

Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee

19 September 2019



Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Transformation Working Group Final Report

Purpose of report:

To provide the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee with a detailed report on the findings and recommendations of the Fire Transformation Working Group which was set up to review the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' which proposes a number of changes to the way Surrey Fire and Rescue Service operates.

Acknowledgements:

Members would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have taken time to share their experiences with the Working Group which has helped to shape the findings of this review.

Any errors, factual inaccuracies or inconsistencies contained within the report are the responsibility of the Fire Transformation Working Group alone and not of those who contributed their knowledge, insight and experiences to the formation of this report.

Recommendations:

The Fire Transformation Working Group recommends that:

- i. By 1 April 2020, the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience to ensure that the new proposed crew and vehicle placement model as detailed within the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' is resourced at full establishment firefighter (including on-call) staffing levels and for staffing levels to be closely monitored by the service to ensure these do not fall below establishment levels.
- ii. Emergency response times are closely monitored and scrutinised by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee on a quarterly basis to ensure that response times which do not meet current and future Surrey response standards can be addressed by further appropriate scrutiny.
- iii. If the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' is approved by Cabinet, that Senior Managers continue to engage with staff to discuss the impact of the changes on working

patterns and give staff the opportunity to comment and shape the design of the service.

- iv. The service must aim to recover costs from incidents which do not fall within the services statutory obligations. By 1 April 2020, a detailed schedule of charging for incident attendances is drafted to recover costs from incidents which do not meet the services statutory obligations especially in cases of persistent false fire alarms.
- v. The Surrey Fire and Rescue Service statement of assurance is scrutinised by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee in 2020 so the Committee can be confident that the service has the appropriate arrangements in place to deliver services safely and effectively.
- vi. All future public consultations and any associated documents are made accessible in a variety of formats to a wide range of people with differing needs including those with mental health support needs, learning difficulties and physical, sensory or cognitive impairments. It is recommended that the council works closely with organisations and groups that represent disabled people to pilot the accessibility of documents before any future public consultations are launched.

Introduction:

Context

1. At its meeting on 5 December 2018, the Environment Select Committee received a formal report from the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) on the performance of the service which included a brief update on the inspection undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The inspection findings and report can be found at the following link, <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/frs-assessment-2018-19-surrey/>.
2. It was apparent at this meeting that the service needed to transform. The Committee were informed of proposals for a service wide transformation programme designed to deliver the new Community Vision for Surrey 2030, address the findings of the HMICFRS inspection and the Governments Fire and Rescue reform agenda. At this meeting Members formally agreed to convene a Working Group to support the SFRS on its journey of transformation.
3. Surrey County Council is undertaking a large scale transformation programme to reform the function, form and focus of the organisation and improve service delivery to residents and deliver value for money. The transformation programme will support the council in achieving the outcomes in the [Community Vision for Surrey in 2030](#). A number of business cases based on six thematic

areas have been identified and will help the council deliver the Vision for Surrey in 2030. Within this, a business case to improve the fire service has been created.

The Working Group

4. A Working Group was formally established by the Environment Select Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2019 with a specific remit to scrutinise and review the details of the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan'¹ to ensure the plan and proposals are fit for purpose and support the needs of Surrey residents. Following the conclusion of its scrutiny, the Working Group would make recommendations to the Cabinet. The Terms of Reference for the Fire Transformation Working Group are attached as Annex 1 to this report and provide a detailed outline of the scope and remit of the Working Group.
5. The Membership of the Working Group was agreed as the following:
 - Saj Hussain (Chairman)
 - Jan Mason
 - Tina Mountain
 - Chris Botten
 - Amanda Boote
 - Marisa Heath

In May 2019, a new Select Committee structure was introduced to the council and the Environment Select Committee was replaced by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee. Due to personal circumstances and the change of the committee structure, the Membership of the Working Group has not been consistent and attendance at witness sessions has not always been 100%. Only Saj Hussain and Jan Mason form the current Membership of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee. The following Members have been present at the majority of Working Group meetings- Chris Botten, Jan Mason and Tina Mountain. The Chairman, Saj Hussain has been present at all Working Group meetings.

6. The Working Group initially met on 14 March 2019 to agree the group's work programme, proposed key lines of enquiry, the methodology for interacting with witnesses and the format of witness sessions. At this meeting it was agreed that qualitative research methods would be the best means in which to engage with witnesses and would help Members gain a deep and meaningful insight into the views of witnesses.
7. This report will provide details of the key themes and discussions that have taken place with witnesses over a four month period on the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan'. Views collated from witness sessions have been considered by the group

¹ https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/190154/CS4015-Fire-Community-Safety-Plan_v5.pdf

and a set of recommendations have been agreed for consideration by the Select Committee and Cabinet in September 2019.

Engaging with Key Stakeholders

Process for engagement

8. The Working Group met numerous times since it was first established hearing evidence from a diverse range of stakeholders in an effort to understand individuals and groups experiences of the Fire Service and views on the proposals contained within the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan'. Taking into account the Working Groups timescales for conducting research and meeting with stakeholders as described in Annex 1, the Working Group has sought evidence from a range of perspectives in an attempt to ensure that the outcomes from its work are both objective and balanced including Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) organisations, business groups and nature and conservation groups. The majority of those who have responded to the Working Groups call for evidence either have a keen interest in the Fire Service and/ or are impacted by the proposals contained within the document.
9. As explained in the introduction the Working Group had an initial meeting on 14 March 2019 to review the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' and identified and agreed key lines of enquiry to use when meeting stakeholders. As a starting point it was agreed that each stakeholder the Working Group met with would be questioned using the same key lines of enquiry with an opportunity to ask supplementary questions.
10. The following lines of enquiry were formulated and agreed by the Working Group and were shared with witnesses in advance of meetings:
 - a. How confident are you that the needs of the most vulnerable residents in Surrey have been addressed within the Community Safety Plan?
 - b. Is the community safety offer being proposed ambitious enough? Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has appointed a community engagement and positive action officer to improve engagement with people who it has found harder to reach.
 - c. What are your views on charging for non-emergencies (e.g. freeing trapped animals)? Do you think the service should adopt a formal cost recovery scheme?
 - d. How confident are you that the proposed response model (crewing and vehicle placement) is right for Surrey and will not have any adverse impact on the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to respond to emergencies? What actions will be taken to mitigate any risks?
 - e. Successful Community and Business Safety initiatives require strong partnership working. Do you think that partnership working can be strengthened any further within the Community Safety Plan?

11. Various methods were used to engage with stakeholders. The democratic services social media Twitter account was used to put out calls for evidence to residents. A call for evidence was also sent to the Surrey Community Resilience Forum and VCFS Infrastructure Organisations operating within Surrey County Council. An email was sent from the Chairman of the Working Group to all County Councillors twice asking for suggestions of any organisations and groups the Working Group should make contact with to support this piece of work.
12. Understanding witnesses time commitments, sessions took place around the county with Members travelling to the preferred location for witnesses.

Limitations

13. It is important to note that during the period the Working Group was gathering evidence a public consultation on the 'Making Surrey Safer-Community Safety Plan' was also taking place. This opened on 4 March 2019 and closed on 26 May 2019. As both pieces of work were taking place simultaneously there is a possibility that some witnesses may have found it more appropriate to respond directly to the SFRS public consultation rather than the Working Groups call for evidence.

Methodology

14. Specific organisations and groups identified in the Working Groups Terms of Reference were contacted on an individual basis asking if they would like to meet with the Working Group to consider the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan'. A total of 15 organisations and groups were contacted, of these 10 agreed to meet with the Working Group. Democratic Services followed-up with those who did not respond to the original call for evidence for a response. Relevant documents associated with the plan and the lines of enquiry were sent to stakeholders before meetings took place. Those unable to meet with the Working Group were given the opportunity to submit evidence through various methods which would then be shared with the Working Group for review. The Working Group met with the following stakeholders.

Table 1: Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder Name	Organisation	Date of Meeting
SFRS Leadership Team (Steve Owen-Hughes, Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Julie Pickford)	Surrey County Council	27 March 2019
Lee Belsten	Brigade Secretary, Surrey Fire Brigades Union (FBU)	10 April 2019

Clare Burgess	Chief Executive, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People	29 April 2019
Louise Punter	Chief Executive, Surrey Chambers of Commerce	7 May 2019
Hugh Bryant	Vice-Chairman, Esher and Walton Labour Party/ Manager, Cobham Area Foodbank	7 May 2019
Amanda Carcary	Senior Emergency Response Officer, Red Cross	7 May 2019
Alan Palmer	Chairman, Walton on Thames Trading Alliance/ Secretary of the UK Fire Association	7 May 2019
Paul Couchman	Secretary, Save our Services Surrey/ Secretary of UNISON	14 May 2019
Neil Odin	Chief Fire Officer, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service	11 June 2019
SFRS Staff Members (6 Members of staff including front line and back office staff)	SFRS	14 June 2019
SFRS Leadership Team (Steve Owen-Hughes, Sarah Kershaw, Bernie Beckett) and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience	Surrey County Council	22 July 2019

15. The Working Group heard the views of 17 stakeholders between March and July 2019. For a small Working Group with limited resources, Members were satisfied with the number of stakeholders that came forward. Numerous attempts had been made by the Working Group to engage with the various stakeholders impacted by the proposals, not all successful. Where engagement has not been possible, further attempts have been made by the Working Groups Support Officer to engage with these stakeholders.

16. Importantly, Members have been exposed to a diverse range of perspectives due to the willingness of the stakeholders listed to share their views with the Working Group. This has contributed to the Working Group making informed, balanced and robust findings.
17. As explained in paragraph 10, all witnesses were presented with key lines of enquiry prior to face to face witness sessions taking place. The responses to these key lines of enquiry were varied with some lines of enquiry receiving more in depth comments and feedback than others. The next part of this report will review the key themes arising from the key lines of enquiry presented.

Key themes emerging from the Key Lines of Enquiry

How confident are you that the needs of the most vulnerable residents in Surrey have been addressed within the Community Safety Plan?

18. The majority of the witnesses the Working Group spoke with were not confident that the needs of the most vulnerable had been addressed within the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan'. This was because the early draft of the Equality Impact Assessment ²(EIA) and the Plan did not contain the details of how potential negative impacts of the proposals on residents and service users with protected characteristics (including the disabled) would be mitigated.
19. This issue was raised with the service by the Working Group. In response the service stated that at the time the public consultation had gone live, the EIA was a work in progress and was being updated by the service with details on mitigation measures for people with protected characteristics. Mitigation measures had now been included within the updated EIA.
20. Witnesses also raised concern around the changes to response times under the new proposed plan and the impacts this would have on vulnerable residents. In particular that with night time response cover, on average a first appliance would arrive at a critical incident 38 seconds later under the plan. This concern was raised with the service who explained that even with a 38 second delay, the service would still be meeting the Surrey Fire and Rescue response standard which is to have a fire engine at a critical incident within 10 minutes from when the crew is alerted, and the second engine at the incident within 15 minutes.
21. Members were assured that the proposed crew and vehicle placement model and was based on a revised Community Risk Management Profile. Members were informed that with the proposals for more investment in business and community prevention work through the Making Surrey Safer Plan, the number

² https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/190533/Draft-Equality-Impact-Assessment-Making-Surrey-Safer-2019-FINAL-15.04.19.pdf

of incidents should decrease over time and vulnerable residents would be targeted within the business and community safety offer.

22. The Working Group recognise that a key issue for witnesses on this specific line of enquiry has been the increase to night time response times under the proposed model and the impacts this would have on residents. To this end, the group has recommended that response times are closely monitored and scrutinised by the relevant Select Committee on a quarterly basis and response times which do not meet Surrey standards are escalated to the appropriate authority for immediate investigation.

Is the community safety offer being proposed ambitious enough? Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service has appointed a community engagement and positive action officer to improve engagement with people it has found harder to reach.

23. There was not a great deal of feedback in relation to this line of enquiry with the majority of witnesses being supportive of the proposed business and community safety offer and additional resource being put into the business and community safety service. There was a recognition that there had been a drop in the investment in this service over the years with the schools programme being significantly reduced. The Working Group were informed that only the 11 Surrey SEND schools were visited as part of a formal programme in the current year.
24. As part of the business and community safety offer, witnesses referenced the need for the service to promote the work of the Surrey Fire Volunteer service and also the volunteering opportunities open to members of the public which in turn could support with the business and community safety offer. At one of the witness sessions, a witness explained that the best person to help a disabled person is a disabled person.
25. The Working Group support increasing resource for business and community safety but also recognise that the proposals being put forward by the service are ambitious and are therefore keen to ensure the service has the right amount of resource in place to manage the programme effectively.
26. At a meeting with officers on 22 July 2019, Members were presented with the current and draft proposed operational model for the Service which showed at the time a proposed additional 57 posts in the Business and Community Safety teams. Details of staffing proposals will be developed further once the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' is considered by Cabinet.

What are your views on charging for non-emergencies (e.g. freeing trapped animals)? Do you think the service should adopt a formal cost recovery scheme?

27. This line of enquiry created the most amount of discussion in meetings with witnesses. The majority of witnesses supported the recovery of costs from non-emergencies which did not fall within the service's statutory obligations but importantly recognised that recovering costs needed to be addressed on a case by case basis.
28. As an emergency service, many witnesses associated the Service with humanitarian causes such as freeing trapped animals and were therefore of the view that universal cost recovery should not be introduced across the service as a whole.
29. Witnesses were more supportive of the service recovering costs from persistent false automatic fire alarms and argued that cost recovery should be judged on a case by case basis especially in cases where vulnerable people are involved and where situations are out of people's control.
30. With the increasing financial challenges the council faces and the costs associated with operating a pump the Working Group agreed that recovering costs should be prioritised by the Service and a detailed schedule of charging for incident attendances is drafted to recover costs from incidents which do not meet the services statutory obligations. The Working Group was of the view that over time, cost recovery would begin to promote behaviour change amongst service users.

How confident are you that the proposed response model (crewing and vehicle placement) is right for Surrey and will not have any adverse impact on the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to respond to emergencies? What actions will be taken to mitigate any risks?

31. This line of enquiry was the most discussed. The majority of witnesses were unhappy with the proposed response model within the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan' and in particular the changes to night time cover which would see the number of appliances at night reducing from 30 to 23 (13 wholetime and 10 on-call appliances). The increase response times at night under the proposed plan created universal concern amongst witnesses.
32. With population growth, people living for longer independently and the requirement for additional homes across the county, there was concern from witnesses that if emergency incidents occurred simultaneously across the county at night, there would be a delay in response times due to the number of appliances being available.
33. A number of witnesses working within the Service, informed the Working Group that the fire service was currently operating under establishment figures. Although a recruitment drive was under way, witnesses were concerned that in the future night time appliances and in particular on-call appliances would not be resourced appropriately due to staff shortages.

34. The HMICFRS inspection report rated the Service as *inadequate* at making the best use of its resources and recommended that the Service ensure that its resourcing model meets risk demand sustainably³. As a result of this recommendation, Members were informed by officers that the Service had undertaken detailed risk analysis and response modelling, the latter of which has been externally verified by Cadcorp and concluded that there was currently more resource at night than was required. Members were informed that although there would be a decrease of seven appliances during night time, the service was confident that appliances would still arrive at incidents within the Surrey response standard. The mobilising system which sends the nearest fire engine to an incident would ensure the fastest response time.
35. Although the Working Group felt confident with the response modelling undertaken by the service, on behalf of the public, the group request further assurance that the proposed vehicle and crew placement model is fully staffed at the correct staffing levels when the proposed model is implemented in April. This was supported by the HMICFRS inspection report finding which stated that the service over-relied on staff overtime and needed to ensure appropriate resource was in place to respond to risk.
36. As a result, the Working Group recommend that the proposed crew and vehicle placement model as detailed within the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' is resourced at full establishment firefighter (including on-call) staffing levels and for staffing levels to be closely monitored by the service to ensure these do not fall below establishment levels. Many of the witnesses the group spoke with were supportive of this recommendation as it would ensure further resilience to the proposed crew and vehicle placement model.

Successful Community and Business Safety initiatives require strong partnership working. Do you think that partnership working can be strengthened any further within the Community Safety Plan?

37. Many of the witnesses the group met with were unaware of partnership working being undertaken by the Service to strengthen business and community safety initiatives. The Service recognised that over the years the amount of resource being put into business and community safety initiatives had significantly reduced which had impacted on work with partners.
38. Some witnesses the group met with commented that they had not had any contact with the Service for a number of years and the public consultation on the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' was the first communication from the service for a

³ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/surrey-fire-and-rescue-service-report-2018-19.pdf>

long time. Witnesses were open to meeting with the Service to promote business and community safety initiatives and strengthen partnership working.

39. The 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' makes reference to the Surrey Fire Volunteers which has been set up to help the fire service engage more effectively with local communities and support the delivery of community safety activity but many of the witnesses the group met with were unaware of this volunteering initiative.
40. Initiatives organised by the Service such as 'Safe Drive Stay Alive'⁴ where a series of live educational performances featuring a sequence of films and live speakers were welcomed for the impact they made to the prevention agenda and the wider partnerships they created.
41. The group were informed at a meeting with officers on 22 July that the community safety offer would be developed and increased across a broad range of stakeholders in community education and community safety partnerships including the NHS and Schools.
42. There was consensus that for the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' to be successful there needed to be a drive towards strengthening existing and building on partnership arrangements.

Other issues raised in witness sessions:

43. During witness sessions a number of other issues were raised by witnesses. This next section will touch upon these issues.

Accessibility of consultation documents

44. A witness representing disabled residents who was invited to a witness session informed Members that the consultation documents that had been launched as part of the public consultation had not been widely accessible to a range of residents with various physical, sensory and cognitive impairments. The group were informed that for the visually impaired, pdf documents did not work well with screen readers and the details within the document to contact the contact centre for an alternative format would not have been accessible by the screen reader.
45. Red text was widely used within the consultation documents for headings. Both red and green are two colours that are very difficult for anyone with Optic Nerve damage. Therefore a plain text version (e.g. black, unedited text) would be required by anyone with optic nerve damage or any degree of colour blindness. A plain text

⁴ <https://safedrivesurrey.org/>

version of the consultation document would allow the user to increase the document font size as per their specific requirements.

46. It was recommended that an easy read and plain text version of the consultation document were added to the website urgently so those with special requirements could access the document and respond to the public consultation. This request was raised by the Working Group with officers and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience. An easy read and plain text version of the consultation documents were added to the public website alongside a screen reader friendly version of the document although this did take some time to upload.
47. The witness recommended that going forward the accessibility of documents should be piloted with various groups representing the voices of disabled people before consultations are formally launched.
48. To ensure that those with disabilities are not hindered in any way from partaking in public consultations which impact vital services, the Working Group agreed that all future public consultations undertaken by the council and any associated documents are made accessible in a variety of formats to a wide range of people with differing needs including those with mental health support needs, learning difficulties and physical, sensory or cognitive impairments before consultations are formally launched.
49. The group also recommended that the council works closely with organisations and groups that represent disabled people to pilot the accessibility of documents before any future public consultations are launched.

Finances

50. A number of witnesses the group met with discussed the savings to be achieved from the 'Making Surrey Safer-Community Safety Plan'.
51. The consultation document stated that changes to the response model would reduce expenditure by circa £3m per annum with the increased resource needed to undertake community safety increasing expenditure by £1-1.5m per annum. This would leave a saving of around £1.5-2m. A number of witnesses queried what would happen with this saving and if it would be re-invested back into the service.
52. This point of discussion was raised with officers who confirmed that savings made by services were not automatically re-invested into services in which the saving was identified and would be used to balance the council's budget. At a meeting with officers on 22 July, the group were informed by the Director for Community Protection and Emergencies that the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community

Safety Plan' was intended to address the outcome of the HMICFRS inspection and that in reality there would be no significant savings from the proposals.

53. The group were informed that the Executive Director for Resources would be reviewing the budgetary information and proposals within the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan' ensuring the plan was financially resilient before submission to Cabinet.

Conclusions of the Working Group:
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54. Throughout the course of its work, the Working Group have received a valuable amount of evidence from witnesses on the 'Making Surrey Safer-Our Community Safety Plan' and the impacts proposals would have on residents and stakeholders. The Working Group would like to thank all who have taken time to engage with the group and share their experiences.
55. The Working Group focused on five key lines of enquiry to focus questioning for witnesses, the responses to these lines of enquiry have been summarised in the report. The evidence heard at witness sessions has helped the group formulate a series of recommendations for consideration by the Select Committee and Cabinet.
56. The recommendations agreed by the Working Group are based on the key themes raised by witnesses and the frequency with which these were reported throughout witness sessions. These recommendations are also those that meet the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic, timebound) criteria and will help deliver assurance to residents and stakeholders on the proposed changes to the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.
57. From the evidence received it is clear that residents and stakeholders need reassurance that any new proposed crew and vehicle placement model introduced is staffed at full establishment numbers. To give extra reassurance, the group will ensure that the relevant Select Committee closely scrutinise emergency response times and the services statement of assurance.
58. For the Service to effectively transform the delivery of services, engagement between staff and senior officers within the service is critical. From the witness sessions, it was clear to the group that communication and culture between staff and senior officers within the service needed transforming. Looking ahead, staff need to be given the opportunity to comment and help shape the design of services.

59. Witnesses were supportive of the Surrey Fire Volunteers and agreed that the service should promote this further with the public as part of its community protection agenda. There was also support for the service to look to recover costs from incident attendances that did not fall within the services statutory obligations. Although there was consensus that each incident needed to be reviewed on a case by case basis.
60. To ensure the council fully engages with all groups within local communities, it is imperative that all future public consultations take account of the importance of making public consultation documents fully accessible.
61. The Working Group is confident that the recommendations contained within this report will help strengthen the 'Making Surrey Safer- Our Community Safety Plan' and would like to give residents the assurance that the proposed plan will be closely monitored and scrutinised. The Working Group look forward to supporting Surrey Fire and Rescue Service through its journey of transformation.

Next Steps

62. The Working Group's report will be considered by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee on 19 September and recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet on 24 September.

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Sources/background papers:

HMICFRS- Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19 - Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

Community Vision for Surrey in 2030

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Statement of Assurance- February 2019

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management-
February 2019

Environment Select Committee- Minutes, 5 December 2018

Annexes:

Annex 1- Fire Transformation Working Group Terms of Reference

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