



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Consultation Document



PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

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Introduction

The Control room is the primary 24 hour point of contact for all emergency calls and for internal administrative functions. Every emergency call is received within the Control room and the Control operators are responsible for answering all 999 calls, sending fire engines and managing our resources to ensure we provide a highly effective service.

Along with many other fire and rescue services, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service currently each have their own separate Control functions. Both are staffed by highly trained Control Operators who answer 999 calls and mobilise fire engines to all kinds of emergencies including road traffic collisions, chemical spillages, large animal rescues, as well as fires.

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service are working in partnership on proposals for a new, single joint Control function. This document has been produced to provide you with information about this proposal and to seek your views about how we can provide the most effective, enhanced service to the communities we serve.



PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

About Us

Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS)

There are currently 24 fire stations in Oxfordshire, which are staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by a mix of wholetime duty system (full-time) and retained duty system (on-call) firefighters who offer safety advice, education and, of course, an emergency response service.

We have a front-line fleet of 34 fire engines and a number of specialist vehicles.

We employ over 250 full-time personnel (including middle and senior operational managers), over 360 on-call firefighters and 26 Control room staff. These are supported by 50 specialist or administrative staff.

OFRS covers a large area of 260,595 hectares, although the county's population density is much lower than that of the rest of the south east of England at 635,500.

We are organised around three Fire Risk Areas based upon the five District Council areas:

- West/Cherwell
- City
- South/Vale

OFRS Control functions are undertaken from the Control room on the headquarters site at Kidlington. In the event of a problem with the main Control room this is supplemented with a secondary Control room at Woodstock and fallback arrangements to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service. The Control room currently handles approximately 35,000 calls each year, of which 13,000 are emergency calls and 22,000 are administrative calls. OFRS Control as part of the wider County Council also handles a number of calls on behalf of other County Council departments.

Map of Oxfordshire split into the fire risk areas and showing the five districts and the 24 fire stations.

Key to fire stations:

- Wholetime
- Retained duty system (RDS)
- ◓ Day crewed



Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS)

There are currently 18 fire stations in Royal Berkshire, which are staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by a mix of wholetime duty system (full-time) and retained duty system (on-call) firefighters who offer safety advice, education and, of course, an emergency response service.

We have a front-line fleet of 22 fire engines and a number of specialist vehicles. We employ over 380 full-time personnel (including middle and senior operational managers), over 150 on-call firefighters and 34 Control room staff. These are supported by 100 specialist or administrative staff.

RBFRS covers an area of 125,914 hectares and has a population of 865,000.

RBFRS Control functions are undertaken within the purpose-built Control building on the headquarters site in Tilehurst, Reading. In the event of a problem with the main Control room this is supplemented with a secondary Control facility at the Whitley Wood Fire Station in Reading and a tertiary arrangement on strategically-placed laptop computers. A mutual, manual fallback arrangement is in place with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Control room currently handles approximately 67,513 calls a year, of which 20,206 are emergency calls and 47,307 are administrative calls.



Map of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service area.

Key to Reading Fire Stations

- | | | | |
|----|----------------|----|-------------------|
| 01 | Caversham Road | 02 | Wokingham Road |
| 03 | Dee Road | 20 | Whitley Wood Road |

MAKING BERKSHIRE SAFER

Background

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

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

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

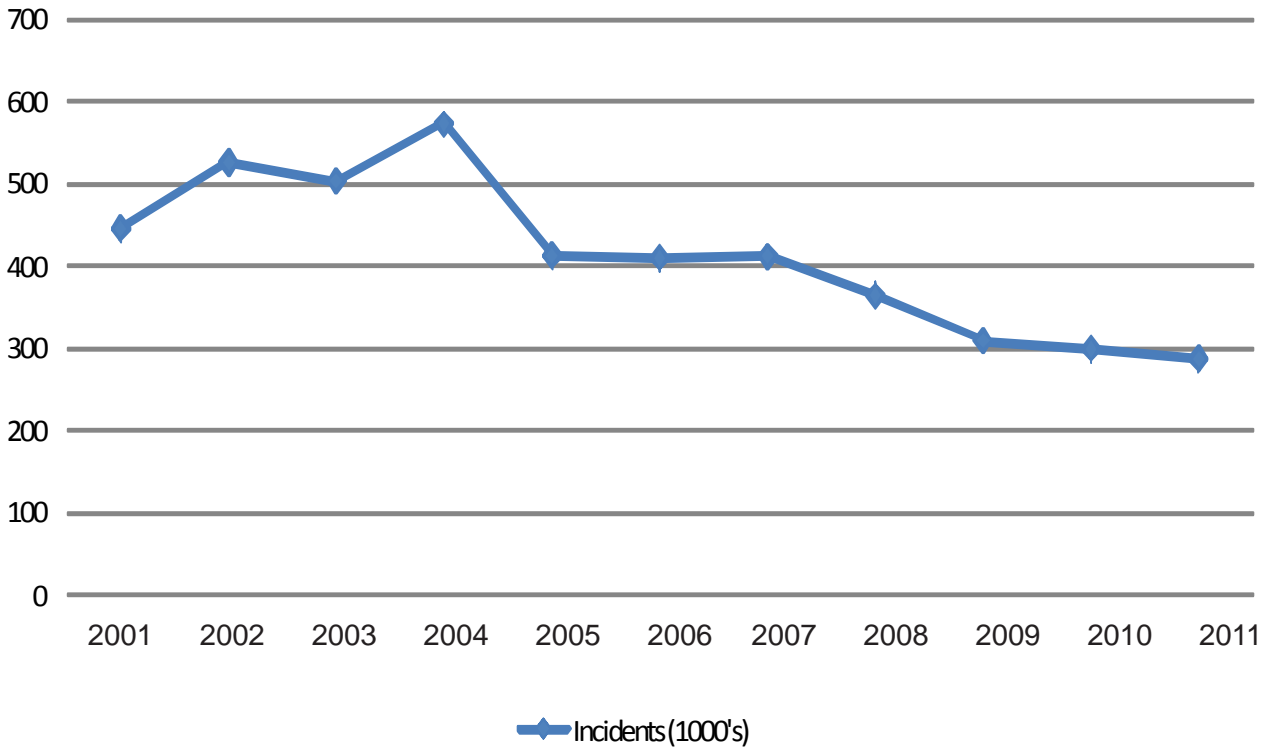
Through community safety education programmes and fire safety enforcement, both services have seen a substantial reduction in the numbers of emergency incidents attended and the number of calls received, from a peak in 2003/04. These falling call numbers and the consequential increase in cost per call handled means that individual Control rooms are becoming increasingly unviable.

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.

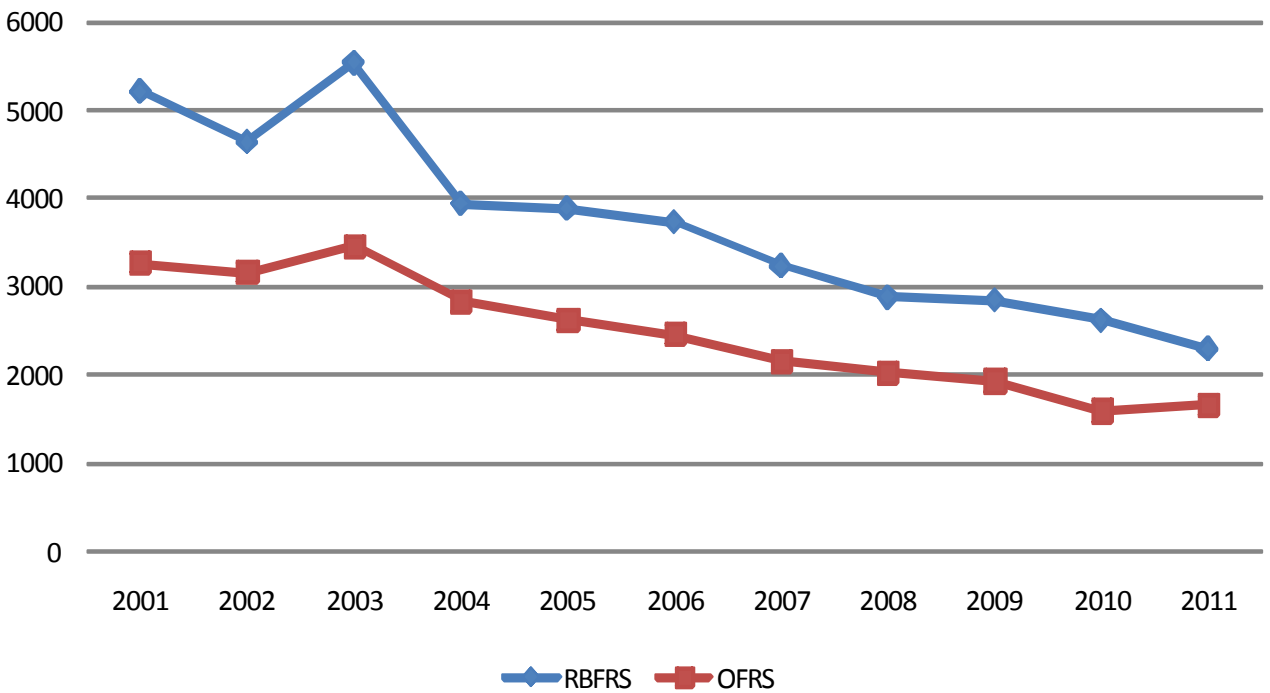


**PROTECT YOUR HOME
WITH SMOKE ALARMS
TEST YOUR
SMOKE ALARMS
EVERY WEEK**

National Fire Incidents



Thames Valley Fire Incidents



Note: The disparity between number of emergency calls and number of emergencies attended can be explained by the fact that an incident may generate numerous emergency calls to the Control room.

Therefore, we believe that a shared Control function between the two fire and rescue services, provisionally called the **Thames Valley Fire Control Service**, is the best way forward for OFRS and RBFRS. The plans are still in their early stages and will be subject to Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority approval in July 2012.

As part of this project, both OFRS and RBFRS are required to consult with the communities we serve and we are very keen to hear your views about our proposals.

Other Options We Considered

A number of alternative options were considered including a 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 project would bring to the communities we serve.

Other options included research into:

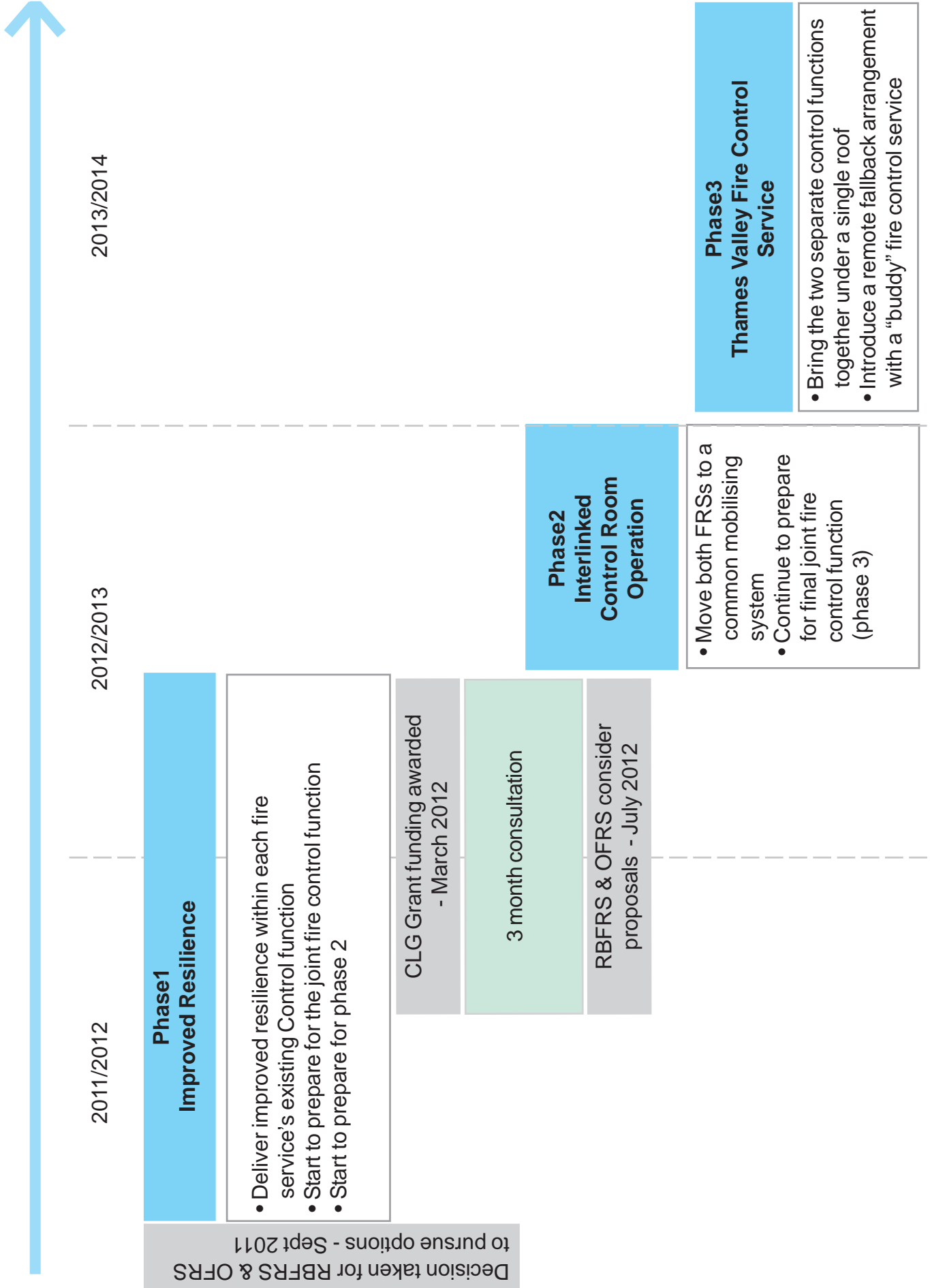
- Outsourcing our separate Control functions to other fire and rescue services.

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 projects were considered suitable for progression due to financial, timeliness and technological concerns.

- A 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 we serve 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.

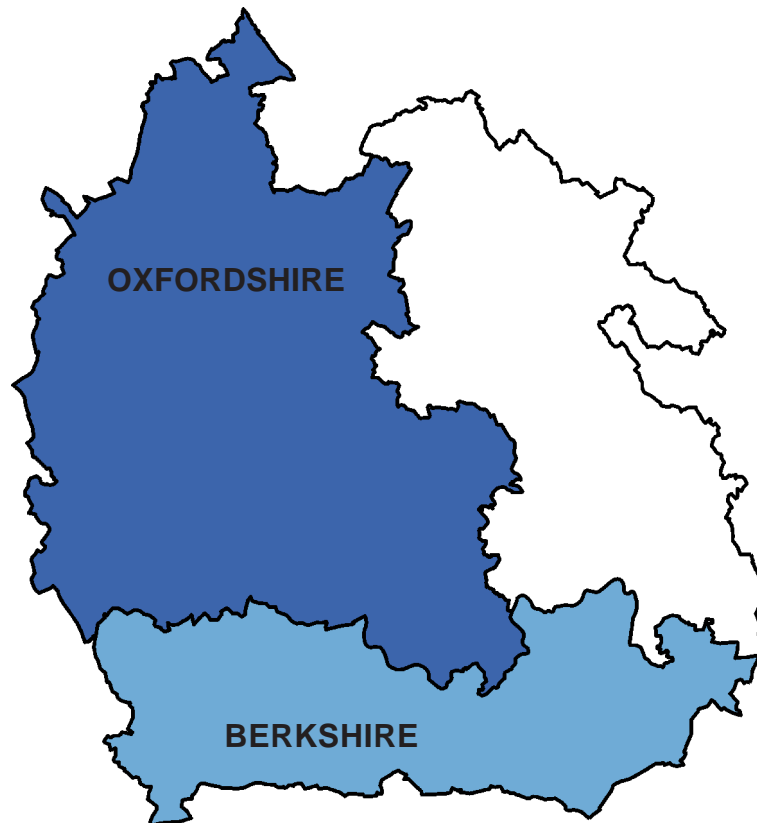
Proposed Thames Valley Fire Control Service Timeline



Our Vision

'Thames Valley Fire Control Service: A strategic partnership between Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire's fire and rescue services, which will provide a world class, resilient and cost effective emergency call handling, mobilising and resource management service, enhancing firefighter and public safety.'

Map of the Thames Valley geographic area



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What We Are Proposing

Enhanced Resilience (Our ability to offer an uninterrupted service)

One of the key aims of the project is to enhance our resilience and ensure we are able to provide an effective service at all times. The financial constraints of remaining as two 'stand alone' control rooms' would prevent us from adopting the latest technologies to enhance resilience and improve our current standards of service.

As a joint partnership the Thames Valley Fire Control Service will enable us to enhance our capabilities and also provide new opportunities for information sharing amongst all the emergency services by the introduction of new technology.

Another geographically remote fire and rescue service will be used to ensure resilience in the event of system problems or unusually high levels of calls. Wherever the TVFCS (the primary Control) is located, a secondary Control room will also be provided to further enhance resilience, guaranteeing a seamless, uninterrupted service in the extremely unlikely event that the TVFCS becomes unusable for a lengthier period of time.

We will improve security arrangements in accordance with central Government guidance, which will also enhance resilience. By introducing more resilient technology, we will increase system reliability, leading to improved business continuity arrangements.

As a single Control Room we are able to adopt common regional policies and procedures more quickly to ensure we can work more effectively with our partners (e.g. local authorities, other emergency services) and other fire and rescue services. This will also enable us to share our own and others' resources more effectively.

We welcome your comments on our enhanced resilience proposals.

Improved Efficiency

Individual Control rooms are becoming increasingly unviable, owing to falling emergency call numbers and the consequential increase in cost per call handled. The Thames Valley Fire Control Service will enable both OFRS and RBFRS to make significant efficiency improvements by rationalising the resources required, compared to the potential cost of upgrading both current Control rooms. It is anticipated that combined savings of £880,000 pa will be made across both Services.

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service will also create the potential for further collaborative arrangements with other fire and rescue services in the future, as well as the ability to offer non-critical out of hours call handling to local authorities (e.g. Oxfordshire County Council and Berkshire unitary authorities).

We welcome your comments on our improved efficiency proposals.

New Operational Benefits

Although we already provide an effective service to our firefighters and the public, there is scope for improvements. A new fire engine mobilising system will be introduced to enable our Control Operators to identify the location of both the caller and our fire engines, which will optimise our response times to emergencies and allow for accurate identification of the location of the emergency.

We will increase public and firefighter safety by providing our staff with the most up to date risk information and enhanced caller identification technology, which will determine the most appropriate response to emergencies.

Fire engines will be upgraded or fitted with the latest onboard computers which will provide mapping data and risk information such as individual building design and special or unusual processes or manufacturing.

These onboard computers will enhance public and firefighter safety whilst providing information for the Thames Valley area which will improve safety, both inside and outside of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

We will introduce an improved method of information gathering from callers, to ensure we send the most appropriate fire engines. This will also allow our Control Operators to give more detailed advice and reassurance to callers trapped in dangerous situations.

We welcome your comments on our new operational benefits proposals.

Staffing Numbers

Both fire and rescue services each have up to 34 people dedicated to emergency call handling, mobilising of resources and resource management functions. By moving to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service we can offer significant efficiency improvements in terms of the numbers of staff employed and the associated employment costs, whilst at the same time improving performance.

The following table gives an indication of current and anticipated call numbers, in comparison with other fire and rescue services.

Comparative Efficiency Table					
Service	Emergencies attended p.a.	Ctrl Staffing	Avg Emergencies per Operator/ p.a.	Avg Emergencies per Operator/ Shift	Staffing Costs/ Emergency £
London	120,692	115	1,049	6.36	52.45
TVFCS	13,217	30*	440	2.6	77.99
Lancashire	21,158	42	503	3.0	78.64
Kent	17,653	36	490	2.9	90.15
Humberside	11,543	33	349	2.1	130.08
RBFRS	7,674	34	225	1.36	146.58
OFRS	5,543	26	213	1.29	169.81

* Indicative figures

At this stage no specific numbers have been decided for the Thames Valley Fire Control Service, however we welcome your comments on our efficiency and productivity proposals.

Location

No location has been confirmed as yet but locations within the Service Headquarters buildings in Kidlington and Reading are under consideration as part of the premises selection process. It is anticipated that one of these sites will offer the 'primary' Control room, with the other site providing a 'secondary' Control room for resilience purposes. Rationalisation of estate costs based upon a single Control site and a single secondary Control site will provide ongoing savings.

We welcome your comments on the proposal for a single joint Control function in either of these locations.

Funding

Following the termination of the FiReControl project, grant funding was made available by the Government to support fire and rescue services to establish alternative solutions, to avoid the financial burden being placed on local residents.

Fire and rescue services were invited to bid for this grant in a very strict process that required detailed identification of efficiencies and improvements before any funding was considered. After a successful joint bid for funding, OFRS and RBFRS were awarded a total of £3.6M to finance plans for a single joint Control function.



Contact Us

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service welcome your comments on this Thames Valley Fire Control Services consultation document any time during the consultation period **6 April - 6 July 2012**

Please take this opportunity to make your views known, as it will help to develop strategies and policies to meet local needs.

* **Please note:** further copies of this document can be downloaded from our websites at www.rbfrs.co.uk and www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fire_service

How To Reply

You are invited to comment on our plans using any of the following methods:

- In writing, using the following **FREEPOST** address:
TVFCS Consultation
FREEPOST (RG2 669)
103 Dee Road
Reading
RG30 1BR
(Remember, no stamp is required)
- Email to: TVFCS@rbfrs.co.uk or TVFCS@oxfordshire.gov.uk
- Visit the Website at: www.rbfrs.co.uk or www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fire_service
- Telephone: **0118 938 4331**
- Fax us on: **0118 959 0510**

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Do You Want To Become A Retained Duty System Firefighter?

There is currently a shortage of retained duty system (on-call) firefighters at some fire stations in both OFRS and RBFRS. This is particularly the case in our small towns and rural areas because nowadays there are fewer people who live and work in their local towns and villages. You might be just the person to fill the gap.

Where do you work?

First of all, you need to live or work near to a fire station because you have to be able to get there within a few minutes of a call.

Secondly, because we can't predict when you'll be called out, you have to be flexible in your work. The chances are that you'll be working at home, self-employed or for a community-minded employer who can let you off from time to time.

Are you fit for the job?

To apply to join the Fire and Rescue Service you don't need any paper qualifications. You must be at least 18, with good all-round fitness. You will be asked to take a straightforward physical test as part of the process, and just as important are qualities like common sense, commitment and enthusiasm.

How often will you be needed?

On average, you will be called out two or three times a week for a couple of hours. If you cannot be available all the time, that's not a problem. You can be paid for being "on call" for only part of the day or week. There is a particular shortage of people who are available during midweek working hours, so you could have evenings or weekends free if you need to, and still do a valuable and worthwhile job. If you really can't be on call - for example because of a holiday or a deadline at work - you can "sign off".

What do you get out of it?

Apart from the excitement, the challenge and the satisfaction of a job well done, your ongoing training will assist you in becoming more self-reliant and confident. After all, if you can cope in a real emergency, you are ready for anything else which life might throw at you. You will meet a lot of people in your local community and earn their confidence and respect. You will also get continual, ongoing training in the use of equipment and in other more general life skills including first aid.

Added to all this, you get paid! You get paid a basic retainer, plus a fee for call outs and another fee for going into action. You get paid for training and duties like equipment maintenance.

If you think you've got what it takes to join the team, contact your local fire station for further information, or check out our vacancies pages at:

<http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/vacancies.asp>

<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/retained-firefighters>

Confidential Monitoring

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service are keen to ensure that their consultation with the public is effective and inclusive - so please answer the following questions and return these pages together with any comments you may wish to make to the FREEPOST address shown overleaf. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, all personal information will be confidential. It will be used for no purpose other than improving services.

Q1 Are you...? (Please cross **one** box only)

Male.....

Female.....

Q2 What was your age on your last birthday? (Please cross **one** box only)

16 to 24..... 35 to 44..... 55 or over.....

25 to 34..... 45 to 54.....

Q3 What is your ethnic group? (Please cross **one** box only)

White - British, Irish or any other White background.....

Mixed - White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White Asian or any other mixed background.....

Asian or Asian British - Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or any other Asian background.....

Black or Black British - Caribbean, African or any other Black background.....

Chinese or Other ethnic group.....

Q4 What is your first language? (Please write in)

Q5 Do you consider yourself to be disabled? Yes..... No.....

Q6 How did you become aware of this consultation? (Please cross all boxes that apply)

Website..... Newspaper..... Fire Service employee....

Email..... Through the post...

Other (Please specify)



Q7 If applicable, in which area of Oxfordshire or Berkshire is your main home?

(Please write in)

Please return these pages together with any comments you may wish to make to:

TVFCS Consultation
FREEPOST (RG2 669)
103 Dee Road
Reading
RG30 1BR

(Remember, no stamp is required)





Oxfordshire County Council Fire & Rescue Service HQ
Sterling Road, Kidlington, OXON OX5 2DU

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fire_service



**ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

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