

**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE–
30th April 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 a DCLG bid for 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

Alternative Arrangements

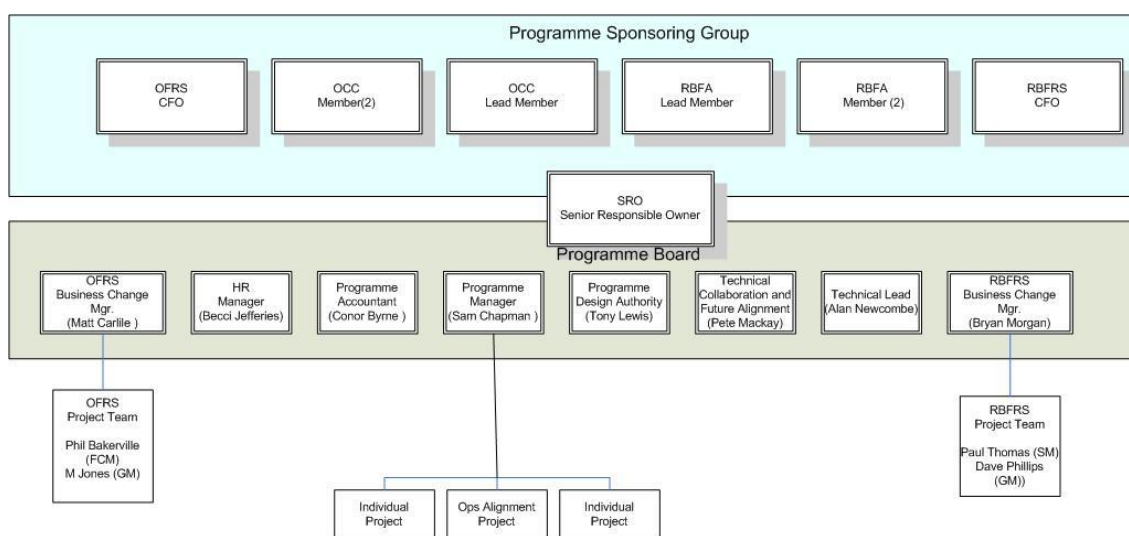
8. Following the decision of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Authority to pursue an alternative strategy, Officers from Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS and OFRS) identified an alternative which was subsequently endorsed by the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities on the 13th February 2012.
9. The alternative was the continuation by Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire to create a single joint control.
10. Work has progressed on this basis and it is anticipated that the proposal for a move to a single joint control will be presented to the OCC Cabinet and the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) on 17th July 2012 at their respective meetings.
11. It is proposed that this paper will be supported by:
 - (a) A full Business Case
 - (b) A paper giving details of the premises selection process and recommendation
 - (c) A paper identifying the proposed steady state governance arrangements
 - (d) A paper summarising the consultation (staff and public) activities and responses and analysis
 - (e) A Service and Community Impact Assessment

The paper will also have details of the arrangements for programme and steady state assurance of the operational effectiveness and resilience of the solution.

12. It is reaffirmed 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 report to be presented to Cabinet on the 17th July 2012.
13. The strategic reasoning for the proposal is to:-
 - (a) Improve organisational resilience (our capacity and ability to handle spate call conditions such as flooding events etc.)
 - (b) Improve the quality and responsiveness of the service to the public and our firefighters
 - (c) To allow reinvestment of revenue savings to protect operational services from financial efficiencies

Programme Governance Arrangements

14. A Programme Sponsoring Group (PSG) has been established and has met three times. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the programme has been drafted.
15. 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 (SRO)).



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 (RBFRS). It is not a Joint Committee and is not required to be politically balanced.
17. PSG Elected Members are the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities and the Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
18. The initial SRO of the Programme is Deputy Chief Officer Colin Thomas. The initial Chairman of the PSG is Cllr Dr Paul Bryant from Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. Both positions will be reviewed later in 2012.
19. PSG is supported by a Programme Board which has representatives from both authorities and is chaired by the SRO.

DCLG Resilience Grant Funding

20. A joint bid for Section 31 DCLG Resilience Grant has been successful and £3.6M has been received (£1.8M to each authority).

Communications

21. A communications strategy and a number of communications have been released. The main feature of this is a 12 week Public Consultation which commenced on the 6th April 2012. Announcement of this was supported by press releases.
22. The public consultation strategy is available on the OCC Public website: [Thames Valley Fire Control Service Public Consultation](#) and individuals and other stakeholders have been invited to respond using the OCC on line response system.
23. Oxfordshire County Council Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee Members are specifically encouraged to respond to the consultation.
24. In addition, two community engagement forums will be held in early May to seek further public views. Twenty to twenty-five members of the public will be selected for each event and will receive a presentation and then be invited to give their views on the proposal.
25. The forums will be managed by a professional and experienced consultation agency supported by advice from the OCC Consultation's team.
26. A separate staff engagement forum will also be held to seek their views.
27. At the end of the consultation period, feedback from all sources will be analysed and a report will be produced for PSG, Oxfordshire County Council and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority meetings.

Phase 1 and other Resilience Works

28. 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.
29. 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.

Risk Management

30. The papers presented to Cabinet in July 2012 will contain a comprehensive risk assessment based on the creation of a Joint Control.

31. Programme risk is managed by the creation of a specific risk register and risk treatments which are reported to PSG.

Legal Implications

32. 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.

Financial and Staff Implications

33. Financial and programme staff implications for initiation of Phase 1 have been met from existing project resources.
34. Initial indications show that using the DCLG grant that the programme is financially viable and the steady state costs will be lower than current costs.
35. Control staff are receiving periodic updates and will be supported through what is acknowledged as uncertain and challenging times. Initial formal staff briefing sessions have been undertaken.
36. A joint Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire management and Fire Brigades Union meeting has been held and further meetings will be programmed as necessary.
37. Management are fully committed to continue to support staff throughout the entirety of the programme.

Colin Thomas
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Background papers: Nil

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April 2012