
REPORT AUTHOR: DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SUBJECT: EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW – PILOTS & TRIALS UPDATE

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Background Papers: CRMP 2019/23; Member Development Workshops 23 November 2021 & 7 July 2022

PURPOSE:

To update Members on progress with the work commissioned as part of the current 2019-23 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), to review our emergency cover provision and, specifically, the implementation of two ‘pilots and trials’ in Luton and Central Bedfordshire. These aim to improve appliance response times in all three Local Authority areas and assist in gathering a data driven evidence base, from which the FRA can consider more permanent proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our emergency response both now and into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Members:

1. **Support** the proposal to temporarily relocate one fire appliance from Luton fire station to Luton ambulance station for set periods each day over an initial period of 6 months.
2. **Support** the primary crewing of one of the Rural Fire Appliances during periods of low on-call availability, once upgraded with the new hydraulic cutting equipment, to reinforce appliance availability over an initial period of 6 months.
3. **Agree** to receive a further report in the autumn detailing proposals to temporarily introduce an additional, fire appliance to the fleet, primary crewed at key times, to be deployed on a peripatetic basis as required.

4. **Agree** to receive a further update report detailing the impact of these two pilots and trials on appliance response times over the duration of the trials.
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2. Background

- 1.1. The current Community Risk Management Plan 2019/23 (CRMP) seeks to improve our self-awareness of the foreseeable fire and rescue related risks within Bedfordshire and ensure the Service is 'fit for the future' challenges as we pursue our mission to provide outstanding fire and rescue services that help make Bedfordshire safer.
- 1.2. The risks within Bedfordshire are constantly evolving and our emergency response cover needs to keep pace with the major growth planned across our County in the next 20-30 years. We also need to ensure any future policy changes or investment decisions are data driven and evidence based. This is particularly important when considering future investment in our estates portfolio, under the umbrella of the Blue Light Estates Strategy.
- 1.3. Our CRMP Action Plan for 2021/22, action 23 states:
Our fire stations need to keep pace with the evolving needs of our fire and rescue service. Our emergency cover review will help identify which of our fire stations should be prioritised for re-investment.
- 1.4. Put simply, we want to be confident we are doing the right thing, using the right people and resources, provided in the right place and at the right time.

2. The Value of Pilots & Trials

- 2.1. If we are to deliver on the aims and objectives of the emergency cover review and provide evidence based and value for money proposals for future investment, we need to be innovative, testing new ideas and exploring utilising our staff and fleet in ways we have not done before. The proposed pilots and trials are designed to provide immediate improvements in response times whilst gathering real-time data that will support evidence-based decisions on more permanent proposals in the life of the next CRMP from 2023/24 onwards.
- 2.2. Officers have previously presented to Members the outcomes from the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) analysis undertaken by ORH Ltd which has highlighted opportunities to improve appliance response times in the south of the county by providing

a base in the north of Luton. In addition, the analysis has shown the opportunities to improve response times in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council areas by increasing appliance availability in the eastern part of the county along the A1 corridor.

2.3. The guiding principles of these pilots and trials include:

- Must improve service performance;
- No increased risks to public or firefighter safety;
- No adverse impacts on the operations response times due to the trials;
- Be supportive of our service values;
- Support operational crews to maintain productivity through the provision of appropriate equipment including mobile information and communication technology (ICT);
- Promote effective collaboration with partners and identify new and innovative ways of working;
- Aid the capture of effective qualitative and quantitative data to support evaluation of the impact on response times;
- Establish and maintain engagement with operational crews and their trade unions from the outset in designing & evaluating the pilots.

3. Additional Peripatetic Fire Appliance pilot

3.1. Proposals to introduce an additional fire appliance, primary crewed at key times and deployed on a 'peripatetic' basis have been delayed for a number of legitimate reasons, including:

- Availability of officers to effectively manage the project due to staff turnover;
- Availability of the fire appliance vehicle and equipment due to being deployed to support a firefighter training course.

3.2. It is now anticipated that the vehicle and equipment needed will now become available for deployment from November 2022.

3.3. To compensate for the delays in implementation of the additional fire appliance, Members were supportive of proposals presented at the recent Members Workshop on 7th July 2022 to primary crew, at key times and when it would otherwise be unavailable due to a shortage of on-call staff, one of the three existing On-Call crewed Rural Fire Appliances for an initial period of 6 months.

- 3.4. This proposal was made possible by the recent investment by the FRA in new, battery powered, hydraulic cutting equipment for deployment on all fire appliances which, when fitted to the Rural Fire Appliances, will enable these vehicles to respond to all incident types. This equipment is not currently carried on the Rural Fire Appliances.
- 3.5. This option is effectively akin to existing arrangements where wholetime and on-call firefighters are deployed on standby to other stations when they experience crewing deficiencies so requires minimal policy change beyond adjustments to the mobilising systems.
- 3.6. The primary additional costs relate to staff pay which will be borne from existing budgets. It should have minimal impact on the existing on-call workforce as, in principle, the vehicle will only crewed when there are insufficient on-call staff to crew the Rural Fire Appliance in addition to the first fire appliance at that station (Amphill, Biggleswade and Toddington all have an standard fire appliance in addition to their Rural Fire Appliance). Therefore, the costs will vary depending on on-call availability and will be recorded, monitored and reported back to the FRA as part of the trial.
- 3.7. The evaluation will examine the impact on appliance response times as well as capturing other activities such as safe & well visits and fire safety inspections being undertaken in on-call areas.

4. Luton Ambulance Station trial

- 4.1. The Luton Ambulance Station trial involves the temporary relocation of an existing wholetime primary crewed fire appliance based at Luton Fire Station into Luton Ambulance Station at key times. Crews will start and finish their 24hr shift at Luton Fire Station, travelling to Luton Ambulance Station for the designated time periods.
- 4.2. Luton ambulance station was identified as an optimum location during the ORH modelling (see Appendix A) and is a low risk, low cost opportunity to trial this potential future proposal in a real-world environment.
- 4.3. A project team, established some time ago, has undertaken several site visits to assess the suitability and make arrangements to accommodate the trial.
- 4.4. Building upon the existing strong collaborative relationship that exists with BFRS, EEAST are very supportive of the use of their station for the trial. Although no material changes to the building and accommodation are required, additional ancillary

equipment needs, system access, training and welfare requirements have been identified and are being addressed prior to an anticipated commencement date of early September. These likely minimal costs will be borne from existing budgets.

4.5. Luton station staff have been fully engaged from the outset as have their trade unions. The evaluation will examine the impact on appliance response times as well as capturing other activities such as safe & well visits and fire safety inspections being undertaken in on-call areas.

5. Next Steps

5.1. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) and Head of Response (HoR) will maintain engagement with the Member Portfolio lead for Operational Response and Resilience prior to go-live and during the trials with update reports presented to Members at a future FRA meeting.

5.2. Although the data being gathered will be used to influence the ongoing ECR project, an evaluation report will be presented to Members after the initial 6-month period of these two trials has elapsed.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. That Members:

1. Support the proposal to temporarily relocate one fire appliance from Luton fire station to Luton ambulance station for set periods each day over an initial period of 6 months.
2. Support the primary crewing of one of the Rural Fire Appliances during periods of low on-call availability, once upgraded with the new hydraulic cutting equipment, to reinforce appliance availability over an initial period of 6 months.
3. Agree to receive a further report in the autumn detailing proposals to temporarily introduce an additional, fire appliance to the fleet, primary crewed at key times, to be deployed on a peripatetic basis as required.
4. Agree to receive a further update report detailing the impact of these two pilots and trials on appliance response times over the duration of the trials.

CHRIS BIGLAND
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Appendix A (Ideal location in ORH modelling for redeployment of a secondary Luton appliance)

