

CABINET

Tuesday 16 July 2019

RESPONSE TO PETITION

The Petition concerning 'Cancel the proposed cuts to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service in Runnymede'

It states: "When a fire is reported, the first appliance should reach it in 10 minutes or less. This standard should be achieved in at least 80% of cases - under these proposals this will not be possible. The response across Surrey would increase by 38 seconds but Runnymede would be hit particularly hard. Fordbridge has a 12-minute run to Egham using blue lights, Camberley is approximately 18 minutes and Chobham (with only intermittent 'retained' staff) around 16 minutes. Three appliances are needed for an incident on the M25 or M3 and four appliances needed for a house fire. Despite these demands, Egham Station regularly attends incidents in Berkshire. What has Egham and the surrounding area done to be excluded from very minimum standards? The potential for disaster and loss of life is self-evident.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service has experienced brutal cuts, with 131 firefighter positions slashed between 2010 and 2018 - a 17% reduction in the workforce. The proposed cuts would see a further 70 firefighter posts axed in the area, cutting numbers by 22% since 2010. This follows a December 2018 report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) voicing 'serious concerns' about the service's effectiveness and efficiency in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. Proposals from Surrey County Council would see drastic reductions to fire cover at night, with Egham, Painshill and Banstead fire stations closed at 1800 hours. Fire cover at Guildford, Woking, Camberley and Fordbridge would be cut in half. The drastic reductions to firefighter availability at night are under the guise of what the Council calls 'risk-based cover', as more fires occur during the day than in the evening. However, there is, in reality, a far greater chance of fire deaths at night, as victims are often asleep. Home Office figures show that, from 2017-18, 73% of all deaths from residential fires and 77% of all deaths from accidental residential fires occurred between the hours of 1800 and 0900. The appalling Grenfell fire started with an electrical fault at 1am.

Response times in the area have already suffered, with it now taking an average of nine minutes and 13 seconds for a crew of four firefighters to arrive at a fire, the longest response time for Surrey on record. In 1994/95, it took just six minutes and 52 seconds to send a larger crew of five, showing the cumulative effect of decades of cuts to the service. These proposals offer no improvement in public safety and do nothing to address how firefighters are supposed to keep themselves safe. We value the work of our firefighters, their safety, and we value our lives and we reject the proposals."

Submitted by Fiona Dent

Signatures: 1111

Response:

The proposals in the [Making Surrey Safer plan](#) have been developed to increase the service's focus on preventing emergencies, which we know saves lives with house fires down by 50% nationally over the past decade, and to ensure the right resources are in the

right places to deal with the risks in Surrey. The plan also addresses the [findings](#) from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection which said that our response to incidents is inefficient and we do not undertake enough prevention and protection activity to save lives by preventing emergencies happening in the first place. Given the scale of these concerns, we do not feel that continuing with the status quo is an option.

This work will see a significant increase in activities including fire safety visits for every Surrey school, more partnership working with districts and boroughs and four times as many safe and well visits as we do now. These visits are particularly important for people with mobility issues, other disability or vulnerability.

There will be no reduction in the number of fire engines, no fire station closures or any firefighter redundancies. The impact of this proposal on response times has also been modelled and independently verified. In terms of the Runnymede area specifically, the proposals mean a fire engine would be available at Egham fire station during the day (7am – 7pm) when we know the risk is higher and the service is busier. From 7pm until 7am, if a fire engine was needed in the area, this would come from a neighbouring fire station. We believe the impact of these changes is small and that residents will certainly be made safer because the increased prevention work will reduce the likelihood of emergencies happening in the first place.

We're also undertaking improvement work including bringing in new technology to speed up response times and have recently taken on 75 additional firefighters.

Sadly, recent tragedies in Surrey have shown us that even though firefighters arrive well within our committed response times to house fires, they had been unable to save lives due to fires taking hold. This reinforces that we need to do more to help prevent fires and work with residents and businesses to understand what to do when a fire does occur.

Ms Denise Turner-Stewart
Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire & Resilience
16 July 2019