

Collaboration

Review

Emergency Services have a duty to collaborate as a result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This provides RBFRS with a tangible legal framework to increase the scope of collaborative work and identify ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in how all services collectively keep our communities safer.

Much of RBFRS's collaborative activity is coordinated via the Thames Valley Collaboration Steering Group with political and non-executive leadership representation from across three Fire and Rescue Services, Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). Cllr David Cannon represents RBFA as lead member in this key forum and is further supported by Cllrs Gittings, McKenzie-Boyle, Smith and Simpson in the Collaboration Working Group, offering their support, guidance and where appropriate, challenge to how RBFRS move forward and extract the benefits available from closer working with partners.

In their 2019 review of RBFRS, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) specifically cited our collaborative activity under the key pillar of 'Efficiency' for which we achieved a 'Good' rating. The inspectors noted that RBFRS was "making best use of resources" with reference to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service, joint procurement initiatives including fire engines and the new aerial ladder platform and the opening of the first tri-service station at Hungerford. Further joint procurement of fire appliances and associated equipment such as breathing apparatus is scheduled and in May, RBFRS opened the second new tri-service station at Crowthorne with ground broken at Theale for the third which is due for completion in early 2022.

In 2019 a full-time, jointly funded programme office support post was substantiated. This critical role provides invaluable assistance, advice and guidance to project managers as well ensuring reporting and monitoring is accurate and timely. This role, based at RBFRS HQ, enables a smoother flow of information and delivery spanning across the organisational boundaries.

In late 2019, a comprehensive review of project work streams was undertaken to focus resource on common organisational objectives. The phase one work developing common practice in our delivery of fire safety services was drawn to a close with the production of a number of technical guidance notes.

The operational alignment programme, which has a wide scope of work streams that include the standardisation of all operational policies, procedures, training and equipment, was refocused to target areas of maximum opportunity. In 2020/21 this programme will prioritise the enablement of standardised breathing apparatus and address the significant challenge of aligning the Thames Valley to National Operational Guidance (NOG)

Ongoing and looking forward

In addition to the continued aspiration of achieving operational alignment across Thames Valley Fire services, RBFRS, in conjunction with TVP, will be leading a project exploring options on the future delivery model for fire investigation. A UK wide implementation of new stringent accreditation, expected in 2021, requires services to examine and plan for future delivery in light of the anticipated additional financial and administrative burden this will attract. As an interim arrangement, and in part as a result of the successful 'remotely managed station/flexi duty officer project', RBFRS have made arrangements to work with West Midlands FRS who are anticipated to support the delivery of our most complex fire investigation requirements from Q3 2020. RBFRS will also lead a review in understanding if there is opportunity in the delivery of some 'low volume / high specialist' fire protection tasks in a collaborative way.

Collaboration remains a challenging and complex environment in 'ordinary times' The additional obstacles created by the global pandemic, are likely to impact the scope and pace of activity for, at least, the remainder of 2020/21. Well established working practises and relationships across organisations should largely help overcome these issues however, RBFRS will look to identify areas that it may wish to refocus internal resource in helping to expedite some time sensitive critical project objectives.

Cllr David Cannon, Collaboration Lead Member