



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee Meeting

Thursday, 12th December, 2024, 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present: (*) Councillor Peter Frewer, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Councillor Gary Hall, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Nathan Ley, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Simon Werner, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

In Attendance: Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Graham Britten, Monitoring Officer – TVFCS
Matt Chapman, Area Manager/Senior Responsible Officer - Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
Simon Harris, Group Manager – TVFCS
Louise Harrison, Chief Fire Officer – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Asif Hussain, Deputy Director of Finance and Assets – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer – Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
Jim Powell, Area Manager Collaboration and Response / Senior Responsible Officer – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Paul Scanes, Head of Response & Resilience / Senior Responsible Officer, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Simon Tuffley, Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Lukasz Wrona, Head of Business Information Systems – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Michaela Smith, Democratic Support Assistant – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Action

16. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Wayne Bowcock and Councillors Neil Fawcett, Simon Rouse and Matthew Walsh.

Councillor Gary Hall was in attendance as a substitute.

17. INTRODUCTIONS (INCLUDING CHANGES OF MEMBERSHIP, IF ANY)

All Members and Officers present gave a brief introduction.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members and Officers.

19. MINUTES AND RECORDED ACTIONS OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2024

Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, confirmed that the action on page eight (mandated training into the budget) was covered in the workshop which preceded the meeting.

Simon Harris, Group Manager – TVFCS, confirmed he had looked at contracts that have been awarded by other Fire and Resue Services in relation to Command-and-Control Systems and quoted the following: Humberside – £6m over a 6-year contract term, NFSP Partnership - C£24m over 7 years and Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire - £10–12 million over 10 -12 years.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

No questions were received from Members.

21. MATTERS ARISING

There were no Matters Arising.

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

None received.

23. TVFCS PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT Q1 & Q2 2024/25

Paul Scanes, Head of Response & Resilience, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, stated the Performance Monitoring Report covered service performance for Quarters 1 and 2, between April – September 2024. Some measures for October 2024 were also included.

September was a busier period due to heavy rainfall and emergency calls answered by the service during this period averaged within 10% of the previous five years.

Call handling targets have been reviewed to better understand call handling times according to call challenge and incident type. Call handling to building fires have averaged above target whilst calls to vehicle fires were slightly off target. Calls to fires in the open and road traffic collisions take longer to pinpoint, being harder to locate, and therefore have not met the 90 second target.

The service continued to perform well in answering emergency calls within the 5 second target, with the monthly average number of calls handled per FTE having increased to 93 in October.

Fire survival guidance given to the public were on four occasions. Staff turnover has been zero with headcount above target. Completed learning statistics remain low due to the recent introduction of a new mandatory learning package, which staff are yet to complete.

Within the period there was one reportable data breach which was a potential data breach concerning restricted access to data. Safeguards were now in place to prevent this happening in the future.

In response to a question about the breach, Simon Harris, Group Manager – TVFCS, reported the Information Commission Office (ICO) changed their guidelines earlier in the year which meant that potential breaches were now reportable. He added even though data on the information sharing system was available to unauthorised staff, no staff accessed the data.

In answer to a question from Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer – Oxfordshire

Fire and Rescue Service, around call handling targets and whether data was specifically linked to particular stations, Simon Harris stated that data could be expanded, broken down further and made available if required.

RESOLVED that the Performance Monitoring Report be noted.

24. TVFCS REPLACEMENT PROJECT MANDATE

Jim Powell, Area Manager - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, reported TVFCS 10-year anniversary will be in April 2025. The original business case predicted services would collectively save £1 million per year compared to running individual control rooms. In the past 10 years, significant financial savings have been made and the three services have aligned several operational procedures including training.

TVFCS legal agreement was established for the period of 15 years and was due to expire in April 2030. The contracts which were put in place within TVFCS mirror the legal agreement and were due to expire in April 2028. Engaging with suppliers has shown that going out to tender for a new system would take at least one year, and then two years to deliver the solution to Control.

Jim Powell stated the report was seeking Members to approve funding from the renewals account to enable a dedicated resource to carry out the work. The legal agreement requires each service to confirm they are willing to continue beyond the current life of the agreement. He confirmed that in the workshop that preceded the meeting, Senior Responsible Officers (SRO) agreed to bring a draft proposal to this Committee.

The Chair thanked Jim Powell and agreed this was a complex situation and could be looked at in further detail at the March meeting.

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer – Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, stated it would be useful from a budget perspective to have an idea of the range of costs. Jim Powell agreed and said they hoped to bring this detail to the March meeting.

SRO

Answering a question about the 10th anniversary of TVFCS, Jim Powell answered activities were being planned to celebrate this.

On being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

- 1) To recommend to Authorities in principle, to continue participating in TVFCS beyond 2030 by approving this project mandate, which recommends the TVFCS replacement project commence in 2025/26 be agreed; and,
- 2) A final decision and full approval, or otherwise, on future participation in TVFCS and further investment in the replacement project will be taken on

presentation of the Full Business Case in December 2025 be noted; and,

3) The Capital expenditure profile for 2025/26, enabling investment in phase 1 project resourcing to deliver the Full Business Case be approved.

25. TVFCS BUDGET REPORT 2025-26

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement – Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, began with the Revenue Budget (Appendix A), which showed a total budget of just over £3 million, which was a 4.6% increase. The increase was a result of employment costs caused by a budgeted grey book pay award, overtime costs due to increased training and a pension scheme deficit payment. The reduced staff turnover has meant that a number of staff have achieved role competence, and the accompanying uplift salary has led to increased costs compared to previous years.

He stated any addition to the pay award above 2% would need to come out of the contingency budget. Recharges have been reviewed and updated to reflect the cost to provide 2025/26 corporate functions, such as:

- Finance and Procurement – Increase due to the rise in audit fees
- HR and L&D recharges increase due to the restructure of HR and Health and Safety team and increased occupational health costs
- Secondary control recharge from Oxfordshire FRS has increase due to PSTN replacement.

The current call handling contract ends in April 2025, and the new contract begins on 1st May, with an estimated annual cost of £20K.

Appendix B detailed the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and included budget pressures and future salary awards. In referring to paragraph 2.4 of the report, Conor Byrne stated it was proposed that each TVFCS partner continue to set aside £50K towards capital replacement costs, and the fund totalled £1.82m at 31st March 2024.

Appendix C covered the capital expenditure programme, totalling £217,800 for 2025/26 and Appendix D detailed the forecast of payments into and out of the Renewals Fund.

Jim Powell, Area Manager - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said that the information in Appendix D would change over the coming years as it was a forecast based on TVFCS' current position.

Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer – Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, commented on the £20k increase in the 2025/26 Budget and queried whether the budget cycle could be brought forward to align with Oxfordshire County Council. Councillor Ley queried how much of the budget increase could have

been foreseen.

Simon Harris, Group Manager – TVFCS reported the budget cycle timescales were embedded within the legal agreement and that pay awards, staffing changes and other recharge increases were unknowns at the time of budgeting.

Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance - Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, confirmed any changes to the legal agreement would need to be approved by Buckinghamshire and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's and Oxfordshire County Council.

Asif Hussain, Deputy Director of Finance and Assets – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, stated it was challenging to forecast any budget early when there were unknowns and the £20k increase within a multimillion-pound budget was small.

In response to a question from Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Rob MacDougall reported Oxfordshire County Council 2025/26 budget report was brought into the public domain at the end of November 2024, therefore it would be helpful to have TVFCS 2025/26 budget six to eight weeks early.

Rob MacDougall asked a question about the Cost Apportionment Model and the ability to track incident changes to assist with forecasting costs. Simon Harris confirmed tracking data could be made available, and calculations could be run to show number changes for the previous year.

Conor Byrne added RBFRS try to accurately predict budget uplifts regarding staff moving into competence. He stated pay award assumptions were different to the actual pay award and advised TVFCS budget was presented to its meeting in December for Fire Authority and Oxfordshire County Council approval at respective meetings in February each year.

Jim Powell reported the legal agreement states two or more authorities can request that the cost apportionment model be reviewed and revised to reflect changes to the data (Population, Tax Base and Incidents Attended). However, amending the cost apportionment model principles is an Authority decision.

On being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**:

- 1) That the proposed TVFCS revenue budget for 2025/26 as detailed in Appendix A be agreed;
- 2) That a contingency budget allocation of £150,000 which would provide an upper limit of expenditure without further Authority approval be agreed;
- 3) That it be agreed to delegate authority to the three CFOs (unanimous decision required) for any unplanned expenditure between £10,000 and £150,000;
- 4) That it be agreed to pay £150,000 into the Renewals Fund (£50,000 from each partner) in 2025/26 towards capital replacement costs be agreed;
- 5) That the Capital Expenditure Programme for 2025/26 (Appendix C) be agreed;

- 6) That the Medium-Term Financial Plan (Appendix B) and Renewals Long Term Forecast (Appendix D) be noted; and,
- 7) To recommend to their respective Authorities the TVFCS revenue and capital budgets for the financial year 2025/26 and the individual Authority contributions to these budgets.

26. THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL - CONTINGENCY CALL HANDLING TENDER

Jim Powell, Area Manager - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, reported this paper was for note only as Authorities have approved for Contingency Call Handling Tender to commence. He explained the existing contract will expire on 30 April 2025 and were looking to tender for a new contract provision for Contingency Call Handling Service for TVFCS from April 2025.

It was estimated that the cost for providing this service will increase from £6K to £20K mainly due to inflation.

RESOLVED that it be noted Authorities have agreed to tender for Provision of a Contingency Call Handling Service and related services to Thames Valley Fire Control Service.

27. FORWARD PLAN

Jim Powell, Area Manager - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, made the following amendments to the Forward Plan.

- March 2025 Joint Committee meeting change '*TVFCS Contingency Call Handling*' to '***TVFCS Contingency Call Handling Contract Award***'.
- Scoping paper on TVFCS Replacement Project Mandate to be added to the Forward Plan
- December 2025 Joint Committee meeting change '*TVFCS Performance Report Q1*' lead officer to SRO.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

28. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

TVFCS Joint Committee meeting (Public meeting) – Monday 17 March 2024, 2pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

(The meeting closed at 2.45pm)