

**DEPUTY LEADER & CABINET MEMBER FOR FIRE SERVICE
- 01 JUNE 2015**

**OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – COLLABORATION
ACROSS THAMES VALLEY BLUE LIGHT SERVICES**

Report by the Chief Fire Officer – Fire & Rescue Service

Introduction

1. This report seeks Lead Cabinet Member approval for the continued development of collaborative opportunities with other Thames Valley Blue Light Services (Police, Fire & Ambulance), supporting national guidance around inter (FRS-FRS) and intra (Blue Light) operability, whilst that the same time, delivering increased public sector efficiencies.
2. Specifically, this report highlights two collaborative initiatives for approval: Firstly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the three Thames Valley Fire & Rescue Services aimed at establishing a clear commitment by the respective fire authority members to consider each other's services as preferred collaborative partners from the outset. Secondly, the development of a separate MoU between the three fire authorities and the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner regarding the sharing, primarily, of property assets.
3. Both of these initiatives will build upon the knowledge gained and operational / governance frameworks developed by the Thames Valley Fire Control Service programme.

Background

4. Over the last few years, the three Thames Valley fire authorities have developed successful partnership working arrangements over a range of operational activities, from procurement and legal services to fire investigation and emergency response driver training. However, this partnership approach has advanced significantly over the last three years under the auspices of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) programme, where the complex sharing of premises, people and processes has led the authorities to establish robust operational, governance and outcome / performance based frameworks and operating practices that are focussed on improving the effectiveness, efficiency and commercial acuity of the three services in the face of continuing financial austerity. It is believed that this work has now provided the correct foundation for both identifying future collaborative opportunities and successfully implementing more strategy initiatives across the three authorities, whilst each fire authority retains individual ownership and direction of their respective services.

5. Accordingly, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) proposed for FRS-FRS collaboration focuses on the following key objectives and principles:

Objectives:

- Sharing resources on a fair and equitable basis, to support achievement of excellent outcomes for communities across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire.
- Delivering excellent, cost-effective and resilient services to communities
- Ensuring necessary capacity, capability and resilience across support functions in a cost-effective manner.

Principles:

- During the process of developing and delivering collaborative initiatives, fire authority members and officers will always focus on what is in the best interests of the communities they serve.
- Collaboration will be used as a mechanism to share best practice across the three fire and rescue services.
- All costs and benefits will be shared on a fair and equitable basis.
- Governance arrangements will be put in place, which properly balance the requirement for effective oversight with the need to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

6. As a consequence of this more focussed approach, further opportunities with other partners are also now being proactively identified and considered. However, the knowledge and frameworks acquired through the TVFCS programme are ensuring that the initial scoping of these potential collaborations are being shaped by their practical achievability and longer-term sustainability, and not just their potential outcomes and benefits.
7. More specifically, the TVFRS lead authority members and Chief Fire Officers recently met with the Police & Crime Commissioner, Anthony Stansfield, and the new Chief Constable, Francis Hapgood, to consider the potential benefits of collaborative opportunities focussed primarily on the sharing of property assets across the organisations.
8. Following that meeting, the respective political leads agreed for the officers to construct a suitable MoU (along similar lines to the Thames Valley FRS's MoU highlighted above), supported by a combined analysis of the current and future asset management priorities of each organisation – so that it is possible to identify and progress (or reject) opportunities early on and in a planned manner.

Financial and Staff Implications

9. Other than individual organisations seeking legal assurance on the format and content of the MoU's, there are no initial additional costs to developing this

approach. Likewise, any background research work to support any outline business case work can be undertaken within existing team resources.

10. However, each resulting project will need to be appropriately budgeted for across each organisation – both in terms of revenue and capital funding - and will need to fully recognise the prevailing economic constraints.
11. In addition, future funding streams will also need to be considered in respect to programme management costs and the development of any programme / project management team(s), although this could be delivered from within existing resources, existing medium term capital & revenue programmes and/or incorporated into any transformational bid funding that is applied for – on a project-by-project basis - to central government (either through DCLG, the Home Office or other interested government department).

Equalities Implications

12. A Service and Community Impact Assessment has been undertaken with regards to the proposed projects. This does not identify any issues with regards to equality.

RECOMMENDATION

13. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) Approve the contents of the proposed MOU's and the collaborative Blue Light Services approach described in this report.
 - (b) Sign the MOU's on behalf of the Cabinet of OCC and direct the Chief Fire Officer to continue with further collaboration

DAVID ETHERIDGE
Chief Fire Officer

Background papers:

- National Framework document for the Fire and Rescue Service
- Oxfordshire Fire Authority Integrated Risk Management Plan 2013-18
- Thames Valley Fire Control Service Full Business Case and programme management reports
- Fire and Rescue Collaboration in the Thames Valley
A Memorandum of Understanding between the Fire Authorities of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, and Royal Berkshire.

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