

Division(s):

CABINET - 26 FEBRUARY 2013

STRATEGIC COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2013 - 2018 AND CRMP ACTION PLAN 2013 - 2014 - PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Report by Chief Fire Officer – Fire & Rescue

Introduction

1. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the Secretary of State to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework to which Fire Authorities must have regard when discharging their functions.
2. The latest (2012) Framework requires each Fire and Rescue Authority to produce a publicly available Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) covering a minimum period of three years which should be appropriately consulted upon.
3. In order to improve accessibility and public understanding, OFRS has titled its IRMP as a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) - highlighting its aim to manage and mitigate the overlapping risks facing the local communities in Oxfordshire. This strategic, five-year CRMP has undergone a 3-month public consultation and is ready for final approval and publication. At the same time, the 2013-14 CRMP action plan (detailing specific projects related to the strategic analysis work) was also consulted upon and is ready for approval and publication.
4. This report summarises the consultation approach taken by OFRS and any key commentary and subsequent changes to the plans.
5. It should be noted that the consultation finished on 1st February 2013 - close to the submission date for this report (8th February 2013), so any significant consultation commentary that has not been able to be responded to and/or incorporated in to the final documents (including the feedback from the Safer & Stronger Scrutiny Committee on 18th February) will be provided as a verbal update, along with any additional proposed changes to the two plans.
6. Both draft plans have already been submitted to the Cabinet member for Safer & Stronger Communities (October 2012) and Safer & Stronger Scrutiny Committee (November 2012 and February 2013).

Consultation Process

7. The Strategic CRMP consultation process has been as follows:

May-August 2012	Pre-draft consultation (internal and external focus groups and on-line survey)
October – November 2012	Initial SSC Scrutiny of Draft
November 2012 – February 2013	Full Public consultation
February 2013	Final SSC Scrutiny & Cabinet Approval

8. The Scrutiny and public consultation process for the 2013-2014 CRMP Action Plan has been run in tandem with the Strategic CRMP from October 2012 – February 2013.
9. The full public consultation for both plans has taken the following structure:
- Invitation to approximately 1200 individuals & organisations associated with OCC (e.g. staff representative groups, parish, district & neighbouring councils and other parties with interest in the Fire & Rescue Service) to take part in an on-line questionnaire. To date, around 100 responses have been received.
 - Another 1200+ invites were sent to the Citizens' Panel members. In the region of 20 responses were received by the beginning of February.
 - The Service has also undertaken a number of public roadshows in local communities (e.g. Banbury, Witney, Bicester, Oxford, Henley, Abingdon, Didcot), with the aim of providing another 50-100 public responses to the same questions detailed in the on-line questionnaire.
10. The focus of the consultation process has been to positively engage staff, interested parties and the public in the development of both the strategic CRMP and the associated action plan, as well as significantly increasing both the quantity and quality of consultation responses. By 1st February, the Service had received over 200 responses to both the pre-draft and draft plans (compared against previous years where the totals have ranged from around 10-100 responses).

Consultation Outcomes

11. Overall, both the strategic five-year plan and one-year action plan have received strong support from all areas.
12. In respect to the on-line questionnaire, the consultation questions for the strategic plan were focused on the following key risk areas:
- Risks at Home (including Leisure activities)
 - Risks at Work
 - Risks whilst Travelling
 - Heritage Risks
 - Risk from Extreme Events

Risks at Home

13. In relation to reducing risks in the home, the questions were related to the benefits of installing domestic sprinkler systems, as well as the Fire & Rescue Service carrying and being able to use emergency medical equipment such as defibrillators.

Domestic Sprinklers - although strongly supportive of established fire prevention measures in the home (e.g. smoke alarms), a number of respondents raised concerns about both the cost of installing domestic sprinklers and the potential for water damage if activated accidentally.

OFRS response – the Service will continue to recommend the installation of domestic sprinklers from a professional perspective, particularly in the homes of vulnerable people, as they are a proven fire suppression tool. However, we recognise the national economic situation in respect to costs of fitting such devices. On the issue of potential water damage, we recognise that we need to raise public awareness about the overall benefits of domestic sprinklers, as the new systems do not pose a significant risk of accidental damage (since they are now designed to minimize such occurrences). There is no statutory requirement for people to fit domestic sprinklers in England, although recent legislation has been made in relation to ‘new build’ properties in Wales by the Welsh Assembly.

Emergency Medical Services – partnership working with the Ambulance Service was strongly supported by a number of respondents, with some even suggesting Fire and Rescue Services undertake aspects of Ambulance Service work.

OFRS response – we recognise the benefits to casualties of joint working with other emergency responders - such as the Ambulance Service and the Police – during an emergency incident. As a consequence, we are already providing frontline crews with trauma care training and defibrillators. We will also look to develop that working relationship further for the wider public benefit, whilst still being mindful of the specialist role of a paramedic and the Ambulance Service in relation to dealing with medical emergencies.

Risks at Work

14. In relation to risks at work, the questions were related to continuing to develop a risk-based approach with businesses to their fire safety responsibilities and the need to respond - in a timely fashion and with the right amount of resources - to any emergencies in commercial property.

Risk-Based Audits – respondents were broadly supportive of OFRS helping businesses to manage their fire safety responsibilities dependent on their risks – stating that education and support could actually reduce costs. Although some respondents were concerned that meeting any deficiencies could increase costs to Business at a difficult economic time.

OFRS Response – The Fire and Rescue Service has a statutory duty to enforce fire safety in businesses, although OFRS is committed to working with companies to support them with their responsibilities, using our enforcement powers only when it is necessary (e.g. in high-risk circumstances or where other alternative approaches have not been effective).

Responding to Emergencies in Businesses – again, respondents were supportive of maintaining and developing the right amount of resources (able to respond in a timely fashion) to effectively tackle emergency incidents in commercial properties.

OFRS Response – we will regularly assess the effectiveness of the current quantity and disposition of our fire stations and appliances, as well as any proposed future changes that may be required as a result of the changing risk profile of the county.

Risks whilst Travelling

15. In relation to risks whilst travelling, the questions were related to OFRS's development of the OCC Road Safety Education function (which we now directly manage), as well as the benefits of effective joint working with other agencies when dealing with road traffic collisions.

Road Safety Education – respondents strongly supported the continued drive to educate all road users about the risks and potential consequences of road traffic collisions, stating 'prevention is best'. Some respondents focused specifically on the need to educate adult cyclists and motorcyclists, in particular.

OFRS Response – OFRS will continue to work with partners, such as Thames Valley Police, to develop targeted education initiatives – although we will need to take into account that there is no statutory support to compel some groups, such as adult cyclists, to undertake road safety education.

Road Traffic Collision Response – respondents were strongly supportive of the three main emergency services working closely together when dealing with road traffic collisions. Some respondents felt it would be appropriate to share buildings as well – putting ambulance on fire stations, for example.

OFRS Response – we continue to develop procedures and training with both South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police, in order to improve our joint working arrangements at such emergencies. As part of OCC, we are also in the process of looking to maximize the public building assets we have by exploring any appropriate opportunities to share them with other agencies.

Heritage Risks

16. In relation to heritage risks, the questions were related to supporting the owners of heritage properties in the effective management of their risks, as well as being able to respond effectively to any emergencies.

Prevention and Response – although respondents supported the need to mitigate the risks to heritage properties, many stated that the owners had the primary responsibility to put in any prevention measures. It was also noted by some respondents that heritage properties were wide spread across the county and efforts should not just be focused on the larger and more well-known examples.

OFRS Response – OFRS already has resources in place to assist the owners of heritage properties as they consider how to best mitigate the risks of fire, as well as identifying heritage value as part of our own risk management processes. We are also currently researching new extinguisher technology that could assist in firefighting in complex, old buildings whilst minimising any resulting water damage.

Risks from Extreme Events

17. In relation to extreme events, the question focused on continuing to develop effective joint working arrangements with other agencies involved in such major incidents.

Prevention, Mitigation and Response – respondents strongly supported the need to work more pro-actively, closely and effectively with other responding agencies prior to any event, so that efforts are not duplicated when the emergency actually happens. Some respondents focused on specific prevention measures, such as gulley clearing to alleviate the impact of flooding, as well as stating that property owners had a responsibility to prepare and put in place their own prevention measures.

OFRS Response – as the service responsible for overseeing OCC Emergency Planning, we have already made good progress in developing county-wide plans and multi-agency training to support effective joint-working arrangements. The preparation work for the 2012 Olympics and Torch Relay, in particular, helped us to develop our multi-agency plans and procedures. We also continue to support local communities as they develop their own parish 'continuity' plans. This work will continue to evolve and develop as we learn the lessons from recent events, such as the 2012 flooding in the county.

Action Plan Consultation Response

18. The consultation on the 2013-2014 CRMP Action Plan focuses on specific initiatives linked to road safety, the research of new fire suppression technology, training firefighters to effectively respond to complex incidents and the implementation of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service.

19. Although the public were in broad support for most of the projects, there was some mixed commentary specifically around the Thames Valley Fire Control Service – with support for the improved facilities and technology, but concerns about the loss of local knowledge, in particular.

OFRS Response – the Thames Valley Fire Control Service has been created in order to improve the overall service it delivers to both the public and firefighters across the Thames Valley. From the outset of the joint Control project, the improvements have been centred on three main areas – operational resilience, operational effectiveness and the realisation of financial efficiencies.

In response to the specific concern about the loss of local knowledge, we are confident the new joint Control Room will actually improve upon the current situation, as the local fire crews will continue to maintain and update their local knowledge (as they do now) – but, in addition, the new Control Room will be able to use the latest technology not only to identify the location of callers more precisely, but also support the responding fire crews more effectively, by using the new ICT and communications systems, for example, to send additional relevant local and risk information directly to the fire engines – if they do not already have the information to hand.

It should also be noted that the project has been financed by central government funding - totalling £3.6m (being given Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire) - with additional funds also becoming available now with the recent re-inclusion of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes FRS into the project. Therefore, the improved service has not needed to be financed from local council tax.

Changes to the 2013-2018 CRMP and 2013-2104 Action Plan

20. Taking into account the OFRS responses to these consultations, as detailed above, there are no significant changes to either the five-year CRMP or the one-year action plan. Where any changes have been made, these are in relation to the terminology, plain English, design and layout – in order to improve the relevance and understanding of the documents.

Financial and Staff Implications

21. Although there are no immediate financial and staff implications relating to these documents to report, the resulting project work and initiatives may have such impacts. As a consequence, each CRMP project will fully recognise the prevailing economic constraints, delivering efficiencies or allowing existing/additional services to be delivered more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION

22. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to agree that the documents be adopted as the final versions of the Strategic 2013-2018 CRMP and 2013-2014 CRMP Action Plan.

DAVE ETHERIDGE
Chief Fire Officer – Fire & Rescue

Annexes: 2013-2018 CRMP / 2013-2014 CRMP Action Plan

Background document: 2012 National Framework for Fire & Rescue Services

Contact Officer: Nathan Travis, Deputy Chief Fire Officer; Tel: 01865 855206

February 2013