SUBJECT:	**New Operational Response Performance Standards**

Author and contact:	**DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER (DCFO)**

Background Papers: Members development day workshop on Response standards delivered on 4 October 2023.

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Response standards comparison and national definitions	

Implications

This table provides a short statement of the impact of the recommendations in this report and/or a reference to the relevant paragraph/s in the report.

Will this report affect any of the following?

	Yes / No	Impact / Reference
Financial Implications		No material issues
Risk Management		Risk to reputation re: public perception of lessening standards. To be mitigated by public consultation to explain the redrafting seeks to surface actual performance and drive improvement.
Legal Implications		Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 and the National Framework document lay the legal framework for the CRMP. The Response standards are the promise to the public and are determined as part of the process laid out in this paper.

Privacy and Security Implications		N/A
Duty to Collaborate		N/A
Health and Safety Implications		Risk assessments and PDA for all incident types to remain in place - unchanged.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion		No material issues
Environmental Sustainability		N/A
Consultation and Communication		Full public consultation to be conducted as part of the change recommended

PURPOSE:

To provide Members with sufficient information to allow the Fire Authority to support changes to the Service Operational Response Performance standards in consultation with the public and key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are asked to agree to consult the public on the following:

1. New operational response performance measures:

   - Mobilise to primary fires within 120 seconds 85% of the time.

   - First fire engine to arrive in 12 minutes to primary fires on 80% of occasions, measured from time of call. (incorporating the existing time of alert measure with the new call handling measure).
   - RTCs we will arrive in 15 minutes on 80% of occasions, measured from time of call. (incorporating the existing time of alert measure with the new call handling measure).

   - For secondary fires one fire engine will arrive in 20 minutes on 96% of occasions, measured from time of call.

- The removal of old descriptors that do not follow the national recording and benchmarking definitions e.g. a move from 'critical incidents' to 'primary and secondary fire'.

- The removal of the old control measure to answer 90% of 999 calls in 7 seconds or less, as this will now be superseded by the control measure above.

- The removal of '5 riders' being part of any performance measure due to the limiting nature of such a measure when maximising the amount of fire engines available to the whole County.

2. Should the Service also publicly measure the arrival of a subsequent fire engine should the pre-determined attendance require more than one fire engine at the time of the call. If this is required, then the following measure may be applied:

- Second fire engine to arrive in 16 mins to primary fires on 80% of occasions, from time of call.

3. Members are asked to agree to an 8-week consultation period which allows for the LGA 6 weeks best practice period but is extended by two weeks due to Christmas, thus ensuring sufficient time for stakeholders to engage with the consultation.

The consultation will be commenced following the Authority meeting that considers the content of this paper and will be formed of the proposals that are agreed from the above recommendations.

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1. <u>Executive Summary</u>

1.1 The existing standards for operational response were adopted when the Fire and Rescue Service Act abolished the national standards in 2006. The Service defined the following standards in 2007 which have remained broadly unchanged:

- Answer 90% of 999 calls in 7 seconds or less.
- Mobilise required resources to an addressable location within 60 secs or less on 80% of occasions.

- For critical fire incidents, (threaten life, structures, or the environment), we will provide an initial response of:
    - 2 fire engines (9 riders) on 90% of occasions (measured from time of send).
    - Arrive within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions (measured from time of send).
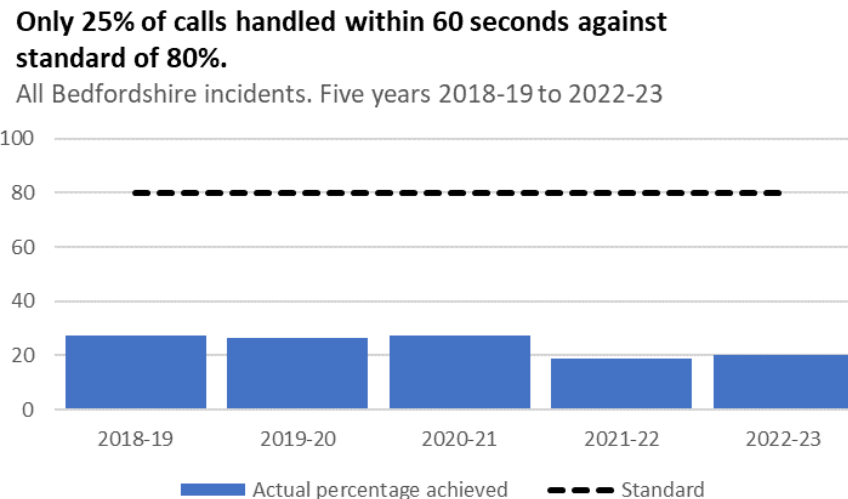
- For road traffic collisions (RTCs) we will arrive within 13 minutes on 80% of occasions (measured from time of send).
- For secondary incidents (non-life risk) one appliance with 5 crew will arrive within 20 minutes on 96% of occasions measured from time of send.

1.2 The standards have not been reviewed since their initial development and have failed to keep pace with the service's policies and practices. They also fail to align easily to national reporting definitions which creates additional work within the service to produce internal and local metrics as well as fulfilling the requirement to report on national measures.

1.3 The service reviewed data measures and definitions in use across the sector and compared our measures with comparable services as well as those who measure similar performance expectations to our own. Examples from the service review can be seen in the appendix.

1.4 The review shows that BFRS is significantly out of sync with the rest of the sector.

1.5 The proposed new standards are more transparent and aligned to national Government reporting which would make the creation and reporting of performance simpler as well as ensuring that the service's performance is more easily compared to other FRS performance – this is also evidenced in the appendix.

2. <u>Background</u>

2.1 Performance reporting to the FRA and external stakeholders is burdensome and complex as the service has failed to change and keep pace with nationally recognised measures. The quarterly reports to the FRA were becoming more burdensome and less efficient as officers had to report on the legacy 'time of send' as well as 'time of call'. The opportunity to consult on proposals to make the measures more transparent and relevant to today's world would improve public confidence in the service they are receiving. The benefits of these changes include improved benchmarking and simplification of reporting due to being aligned with national measures, making our performance easier to compare with similar sized FRS and easier to understand.

2.2 This will be a much more transparent and efficient process. For example, the Home Office measure FIRE1001 is the national benchmark and considers first fire engine attendance time from time of call, which aligns to the proposals contained in the paper.

2.3   The call handling standard is a good example to how out of date and unrealistic the service measures have become. The figure below shows the five-year performance against handling calls within 60 seconds. The service policy dictates that control staff are required to call challenge certain call types which adds significant time to call management. With the increase in mobile technology, we see many more calls to the control room where the caller is uncertain of their own location and therefore control officers have to apply investigative skills to determine the incident location prior to committing service resources. The service also receives calls from other agencies or people in crisis; these calls can be particularly difficult to allocate resources to quickly as significant intelligence gathering is required prior to mobilising, not only to protect our staff but to ensure the response is appropriate and does not exacerbate the situation on arrival. The service must set a performance measure that seeks continuous improvement in performance but recognises the challenges, constraints and policy expectations of staff.

Only 25% of calls handled within 60 seconds against standard of 80%.

All Bedfordshire incidents. Five years 2018-19 to 2022-23

2.4   Further rationale for change is the need to maximise the number of fire engines available at all times. The service had previously committed to a specific number of 5 firefighters on certain fire engines under certain circumstances. The service has tasked officers contrary to this stated measure to maximise the number of fire engines available which ultimately reduces the time taken for a resource to reach an incident which improves survivability and seeks to meet our availability and attendance standards. There is still the ability for Officers to order additional resources to scene and Control Officers are also able to add additional fire engines based on the information gathered at the time of the call.

2.5   Whilst work was already ongoing to review and seek to amend the operational response standards the recent feedback from HMICFRS which suggested that we needed to consider our published standards against our intention and ability to meet those standards reinforces the importance of this review.

2.6   Officers have now revisited our standards with the benefit of better data and greater self-awareness of actual performance compared to when they were written, many years ago. This includes road data and travel distance modelling and historic incident data. Work will continue to model and consider future growth in the county as part of our continuous improvement journey and build any further recommendations in future CRMPs.

2.7   The new measures offer greater transparency to the public, linking the whole life performance of an emergency call. By joining the call handling standards and attendance standards together means we can explain in one measure the whole life cycle of a 999 call. Whilst officers will continue to measure all aspects from time of call, time of send, turn out time and the time to drive to the incident, it is important that the public can easily see and challenge the service on our performance based on what would be reasonably expected as a single measure: from the time a person in need makes the call for help to the time our crews arrive to render such help as needed.

2.8   Officers did consider, but discounted, an option to create a different standard for the urban and rural areas. Having taken early soundings from stakeholders it is clear that a more challenging, county-wide, approach will see the service strive for even better performance. This will be more challenging to achieve in all three unitary authority areas, but it is the right thing to do to ensure we aim to deliver the best service for the public of Bedfordshire.

2.9   The change to the definitions and standards may be seen as lessening the service's performance. This is not the case. Officers are seeking to show the whole life cycle of the emergency call and therefore set a target that drives performance but is cognisant of the service policies and procedures to ensure we commit the correct resources to each incident.

2.10   By changing our language to the nationally understood descriptors for **primary** and **secondary** fires we will reduce our internal reporting burden as well as improve our benchmarking and external reporting. The national Incident Recording System maintained by the government categorises fires as either primary or secondary fires, with chimney fires treated as a separate category.

- **Primary fires** are potentially more serious fires that harm people or cause damage to property such as buildings, caravans, vehicles, some outdoor structures, any fires involving casualties or rescues and any fires attended by five or more fire appliances.
- **Secondary fires** are generally small outdoor fires, not involving people or property. These include refuse fires, grassland fires and fires in derelict buildings or vehicles.

2.11   It is important to note that there is no proposal linked to this paper with regards to changing our wholetime establishment of operational firefighters (55 per colour watch plus 9 at Leighton Buzzard).

2.12   The purpose of the change relating to the number of riders that crew our fire engines is to allow Officers the maximum flexibility to organise firefighters in a way that ensures the most amount of fire engines are available at all times. This will not prevent fire engines having 5 firefighters on them but should alternative options present themselves to the Duty Group Commander or their team to move firefighters to other locations to increase availability then this would be expected to improve county coverage and reduce the time taken for fire engines to reach incidents. This is in line with the service performance expectations for attendance times as described in this paper.

2.13   Additionally, this flexibility supports projects such as the recent roaming pump trial where the placement of firefighters within our existing establishment has allowed us to put a 23rd fire engine into areas of deficiency during the day whilst the service seeks to improve On-call availability.

2.14   Officer's advice is that it is better to take a much more holistic approach to reinforcing our promise to the public by improving operational coverage to the whole county in the most flexible way.

3   Consultation

3.1   Officers will create online content to be shared through multiple channels to explain the changes and seek feedback from the public and partners. This will include animation or video content and an online questionnaire.

3.2   Assets developed for this purpose will be accessible and consider the needs of the audience, including where English may not be the first language of the home or other neurodiversity needs would inhibit participation in a single style consultation.

3.3   Officers will promote the consultation on service platforms as well as seeking support from local authority communications teams. This will be bolstered through Beds Alert and other consultation and marketing channels as necessary.

3.4   Officers will work with stakeholders, including the representative bodies, to ensure all feedback received during consultation is considered so that the Authority is fully appraised of the outputs of the consultation.

3.5   At the end of the consultation period, the Fire Authority will receive a further report which will consider feedback and propose any adjustments to the proposals, informing the Authority's final decision on the new Operational Response Performance Standards from 2024/25.

CHRIS BIGLAND
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Appendix

Response standards comparison and national definitions

Percentage of emergency calls answered within 7 seconds

Fire Control can consistently hit a 7-second target for 'time to answer' calls except during spate conditions, and so failure to achieve the measure typically means that there was a spell of exceptional weather during the period, be that flooding, gales or a heatwave or an incident in a busy urban environment with lots of callers for the same single incident. The KPI therefore effectively measures something outside the Brigade's control and offers little value in terms of assurance. These are the services which use this measure out of the 44 who report nationally.

Services with "Time to answer" KPIs	
Avon	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds (target 94%)
Bedfordshire	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds (target 90%)
Cleveland	Average time to answer an emergency call (target 7 seconds)
Leicestershire	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds
Leicestershire	Average time to answer an emergency call
London	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds (target 92%)
Merseyside	Percentage of calls answered within 10 seconds (target 96%)
Northumberland	Percentage of calls answered within 10 seconds (target 95%)
Nottinghamshire	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds (target 90%)
Oxfordshire	Percentage of calls answered within 5 seconds
Oxfordshire	Percentage of calls answered within 10 seconds

Tyne & Wear	Percentage of calls answered within 7 seconds (no target)
West Sussex	Percentage of calls answered within 10 seconds (target 95%)

Percentage of emergency calls handled within 60 seconds

BFRS is one of only 9 English FRSs that report "Percentage of calls mobilised to within X seconds" KPIs publicly. BFRS's KPI is the most challenging and it is not surprising that we fail to meet the target.

Services with "Percentage of calls mobilised to within X seconds" KPIs	
Bedfordshire	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 60 seconds (target 96%)
Cleveland	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 120 seconds (target 98%)
Cornwall	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 120 seconds (target 80%)
Devon & Somerset	Percentage of calls mobilised to within incident type target (e.g. dwelling fire 90 seconds (about 1 and a half minutes), RTC 120 seconds (about 2 minutes), etc) (target 90%)
Humberside	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 90 seconds (target 75%)
Northumberland	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 90 seconds (target 95%)
Oxfordshire	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 90 seconds (about 1 and a half minutes)
Warwickshire	Percentage of life-risk and property emergency calls handled within 90 seconds (target 85%)
West Sussex	Percentage of calls mobilised to within 120 seconds (target 98%)

Because we don't expect Fire Control to robotically mobilise to every call as quickly as possible, keeping the KPI is unhelpful. It punishes Control for challenging calls and for taking the time to determine accurate locations of fire in the open, etc, where there is no risk to life.

Percentage of primary fires attended within 12 minutes from time of call

Bedfordshire FRS is one of 17 English services classified as "significantly rural" in the urban-rural categorisation used by the Home Office and HMICFRS to compare services. Other FRSs classified as significantly rural include Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Essex FRSs.

The Home Office FIRE1004 statistics for the five-years to March 2023 show that when significantly rural FRSs responded to primary fires, the first resource arrived at 75% of primary fires within 12 minutes of the time of call and at 80% of primary fires within 13 minutes of the time of call.

Percentage of secondary fires attended within 20 minutes from time of call

The Home Office FIRE1004 statistics for the five-years to March 2023 show that when significantly rural FRSs responded to secondary fires, the first resource arrived at 94% of secondary fires within 20 minutes of the time of call.