 1996. Initial deployment has largely been on a like for like basis with the previous system to minimise training requirements. However, developments are underway exploiting the functionality further. The system is capable of being an integral part of any future Joint Control.
27. In addition OFRS has signed a MOU with BT which allows them, on our decision, to instigate a call filtering system on our behalf. If Oxfordshire are experiencing spate conditions BT can be requested to ask callers a set of predefined questions and, subject to their answers, direct these calls to an alternative number / facility. This allows Oxfordshire to set up a spate call handling centre and to batch non-life threatening calls to arrange area based response. This, coupled with the exploitation of new functionality provided in the DS3000, represents a major improvement in resilience to spate conditions.
28. OFRS is the first and as yet only, FRS in the Country to instigate this system which was included as a recommendation from the Pitt Report following the 2007 floods. The system is an integral part of the Code of Practice for Telecommunications providers and provides a degree of additional resilience to spate conditions whilst other options are being developed.
29. As a result of these three items, coupled with our earlier work funded by OCC, to replace all mobilising equipment at the 24 Fire Stations, OFRS's resilience

position is dramatically improved from during the majority of the timeframe of the National FiReControl Project.

Risk Management

30. The Strategic Outline Case will contain a comprehensive risk assessment based on the creation of a Joint Control. Meanwhile it is identified above that significant works to enhance the resilience of the FRS have continued to be undertaken reducing the risks to the organisation of failing to meet its statutory duties.
31. It is acknowledged that the most significant programme risk relates to partnership issues due to the complexity of the authorising environments. Measures, including the creation of the draft MOU and the proposed PSG arrangements, have been taken to mitigate this as far as is possible.
32. A draft risk assessment has been created for the overarching programme which will be formally approved and periodically monitored by the PSG.

Legal Implications

33. As indicated above it should be noted that the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA), in this case the Oxfordshire County Council, remains fully responsible for its statutory obligations under the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 for call receipt and mobilising irrespective of any future collaborative or joint approach.
34. Further work to determine the details of the Joint Committee approach is being undertaken and final Cabinet approval of entry into the programme will be subject to the creation of legally compliant and effective governance arrangements. At this time the creation of a Joint Committee is believed to be straightforward.

Financial and Staff Implications

35. Financial and programme staff implications for initiation of Phase 1 have been met from existing project resources.
36. Initial indications show that subject to receipt of the DCLG grant that the programme is financially viable.
37. Control staff are receiving periodic updates and will be supported through what is acknowledged as uncertain and challenging times. Comprehensive staff briefing sessions are planned in February.
38. Management are fully committed to continue to support staff throughout the entirety of the programme.

RECOMMENDATION

39. **The Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) approve continued working with RBFRA on a joint programme to create the Outline Business Case for a single Joint Control which will be subject to final approval by the Cabinet in July 2012;**
 - (b) note the submission of the DCLG joint Bid;**
 - (c) approve the creation and membership of the Programme Sponsorship Group;**
 - (d) require the Chief Fire Officer to maintain an alternative contingency plan should DCLG funding not be secured or other unknown issues cause the cessation of the joint approach;**
 - (e) require the Chief Fire Officer to continue to report back to the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities on a regular basis concerning:**
 - (i) progress with the joint DCLG bid for the resilience grant funding**
 - (ii) creation of the Outline Business Case**
 - (iii) progress on the creation of a suitable governance structure**

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Background papers: Nil

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