



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee Meeting

Monday 18th March 2024 at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) Headquarters,
Sterling Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2DU

Minutes

Present: Councillor Nathan Ley, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Neil Fawcett, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Matthew Walsh, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Peter Frewer, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

In Attendance: Rob McDougall, Chief Fire Officer (OFRS)
Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS)
Louise Harrison, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive Officer (BFRS)
Tom Brandon, Area Manager – Senior Responsible Officer (OFRS)
Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance (BFRS)
Simon Tuffley, Asst Chief Fire Officer – Senior Responsible Officer (BFRS)
Jim Powell, Area Manager - Senior Responsible Officer (RBFRS)
Simon Harris, Group Manager (TVFCS)
Irene Kema Onyeri, Deputy Finance and Procurement Officer (RBFRS)
Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead (RBFRS)
Chris Barefield, Personal Assistant/Committee Administrator (OFRS)

01. INTRODUCTION

Graham Britten advised the committee that, due to the last meeting not being a quorate, the committee would need to re-appoint Cllr Nathan Ley as the Chair for this committee year as the first item.

Councillor Fawcett proposed and Councillor Walsh seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Ley be appointed to preside over this meeting.

02. APOLOGIES

Councillor Simon Werner, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Councillor Simon Rouse, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (RBFRS)

03. INTRODUCTIONS

Due to some new members being present, introductions were made.

04. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

05. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2023

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting on 14 December 2023 were an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

06. RATIFICATION OF DECISIONS MADE AT THE MEETING ON 14 DECEMBER 2023 – TO AGREE

RESOLVED – that the Joint Committee approved the decisions made at the meeting on 14 December 2023.

07. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

None received.

08. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.5 (QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC)

None received.

09. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 2023/2024 – TO NOTE

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (BFRS) presented the Performance Report Q3 2023/2024.

This report demonstrates Service performance between April and December 2023, with 25 measures reported over the nine-month period.

A highlighted measure for Q3 is the high number of Service Desk tickets logged and a reduction in Service Desk response time during Q3, especially during December 2023. This is due to significant technical hardware upgrades within the control room over this period, which are linked to the delayed national Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project (ESMCP) in implementing the new Emergency Services Network (ESN).

The number of calls dealt with by the Service continues to average within ten percent of the previous five years.

The Service is not meeting its set targets for alerting fire stations within 90 seconds of receiving a 999 call, although performance has improved in Q3 relating to building fires. New measures will be introduced for 2024/25 to better understand mobilising performance.

The Service has consistently performed well in answering emergency calls within five seconds. This averaged 94.7% during Q3, which is above the 92% target set by the Joint Coordination Group.

The average number of calls handled per FTE during Q3 has been 89.6. The monitor established for this measure is set against the expectations set out by the regional fire control project in 2004.

Safeguarding referrals and the need to manage threats of arson continue to show an increasing trend when compared with the previous five-year average. Fire survival guidance has been given on four occasions during Q3 bringing the total up to seven occasions so far this year.

The employee headcount has remained stable, and staff turnover has remained within our target. Long term absence levels continue to remain within target, whereas short term absence levels have remained slightly higher than desired.

Councillor Ley highlighted the increasing trend of threats to arson and safeguarding referrals. Chief Fire Officer (RBFRS) advised that the safeguarding arrangements in the last 2-3 years has seen a 400% increase. He went on to say that our ability to respond and, organisational training and referring internally along with the confidence for partners to respond has contributed to an increase. Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that the trends are increasing and there is some linkage to serious organised crime. As a service this is being understood better but is indicative to how society is behaving. Due to TVFCS we can deploy the resources quickly.

RESOLVED – that Joint Committee noted the TVFCS Q3 Performance Report for 2023/24.

10. TVFCS Q3 BUDGET OUTTURN 2023/2024 – TO AGREE

The Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement (RBFRS) providing the Joint Committee with the 2023/24 Q3 revenue budget outturn position for TVFCS.

The budget provision for TVFCS for 2023/24 agreed at the Joint Committee meeting in December 2022 was £2,639,306 with a contingency allocation of £150,000 available if required. The Q3 Forecast outturn for the year was £2,694,284, a variance of 2.08%.

The pay awards have been higher than anticipated and has contributed to the higher salary costs and associated payments. The current year's budget is based on a pay award of 4% whereas the actual pay award agreed is 5%. Similarly, a provision of 5% had been made for the 2022 pay award but this turned out to be 7%.

In addition, the costs associated with the new Watch Manager (WM) position, approved in June/July 2023, have impacted the budget. While this addition is essential for operations, it has led to increased expenses. Rising prices for travel and accommodation, coupled with a new requirement for staff to attend nationally mandated training on responding to terrorist threats, have led to increased travel and subsistence costs. Additionally, there is an overspend on training costs due to a 'one-off' requirement related to managing neurodiversity in the Control room environment.

The original budget set for DS3000 maintenance and support was based on an estimated cost ahead of a contract award. The final cost was slightly lower. The budget for the Unicorn Network was set based on previous bills and contains a usage charge which can vary. Actual invoices received have been lower than anticipated, hence the variance here.

With reference to Capital Outturn, a few complicating factors delayed the commencement of the Vision mobilizing system hardware refresh. This has meant the tech refresh project did not start until Q4 2022/23 when the initial payments were made. The final payments were paid in Q3 of 2023/24, amounting to £284,000, including project management costs. The total Capex Profile for 2023/24 is £181,500 and this includes provision for replacement of the voice recording system at circa £90,000. This will not now be delivered in 2023/24 as it will be included in the ICCS hardware replacement due to be delivered in 2024/25.

In addition, the 2023/24 profile set aside an estimated figure of £50,000 for replacement of a video monitoring system. The actual cost was £72,351.

Councillor Ley asked whether the forecast overspend of £54,978 would be reduced over the next quarter. The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that the final overspend may be slightly higher; however, this is accounted for by salary costs which TVFCS do not have control over. It is hoped that the forecasted 5% for the next pay award will be closer to the final agreement.

RESOLVED - that the Joint Committee noted the report.

11. MAIT – MULTI AGENCY INCIDENT TRANSFER – FOR DECISION

Multi-Agency Incident Transfer (MAIT) is an interface that provides emergency services with a robust, fast and secure messaging solution to allow information sharing between emergency services and other agencies. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report had highlighted that communication between emergency services could have been improved during this event, with each service declaring a Major Incident at different times, without that information being shared across blue light services. Home Office funding is available for the first two years running costs, but FRS bear the cost of delivering the service in to control rooms.

The Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that any contractual decision has to be an authority decision and was why the paper had been brought to Joint Committee. This item seeks Committee approval to enter into a contract with AVR.

Councillor Walsh stated this is a great advancement and, the integrated system is better than the current arrangements; however, he asked realistically when TVFCS would be able to head towards this. Area Manager (RBFRS) stated that we are tied to the 2028 timeline as entering a contract now, would cost circa 6 figures which is a significant amount. He went on to say that the hope is that, when the sector starts to take on this web version as more suppliers come online, the market will bring the price down. In addition, the Area Manager (RBFRS) advised that there is a national project to look at governance arrangements.

The Area Manager (RBFRS) added that the hope is, that within the lifetime of this contract (4 years) a request will come back to Joint Committee to seek approval to move to the new integrated system.

RESOLVED – that Joint Committee agreed the contract between RBFRS and AVR Group Ltd for the supply and support of MAIT ‘hub’ services in TVFCS to commence in 2024/25 at a cost of no more than £25,000 for years 3 and 4 of the contract.

RESOLVED – that Joint Committee noted that the initial implementation costs will be recovered through TVFCS revenue recharges aligned to the stipulations of the Inter-Authority Agreement.

12. PROJECT SUPPORT ROLE UPDATE – TO NOTE

In March 2023, Joint Committee were made aware of a capacity issue in the TVFCS which was inhibiting the ability to make meaningful organisational change outside of BAU, including MAIT, introducing National Operational Guidance, aligning to newly published Fire Control Standards etc. In addition, there had been some technical issues with the old hardware and, a number of significant events such as the summer heatwave, Death of a Senior Figure etc

which had impacted. An agreement was made to recruit an additional resource at Watch Manager level to deliver projects and organisational change on a two-year, fixed-term contract.

An existing member of TVFCS was recruited to the role bringing with the knowledge closer to alignment with National Operational Guidance and credibility as staff have been able to see work being progressed by someone they trust and know well.

Committee were asked to note the progress that has been made since the appointment of a Project Support Officer.

Councillor Ley asked The Group Manager (TVFCS) what he would like to see happen with this role as it is currently a fixed-term position. The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that the post is in place until September 2025 which will enable the postholder to achieve quite a few of the work issues; however, at that stage a project will have commenced for the hardware refresh in 2028 as it takes 2-3 years to complete. In addition, The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that we do not have sight of what other changes may come. Ultimately, The Group Manager (TVFCS) and the SROs for the three services would like to retain this post on a longer-term basis.

Chief Fire Officer (OFRS) clarified that whilst, the fixed-term post had been funded through the CFO discretionary fund, the money contained within that fund does come from existing service budgets so although the cost is shared, it does create a pressure on their internal revenue budget. Chief Fire Officer (OFRS) went on say that we do need to be cautious around future spend as difficult budget discussions are having to take place internally.

The Area Manager (RBFPS) accepted the point made by the Chief Fire Officer (OFRS). He went on to say that the reason for bringing the update to committee, was to highlight the huge difference the post had made as the TVFCS had been carrying several risks. In addition, the post does help with succession planning as it enables staff members to have exposure to the more technical elements of TVFCS in terms of project management etc.

RESOLVED – that the Joint Committee noted the content and verbal update on the Project Support Role.

13. CONFIRMATION OF 2024/2025 MEETING DATES

- Monday 8th July 2024 – 2pm – *Joint Committee*
- Wednesday 18th September 2024 – 11am – *Members Workshop*
- Thursday 12th December 2024 – 2pm - *Joint Committee*
- Monday 17th March 2024 – 2pm - *Joint Committee*

RESOLVED – that the meeting dates were noted by all present.

14. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED – that the forward plan was noted and, no additions made.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 8th July 2024 – 2pm at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

(The meeting closed at 14:40pm)

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