

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	25 JUNE 2020
SUBJECT	WARGRAVE FIRE STATION
LEAD OFFICER	NIKKI RICHARDS DIRECTOR SUPPORT SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR COLIN DUDLEY
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	TO AGREE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The closure of Wargrave Fire Station was part of the Service Redesign IRMP consultation that ran from December 2016 to March 2017. At Fire Authority on 18 April 2017, Members unanimously agreed to close Wargrave Station but deferred the implementation of the closure for twelve months based on the fulfilment of two key criteria:
 - 1) The required savings be found elsewhere within the RBFRS budget;
 - 2) Wargrave to demonstrate an increase in availability to 60% within that twelve month period.
- 1.2. The twelve-month period commenced on 1 October 2017, and elapsed at the end of September 2018. Through an updated report to Management Committee on the 22 October 2018, a recommendation was agreed by the committee to further defer the implementation of the closure of Wargrave Fire station for 9 months.
- 1.3. On 3 December 2019 Management Committee recommended to Fire Authority that the decision be deferred until June 2020.
- 1.4. At the 20 January 2020 Fire Authority it was resolved that the deferral period should be extended to June 2020 to give the crew additional time to achieve the required availability levels as prescribed by the IRMP consultation.

- 1.5. In addition it was noted that if the funding cannot be found and / or availability does not reach 60%, the extant decision will be taken to the Fire Authority meeting 25 June 2020.
- 1.6. This report sets out the progress against the criteria set out in 1.1

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Fire Authority:

- 2.1. **AGREE** the deferral period has now concluded and that the key criteria set out in 1.1 have not been achieved, therefore, the extant decision, made by Fire Authority in April 2017, will be implemented. Implementation will commence from 1 July 2020.

3. REPORT

3.1. Background To Wargrave Closure Decision

- 3.1.1. In 2016, it was identified that RBFRS were required to realise £2.4 million in savings annually from the base budget. Of these savings, it was agreed by the Fire Authority that £1.3m would be achieved through Service Delivery. Between December 2016 and March 2017, RBFRS consulted with the public on a set of evidence based proposals (Service Redesign) that could achieve the required savings. The main aim was to produce a set of options (containing a number of scenarios) which minimised risk, balanced across the county.
- 3.1.2. Using Risk Modelling technology, we analysed these scenarios in terms of the level of risk they would pose to the communities of Royal Berkshire, including the impact they would have on our ability to meet our response standard.
- 3.1.3. At the time of the consultation, it was identified that closing Wargrave fire station would have a negligible effect on our overall response standard, being less than 0.1%. Risk mapping also identified Wargrave as a relatively low risk area, in comparison to other parts of Berkshire. The risk model recently updated with 2018-19 data continues to support the position that the removal of Wargrave would impact our response standard by less than 0.1%.
- 3.1.4. Following consideration of the feedback received from public and staff, in April 2017 Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members chose to approve option one to achieve the required savings of £1.3 million. That option included the closure of Wargrave fire station, which would realise £168,000 in savings.
- 3.1.5. The Fire Authority, in conscientiously considering the views of staff and the communities of Royal Berkshire, determined that Option 1 of the Response options should be adopted, subject to the amendment that the implementation of the proposal relating to Wargrave be deferred for twelve months, and subject to the fulfilment of the following criteria:

- 1) The required savings be found elsewhere within the RBFRS budget;
 - 2) Wargrave to demonstrate an increase in availability to 60% within that twelve month period.
- 3.1.6. On 10 October 2017 the Fire Authority noted that the twelve month deferment period commenced on 1 October 2017, thus elapsing in September 2018. The IRMP Lead Member led a task and finish group on 10 October 2018 to establish the progress against the above criteria and understand potential developments in relation to both points. This led to an update to Management Committee on the 22 October 2018 where the committee considered a range of recommendations.
- 3.1.7. Management Committee recommended that the closure of Wargrave fire station be deferred for a further 9 months to see if the criteria in 3.6 (1) and (2) could be met. This was agreed by the Fire Authority on the 19 November 2018 and the nine month period commenced immediately and ended on the 18 August 2019.
- 3.1.8. In December 2019 Management Committee resolved to recommend to the Fire Authority that the deferral period be extended to June 2020, to give the crew additional time to achieve the required availability levels as prescribed by the IRMP consultation.
- 3.1.9. The 20 January 2020 Fire Authority meeting resolved the deferral period should be extended to June 2020 to give the crew additional time to achieve the required availability levels as prescribed by the IRMP consultation.
- 3.1.10. In addition it was noted that if the funding cannot be found and / or availability does not reach 60%, the extant decision will be taken to the Fire Authority meeting 25 June 2020.

3.2. Budgetary challenges

- 3.2.1. The 2020/21 budget approved by Fire Authority in February 2020. Due to the extremely volatile funding climate, additional pressures from pension liabilities and the delay of the Comprehensive Spending Review, it has not been possible to identify or confirm the £168,000 additional savings needed to keep Wargrave open. The current position is that there will still be a budget shortfall of £284,000 in 2020/21. This means that Wargrave Fire Station will need to be funded from reserves in 2020/21.

3.3. Availability Requirements, Data and Analysis

- 3.3.1. On-call availability is dependent on a number of factors; the overall establishment at the station i.e. the number of people, the level of cover they provide in terms of number of hours and whether this is during the day or night, on weekdays or at weekends and also the operational qualifications they hold.

- 3.3.2. The Service will only consider an on-call appliance available for operational use when there is at least four appropriately qualified crew available. This means a driver, a level 1 commander and 2 breathing apparatus qualified personnel.
- 3.3.3. Since April 2017 the Service has run five have-a-go days to try to raise interested in coming to work as part of the on-call team at Wargrave. Over that same period we have successfully recruited eight new starters, but unfortunately we have also had seven staff leave. This type of turnover is typical across all on-call stations.
- 3.3.4. Despite best efforts in relation to recruitment, retention and training, the availability at Wargrave over the past three years has fallen short of the target, as can be seen in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Availability by Month April 2017- May 2020

Wargrave Monthly Availability													
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Overall for year
2017/18	13.1%	10.5%	13.5%	10.5%	4.3%	5.8%	3.4%	25.7%	9.0%	36.7%	33.9%	29.2%	16.3%
2018/19	9.7%	17.6%	13.5%	16.7%	4.4%	3.2%	7.9%	19.3%	13.3%	46.4%	29.0%	32.1%	17.8%
2019/20	34.4%	18.8%	19.6%	21.8%	19.4%	10.4%	19.8%	22.2%	5.0%	14.2%	19.8%	13.6%	18.3%
2020/21	4.9%	2.8%											

- 3.3.5. The table above shows fluctuations of improvement and worsening of availability. Whilst significant commitment has been made by the station and the wider service to improve the establishment and qualifications profile, maintaining the right number of qualified personnel continues to prove to be a challenge.
- 3.3.6. A marked improvement occurred from January 2019 until April 2019. This was predominantly a result of a number of new staff obtaining qualifications. However, the encouraging outlook was short lived, as unfortunately in quarter one of 2019/20 there were three resignations. Of these, two individuals were qualified drivers and level one commanders. This has negatively impacted appliance availability as shown in the 2019/20 May and August availability figures and again later in the year. It is expected that this will have a continued impact in the medium to long term, as, even though current Establishment is 10, it will take time, willingness and commitment on the part of those staff at the station to undertake driving or level one command courses and responsibilities as part of their role.
- 3.3.7. In summary, although not impossible, the evidence suggests that the station is unable to reach and maintain the 60% availability target at this time or in the foreseeable future.

- 3.3.8. Obviously, our staff are extremely important to us. Therefore, affected staff will now be invited to attend individual meetings to discuss this matter. Of the ten remaining staff, five are dual contract which means they also hold wholetime contracts with us. As a Service we are due to recruit wholetime firefighters in early 2021 because of this we are able to offer the other five members of staff the option to transfer now into the Service onto a wholetime firefighter contract should they wish.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1. Commitment 2 – We will ensure a swift and effective response when called to emergencies
- 4.2. Commitment 5 – We will ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides good value for money.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The 2020/21 budget approved by Fire Authority in February 2020. It has not been possible to identify the £168,000 additional savings needed to keep Wargrave open. The current position is that there will still be a budget shortfall of £284,000 in 2020/21. This means that if Wargrave Fire Station remains operational it will need to be funded from reserves again 2020/21.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The implementation by officers of the closure of Wargrave fire station will take account of requirements under relevant employment legislation.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no identified equality and diversity impacts.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The risk implications relating to the closure of Wargrave are detailed in the Response evidence base that formed part of the service redesign consultation documentation. This is available in the managing section of the RBFRS website <https://www.rbfrs.co.uk/your-service/managing-risk/integrated-risk-management-planning/>
- 8.2. There is no indication that the risk implications relating to the closure of Wargrave have increased in the period between the original Fire Authority decision and now.
- 8.3. As described in section 5 there is potential financial risk to the Authority if the identified savings are not achieved.

- 8.4. Given the evidence contained within the Authority's risk model continued financial support for Wargrave may not be the most efficient use of public funds. It is unlikely to meet with the Authority's duty to ensure value for money.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1. The recommendations in this paper do not affect any collaboration arrangements.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1. The Chief Fire Officer has noted the contents of this report.
- 10.2. The Monitoring Officer has noted the contents of this report.
- 10.3. The Chief Finance Officer has noted the contents of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Below papers are available on request and on the website

- 11.1. Agenda Item 10 'summary report of responses to the service redesign consultation – Response proposals' Fire Authority 18 April 2017.
- 11.2. Agenda Item 6 'minutes of meeting held on 18 April 2017' Fire Authority 28 June 2017.
- 11.3. Agenda item 18 'IRMP service redesign update' Fire Authority 10 October 2017.
- 11.4. Agenda item 3 'minutes of meeting held on 10 October 2017' Fire Authority 27 February 2018.
- 11.5. Agenda item 10 "minutes of Fire Authority meeting held on 19 November 2018"
- 11.6. Agenda item 4 'minutes of Management Committee 3 December 2019 Management Committee 5 February 2020.
- 11.7. Agenda item 3 'minutes of meeting held on 20 January' Fire Authority 14 February 2020.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1. No appendices.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

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