

Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS)

Review

As lead members, Councillor Angus Ross and Councillor David Cannon have led and supported TVFCS over the course of the last year as the service has continued to consolidate its 'steady state' position and has begun to take steps towards greater effectiveness and efficiency. Both members have attended the quarterly Joint Committee meetings alongside members from Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. They also regularly visit the control room and engage with the TVFCS management team and RBFRS Senior Responsible Officer (the former has been curtailed in light of Covid-19 restrictions.)

This consolidation and ongoing improvement was recognised in all three Thames Valley FRS Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) reports, noting that 'training was well managed and mobilisation generally good' as well highlighting the considerable savings this flagship collaboration generates.

In September 2019, TVFCS became one of the first Fire & Rescue Service Controls to begin using the BT Advanced Mobile Location system for 999 callers using mobile phones, this has greatly improved the ease and accuracy with which incidents reported using mobile phones are located. This has led to improvements in the speed with which calls are handled and appliances mobilised.

There are still concerns nationally and locally about the roll out the Emergency Services Network (ESN), in particular regarding uncertainty over the timescales for 'roll out'. However much of the technical work required for integration into the new network is already being carried out and TVFCS are represented on the relevant groups relating to the Emergency Services Network and maintain a regular dialogue with the ESN project team members within the FRS.

Staff turnover rates have further reduced during the year, with only two staff leaving employment with TVFCS compared with seven during 2017/18 and four during 2018/19. Of these, one was a member of staff retiring after thirty years' service.

The stability this has provided has enabled further progress in terms of staff development and succession planning and it has been possible to fill all internal vacancies at both Supervisory and Middle Management roles with strong internal candidates.

To support those personnel new in post, TVFCS staff have worked alongside colleagues from the RBFRS Resourcing & Development team to introduce a new framework for staff development across all roles. The Development and Assessment Pathways (DAPS) are now being rolled out to TVFCS staff to replacing the previously used NVQ system.

TVFCS Joint Committee members engaged in a series of workshops to review the performance measures and subsequently a proposal for new measures was agreed at the September 2019 meeting of the Joint Committee. The new measures will ensure members and the public have a more meaningful and informative set of criteria to understand performance and hold the service to account. The performance of TVFCS from April 2020 onwards will be reported against these new measures.

A significant amount of work has taken place in the final months of the year as a result of the global COVID 19 pandemic. Plans have been reviewed, revised and implemented to address the crisis. Although TVFCS has been impacted by absence related to COVID 19, it has been possible to maintain crewing levels and continue to provide the Service without interruption or degradation.

Ongoing and looking forward

TVFCS will maintain its ongoing program of software upgrades, along with considerations for the adoption of other new systems and initiatives, to ensure functionality within the Command and Control system continues to improve system performance and the effectiveness of our response to incidents.

A key element of this will be exploring 'Multi Agency Information Transfer' (MAIT) technology which should form part of the services considerations in respect of the Grenfell Phase 1 inquiry recommendations.

Senior Responsible Officers and the TVFCS management team undertook a meaningful staff engagement exercise to evaluate ways of working and the control physical environment as we approached the five year anniversary of the service. This will inform work plans for the coming year and will ensure TVFCS continue to develop and improve on the high quality service it currently provides.

Cllrs David Cannon and Angus Ross, TVFCS Joint Committee 2019/20