



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee Annual Meeting

Monday 13th May 2020, 2pm, a remote Microsoft Teams meeting hosted by
Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service

Minutes

Present: Councillor Judith Heathcoat (OCC) - Chairman
Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE (BMKFA)
Councillor Angus Ross (RBFA)
Councillor David Cannon (RBFA)
Councillor Mark Gray (OCC)

In Attendance: Rob McDougall (Chief Fire Officer, OFRS)
Michael Adcock (Area Manager, OFRS)
Christine Barefield (Personal Assistant, OFRS)
Trevor Ferguson (Chief Fire Officer, RBFRS)
Steve Foye (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, RBFRS)
Jim Powell (Area Manager RBFRS)
Simon Harris (Group Manager, TVFCS)
Jason Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer, BFRS)
Dave Norris (Head of Service Delivery, BFRS)
Calum Bell (Area Manager, BFRS)
Asif Hussain (Principal Accountant, BFRS)

Public: Live webcast broadcast: <https://oxon.cc/TVFCS13072020>

01. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED -

It being proposed and seconded it was resolved that Councillor Judith Heathcoat from OCC be appointed Chairman of the TVFCS Joint Committee for 2020/21.

02. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED -

It being proposed and seconded it was resolved that Councillor Angus Ross RBFA be appointed Vice-Chairman of the TVFCS Joint Committee for 2020/21.

03. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Steven Lambert, Mark Arkwell, Graham Britten and Conor Byrne.

04. INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Heathcoat thanked Councillor Clarke OBE for her Chairmanship of the committee during the previous year, and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service for hosting the Joint Committee meetings.

All Members and Officers introduced themselves.

05. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

06. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 MAY 2020

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) referred to item 8, action point 2 relating to the Public Sector Equality Duty and Gender Pay Gap. On 30th June 2020, The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) and Councillor Lambert had met with the Head of Equality and Diversity at RBFRS and it has been agreed that future reporting will be built in to, the next suite of performance measures. This was agreed by the Committee. Councillor Cannon asked for clarification that the reporting from RBFRS would be taken and included in the report rather than generating separate reporting. This was confirmed as correct by The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS).

RESOLVED –

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

07. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman took Members through the actions from the last meeting.

Councillor Ross raised the issue of the report that had been due to come to Committee regarding Grenfell however; this had been taken to the Working Group in May 2020. The Chairman confirmed that every Member of the meeting had received an email and been advised that this would come forward to the September meeting as agreed with the minutes being presented. The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) advised that his understanding of the action from the recent Workshop had been that they would bring forward, to the Joint Committee, matters from the Grenfell Enquiry as they impacted solely on TVFC. Other matters regarding the outputs and outcomes as they affect the Fire Service more broadly would, go through the normal Fire and Rescue Authority meetings. The Chairman thanked The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) for the clarification and advised that this would show in the minutes from the Members Workshop which would come forward to the September Joint Committee.

08. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

None.

09. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.5

None

10. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

Councillor Clarke OBC advised that this is the 5-year anniversary of the TVFCS and, the report shows that the service continues to improve. Councillor Clarke was pleased to report that the targets are being exceeded and, the report shows an underspend which demonstrates the collaborative working. Councillor Clarke went on to thank everyone who are involved in then TVFCS and, particularly through the Covid-19 response. Councillor Clarke advised the Committee that she did not believe the Fire authorities had been congratulated and thanked for, all of the work that they do and asked for this to be formally recorded in the minutes. The Chairman echoed the thanks that Councillor Clarke OBE had raised and stated that she believed that the Fire Service had gone over and, above during the Covid-19 pandemic and asked that it be noted that we are indebted to them for how they have kept our communities safe during this time.

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) took the committee through the main points of the report. He highlighted that this was the 5th year anniversary of the TVFCS and he was pleased to report that performance continues to improve across a range of measures not withstanding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) advised that the TVFCS had performed well against the existing measure for how quickly calls are answered during the year, with the target met in every month. Time to mobilise measures have remained comfortably under target for the year with the introduction of new technology in September which has enabled Control Staff to locate 999 callers using mobile telephones therefore; improving the call handling and mobilisation of resources. Call challenging for Automatic Fire Alarms has shown an impact on call handling times and, all 3 Services have committed to review their current policy in terms of its effectiveness over the next period and consider the results. Sickness levels have been consistent with the normal expected levels of seasonal absence. Staff turnover rates have been further reduced during the year and progress has been demonstrated for staff development and succession planning.

In relation to the year end financial position, the actual underspend was £33,387. This figure demonstrates the good financial management both, by Officers in TVFC and, their colleagues in RBFRS plus the oversight by the Senior Responsible Officers and Joint Committee.

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) took the Joint Committee through the notable activity for the year and, areas that will be considered going forward.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) for a concise report.

Councillor Ross asked if it would be appropriate for the committee to send a message to the TVFCS staff to mark the 5-year anniversary and he presented a few words to the Joint Committee. All present were in agreement with the wording and the Chairman asked for this to go forward.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the report be noted.

11. TVFCS PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 2019/20

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) advised that during quarter 4 2019/20 TVFCS handled 7934, emergency calls which had led to 4678 mobilisations. This represents a 5% increase in the number of calls in comparison to the equivalent period in 2018/19 but a decrease in consequential mobilisations of 4.3%. This had been caused predominately by the weather conditions which affected the Thames Valley area during the first 3 months of 2020 when 3 storms had arrived in quick succession. Performance has consistently improved throughout the year.

The Head of Service Delivery (BFRS) advised that efforts are being made to#

sustain this improvement through the, identification and sharing of good practice and the adoption of new technology. The work relating to the focus groups led by the Senior Responsible Officers has been paused due to Covid-19 but will be reintroduced as soon as possible to work with staff.

The business continuity plans for TVFCS were reviewed in late February/early March in response to the developing Covid-19 situation in Italy and a range of measures were put in place to ensure continuity of the service provision. These measures included protecting the Control room areas both in the primary and secondary Control room locations. The Joint Co-Ordination Group believe that the measures taken were incredibly successful and, is a real tribute to the efforts of Simon Harris, Julie Summers and the team.

The Group Manager TVFCS advised that the Covid-19 pandemic had necessitated some changes in how the Control room had to respond. Only 4 staff had personally reported symptoms however; the impact had been larger for staff who reported symptoms within the household. For staff with pre-existing health conditions it had been deemed safe for them to be in the workplace. The arrangements put in place back in February 2020 had led to the level of absence being covered through the commitment and flexibility of the shift-based staff. The service will continue to adapt to move with the national situation and, the Group Manager TVFCS was confident that they could meet that challenge. The Chairman stated that this brought to the fore the attitude of the Fire Service in general and the staff in the Control Room.

The Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that the establishment factor is low and, this is down to the work of the Group Manager TVFCS and the Management Team with their recruitment and succession planning. In the future, the establishment table will look slightly different as the Joint Committee move into the new service measures where there will be a bit more of a focus around staff turnover in relation to the overall establishment which will be more meaningful for Members. Competence levels are driven by the staff turnover and the experience levels are monitored across the Watches to try and balance out and, offer the appropriate support where it is needed. The Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that staff were not all at the same level of development and there is a spectrum of experience. It was felt that the word competence is slightly misleading as everyone within the TVCFCS are competent to undertake the role and, the use of the word in this context this relates to their competence in terms of pay purposes. Looking at the attendance levels, they are slightly lower than the previous year with one long term episode which is one individual and the team are working hard to support them. Councillor Clarke OBE asked whether the long-term sickness related to maternity leave and, it was confirmed that maternity leave is not reported through sickness. Overtime levels are within the expectation and, in line with the budgetary planning and does not demonstrate anything of particular note that was not expected.

The Area Manager (OFRS) drew the committee's attention to the call numbers which were just under 8,000 in quarter 4 which resulted in an average of 2,645 calls answered in the month by TVFCS resulting the staff deploying Fire and

Rescue Service assets 1,559 times. No fallback arrangements had been used during the period and, Ambulance colleagues were supported with Co-responding on an average of 110 times in that reporting period. The figures within the report are in line with previous years, taking in to account the storms earlier in the year and, demonstrates how busy the staff within TVFC are. The Area Manager (OFRS) highlighted the measure on % of occasions where time to mobilise is within 120 seconds and, advised that, the drop in performance had been due to, predominately to the storms and the amount of calls the staff were dealing with.

The Chairman thanked the three Senior Responsible Officers for their presentations.

RESOLVED –

That the Joint Committee noted the report and reiterated their appreciation to the Officers and Staff.

12. EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME (ESMCP) UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) presented a report on the ESMCP programme which provided an update on the status of the Nation Programme (NP) and ESMCP South Central Regions input into this. This report followed the update provided to the TVFCS Joint Committee meeting on 28th May 2020. Due to the meeting delays as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic, it had been a very short timeframe since the last update, and there were no immediate developments with regard to, ESN that directly impact on TVCFS. The National Programme has suspended work on the Full Business Caser as, a consequence of Covid-19 and a revised date for its publication is yet to be set.

In reference to the ESN adoption, the cessation of the Airwave system is now indicating a transition period of between Q2 2022 and Q4 2024. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) advised that, it is anticipated the revised Airwave cessation date will be announced as part of the Full Business Case publication. It was confirmed that Airwave continues to operate to the standards expected and this reassurance was presented to the Joint Committee. It was highlighted that the National Programme schedule does not include any contingency in its timeline for product delivery and, so it is the Officers view that it is reasonable to expect issues would be identified for resolution for a programme of that size and these consequently could impact the current delivery milestones and the planned transition period which Joint Committee need to be mindful of. Officers continue to monitor the implications of programme timelines against other TVFCS requirements taking account of issues such as hardware and software refreshes.

Thames Valley FRS colleagues are co-ordinating work with their colleagues in Thames Valley Police and this is contributing to, national work assessing the

ESMCP network coverage and they do this through walk and drive testing across the regions which provides an indication of what coverage of the current ESN provision is like as the network is coming in to being. This will inform and assure that the delivered coverage meets the expected operational standard of the emergency services and, consequently the Control rooms.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) advised that the, South Central Regional Programme Board continues to have senior responsible owners from the three Thames Valley FRSs. The arrangements for Hampshire and the Isle-of-Wight to move across from the South West Region have now been largely finalised with the National Programme and the final move is imminent. The Home Office Fire and Resilience Directorate have approved the 2020/21 business case for the spend of LTR Grant funding in line with the business case submitted by the Region to that Board meaning that it is clear on the funding and spend for the coming year. In relation to point 5.1, The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) confirmed that the ancillary costs from the LTR funding are only where additional activity is undertaken at the request of the National Programme and, where those costs have been agreed.

The Chairman raised concern regarding the suspension of the National Programme and, that the revised date for its publication is yet to be set and went on to suggest that this appears to be going on for a long time. In addition, the Chairman advised that she is continually concerned about the whole project and would welcome some confirmation on the route and, time this project was taking. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) suggested that these were questions more pertinent to the National Programme and, emphasised that, a large amount of work was still progressing with products being developed. It is clarity of a full business case that can be brought forward to the FRSs for normal governance processes to consider. The Chairman stated that, whilst she understood that, she did how certain elements could continue without the full business case as you do not know what the financial position is. Councillor Clarke OBE supported this and asked whether Airwave could continue and, be fit for purpose for the extended timeframe now being suggested and, also raised the implications of potential involvement from worldwide companies and the impacts due to current global issues. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) advised that Airwaves continues to operate to normal standards and assurances have been given and the National Programme have indicated that they would continue to invest where necessary to support the system. The product base for both Airwave and ESN is with Motorola who are, the primary provider, and whilst there are some, other associated products they are not necessarily associated to the firms suggested by Councillor Clarke OBE. Officers continue to operate a very clear view at the Fire Customer Group and The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) reassured the Committee that he presents a clear and robust view of the concerns.

Councillor Ross presented an observation that, the delay may mean that there is no clash with the upgrade/refresh of the Vision system. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) advised that this is a continual discussion with the relevant parties at TVFCS and ICT RBFRS in terms of potential transition days but also

stressed that there are a small number of providers of Control Room Systems of which Capita is one therefore, there is a clear relationship for Capita in terms of preparing services for ESN and ensuring they have the necessary hardware. Officers continue to monitor the timelines.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the report on the ESMCP and the delivery of the ESN were noted with continuing concern.

13. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 21st September 2020 at 2:00 pm.

Following the Members Workshop held on 28th May 2020, it was agreed that the date on the agenda of Monday 22 March 2020 will be a workshop rather than a formal meeting.

(The Chairman closed the meeting at 3.00 pm)