

# Thames Valley Fire Control Service



## Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)

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Note: This document is only valid on the day it was printed

### Document Control

Version	Date	Notes
V2.0	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2012	Amendments following Programme Board

### Summary

Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have entered into a strategic partnership designed to improve service to the public, enhance resilience and improve the cost effectiveness of emergency call receipt and mobilisation of fire resources.

The Fire Control room and the work undertaken by its staff, is central to the effective provision of both the Fire and Rescue Services. Staff receive 999 calls from the public and other agencies, identify the appropriate response, mobilise the necessary resources (fire engines and staff) and then continue to remotely manage and support the incident.

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) will deliver, on a phased basis, a joint Control centre equipped with modern technology. The programme will deliver the following benefits:

- Rationalisation of technology and infrastructure on the basis of a single Control Room site and common services across the two Fire and Rescue

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Services, that will provide both one off and recurring savings when compared to the potential cost of retaining and upgrading both existing control rooms.

- Rationalisation of staff numbers based upon a single Control Room site which will provide ongoing cashable savings.
- Rationalisation of estate costs based upon a single Control Room site and a single disaster recovery site which will provide both ongoing cashable and non-cashable savings.
- A resilient secondary control room which will be located in the opposite county from where the primary control room is located for resilience purposes.
- Planned capacity to allow for the opportunities to insource from other clients or customers. It is also intended to offer non critical out of hours call handling to other local authorities such as, Oxfordshire County Council.

The TVFCS programme is subject to full public consultation, with the consultation process ending on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012. A pivotal decision regarding the future of the programme will be made by Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

**NB:** This is a 'living' document. A Service and Communities Impact Assessment (SCIA) ensure policies meet the diverse needs of the organisations' customers and wider stakeholders. This assessment is iterative and will be updated at significant decision points within the programme.

### Review Date

This document will be reviewed on a regular basis. The first milestone and review point will be early July 2012 following the end of the consultation period & prior to both Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire's Fire Authority meetings scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

### Purpose of the Assessment

This document is an initial assessment of the possible impact attendant with the proposed merger of the existing control room functions into a single TVFCS. Currently, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) operate their own, separate, Control Rooms.

This document considers the communities of Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire as well as Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue personnel and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue personnel and will be reviewed as consultation on the proposed merger is received.

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Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 (“the 2010 Act”) imposes a duty on the County Council and Fire and Rescue Authority, to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. This proposal is such a function.

The three needs are:

- the need to eliminate any conduct which is prohibited by or under the 2010 Act;
- the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share any of the protected characteristics listed in section 149(7); and
- the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and
- encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.
- Steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled include steps to take account of a person’ disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding. Compliance with these duties may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that does not permit conduct which would otherwise be prohibited by the 2010 Act.

These protected characteristics are:

- Age (people of different age groups)
- Disability (e.g. physical or sensory impairments, long-term illnesses and conditions, hidden impairments such as a heart condition, frailty, learning disabilities or mental health problems)
- Gender (men/women)
- Ethnicity (including Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic groups, Gypsies and Travellers)
- Religion/belief (different faiths, including people with no religion or belief)
- Gender Reassignment
- Sexual orientation

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- Marriage/civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and Maternity

This document outlines an innovative approach to the delivery of Control room functions across the boundaries of two Fire and Rescue Services i.e. Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire.

The existing control room functions do not discriminate against any protected characteristics and nor will they in the future.

### **Background to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service**

In response to the termination of the national FiReControl programme, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service are collaborating with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service on a programme to merge their two existing Control Rooms on a phased basis into a single, joint Thames Valley Control room serving the areas covered by both FRs. Within the Thames Valley Control room it is intended to introduce the enhanced resilience, technology and functionality that were to have been delivered by the FiReControl Programme, to the extent that this can be implemented without an overarching National model. The proposal will deliver a new service delivery model and realise significant financial efficiencies alongside enhanced resilience, performance and improved service to the public and firefighters.

### **Proposal**

Elected Members will be invited to consider recommendations for the creation of and funding for a Thames Valley Fire Control Service on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

The Government had intended to replace all local fire and rescue service Control functions with nine Regional Control Centres but this programme (called FiReControl) was terminated in December 2010.

While the FiReControl programme was in progress, OFRS and RBFRS ensured that their individual Control functions remained resilient with essential maintenance and selective upgrading of systems. However, owing to the planned move to a South East Regional Control Centre in Fareham, Hampshire, a decision was taken not to invest public money in medium and long-term development.

Since the Government terminated the FiReControl programme, OFRS and RBFRS have been working in partnership to investigate options for delivering an improved service.

Through community safety education programmes and fire safety enforcement, both services have seen a substantial reduction in the numbers of emergency incidents attended and the number of calls received, from a peak in the early 2000's. These falling call numbers and the consequential increase in cost per call handled means that individual Control rooms are becoming increasingly unviable.

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As an example, within RBFRS in 2001 each Control Operator handled 4 calls per shift at an approximate cost of £80 per call; in 2010 this had reduced to 1.36 calls per Control Operator per shift at an increased cost of £146.58 per call. The proposal for the new Thames Valley Control Room anticipates that these figures will be each Control Operator handling 2.6 calls per shift at a cost of £77.99 per call.

### **DCLG Resilience Grant Funding**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Resilience and Efficiency grant of £3.6m will cover programme costs and the required system upgrades to enhance the service we provide to the communities we serve and to enable successful programme completion to be achieved financially.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

A number of alternative options were considered including collaboration between Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA).

After 9 months of collaborative research into the available options BMKFA chose to pursue an alternative option with another Fire and Rescue Service. This was primarily driven on the grounds of financial savings and a quicker resolution rather than the enhanced benefits this programme would bring to the communities we serve.

Other options included research into

- Outsourcing our separate Control functions to other fire and rescue services.

These options involved research into the possibilities of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service providing the full Control Room facilities for RBFRS. A collaborative approach with London Fire Brigade was examined by RBFRS. Neither of these programmes were considered suitable for progression due to timelines, financial and technological concerns.

- Collaboration with other local emergency services.

These options involved discussions with both Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service. Whilst all three services offer emergency provision to the communities, it was evident that there are significantly different ways we process emergency calls and categorise responses. Due to the sheer number of emergency calls received by our partners, limited resources and cost we could not pursue these options.

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### Impact on Individuals and Communities

The programme seeks to enhance our current system and will improve the Control room function across both geographical areas. However, there is a small but recognisable risk of a disruption or failure of service during the merger of the control room functions into a single entity. This is mitigated in the individual Fire Control rooms by their extensive back-up systems including duplication of systems, secondary control facilities and the provision of alternative or remote buddy brigades. The specific risks of transfer to the single joint control will be mitigated by taking a phased approach to the establishment of the new Control centre, including a number of milestones and gateway reviews to ensure new systems are fully operational before full implementation.

Concerns have been raised by individuals and communities about the loss of local knowledge amongst control operators compared to the current situation. However, given that the existing centres cover large operational areas it is not currently the case that all control operators have a detailed knowledge of the whole of the geographical area for which they are currently responsible. Local geographic knowledge of firefighters responding to incidents, which is considered more relevant, will be unaffected by the programme. Both control operators and firefighters have access to mapping systems which will be enhanced further by the proposed programme. Examples of this will include the provision of automatic vehicle location systems which have the ability to reduce attendance times at incidents. The speed of attendance is a major determinant of survivability or reduction in overall fire / incident damage occurring. As such this is a significant benefit to individuals and communities.

Training will be put in place to increase the extent to which control operators are familiar with the area covered by the new centre. Both control rooms currently conduct training sessions based upon the topography of both counties i.e. motorway junctions, river access, etc.

Concerns have been identified in relation to potential loss of staff knowledge levels relating to operational policy and procedures. The programme includes an explicit work stream designed to mitigate this situation. Where possible the programme will align operational policies and procedures based on an emerging regional standard which as well as minimising issues for OFRS and RBFRS will assist with aligning “over the border” mobilising to our neighbouring Fire and Rescues Services. Where the regional standard is not available or cannot be adopted a local procedure will be agreed between the two FRSs. If this cannot be agreed, individual arrangements will be adopted and additional support will be provided from both the ICT system and by specific training for staff.

This programme is not anticipated to have any detrimental impact upon anyone who contacts the service or in the way that resources are allocated, including people who share the protected characteristics, rural communities or areas of deprivation. Any detrimental impact, if identified, will be positively addressed within the programme.

Existing processes and procedures to ensure the services are accessible to those with particular needs will be carried into the new centre, including “Text Talk” for

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people with hearing impairments and the use of “Language Line” for people for whom English is not their first language.

Risks	Mitigations
Disruption to or failure of service during merger of control functions into a single entity.	A three phased approach to be adopted. Phase One – Delivers early resilience benefits. Phase Two - Delivers a common mobilising system. Phase Three – Delivers a single TVFCS. Milestones have been identified during each phase to ensure compliance and functionality.
Individuals with hearing impairments may not be able to use the phone to report incidents	The Text Talk facility provided in existing control rooms will be transferred to the TVFCS.
Individuals who do not speak English as a first or preferred language may have difficulty reporting incidents	The Language Line facility provided in existing control rooms will be transferred to the TVFCS
Loss of / lack of local knowledge of geography or operational policies and procedures among control centre operatives could lead to inappropriate / inefficient allocation of resources	Training will be put in place to increase the extent to which control operators are familiar with the area covered by the new centre. Both control rooms currently conduct training sessions based upon the topography of both counties i.e. motorway junctions, river access, etc. The programme includes an explicit operational alignment work stream designed to mitigate any possible concerns relating to operational policy and procedures.

Currently no differential impact has been identified at this stage on individuals who share protected characteristics, rural communities or areas of deprivation, beyond those identified above. However full public consultation is currently underway and the response to this consultation will be assessed in full.

### Impact on Staff

The programme does not include fundamental changes to the terms and conditions of staff. This is partially dependent upon the governance model chosen and the consequential arrangements put in place regarding the chosen employer. The assessment will be updated as further information is available in this respect. Some minor changes may be necessary based on shift start and finish times but the general pattern of employment will not be fundamentally altered by the TVFCS programme.

This paper recognises that there will be an impact upon staff dependant on the location of the primary control room. However, a decision on the location of the

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primary control room has yet to be made. **NB:** This assessment will be reviewed once a joint location has been agreed.

Risks	Mitigations
Loss of staff morale, staff feel threatened/insecure, resulting in reduction in performance levels and quality of service delivery on announcement/leakage of premise decision	Comprehensive HR strategy Comprehensive Communications Strategy supporting frequent and meaningful engagement with staff. This includes provision of paid staff engagement events Active redeployment / redundancy planning
Challenges to the HR processes (including, if appropriate and depending on governance vehicle, TUPE arrangements), resulting in a delay to the delivery	Comprehensive HR strategy Full involvement of HR in Programme Board. Development of an HR workstream plan. Active engagement with individual staff members and representative bodies.
During phase 1 and 2 of the programme, the announcement regarding the location of the primary control centre may have an adverse impact on both staffing levels and sickness absence.	A comprehensive HR strategy coupled with full staff engagement and consultation. HR workstream will be in place to help minimise the impact on individuals
Members of staff may feel stressed as a result of the new changes including staff relocation.	Full staff engagement and consultation. HR workstream will be in place to help minimise the impact on individuals.
Location of TVFCS may lead to increased distance and cost of travel for existing staff, including additional stress as a result of increased travel which could have a particular impact on anyone more prone to stress and tiredness (e.g. those with particular conditions, pregnancy, etc.) or those who need to work closer to home due to other commitments (e.g. parents, carers). This in turn could lead to increased turnover and loss of experience / knowledge.	1:1 support and flexible working patterns in line with current Conditions of Service, policy and legislation.
Changes in shift patterns could have a greater impact on part-time workers, the majority of whom are female	Building a shift system / additional support or capacity across teams including the potential for job share opportunities.
Particular needs of disabled staff in extended travel arrangements, accessing the building and/or performing roles.	The planned facility would meet full Equalities Act 2010 compliance with regards to disability access. In addition the need for adapted ICT, seating and other equipment will be considered as part of the programme and



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	reasonable adjustments made for individuals as appropriate.
Need for control room staff to access the building via public / community transport	<p>Both proposed primary locations have been identified (within the premises selection process) as having good road access and are very well served by road and rail networks.</p> <p>Frequency of public transport will be determined further during the TUPE process if applicable, as part of the reasonableness process.</p> <p>Car parking, including designated spaces and facilities for disabled people</p>
Inclusion of appropriate facilities for different users	Quiet rooms, toilets, changing / showering facilities will be considered as part of the programme, mindful of the requirements of different religious beliefs, genders and transgender.

### Impact on other Local Authority and Oxfordshire County Council services

This proposal is specifically designed to enhance our current resilience and efficiency as well as providing an effective service for our firefighters and the public and as such, this initiative will have no impact upon other council services. Indeed it is considered that the proposed TVFCS will offer considerable benefits to our staff and our communities.

In considering and developing these proposals both Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have proactively consulted with all interested parties including staff, communities and other emergency services in both Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire.

### Impact on providers:

In considering and developing these proposals both Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have provided consultation opportunities with interested parties e.g. other emergency services. Via the OJEU<sup>1</sup> tender all potential providers will have a mechanism for responding.

In addition the tender specifications and procurement exercises are required to uphold the councils' and fire authorities' commitments detailed under the Equality Act 2010.

**END**

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<sup>1</sup> OJEU – The Official Journal of the European Union is the gazette of record for the European Union.