

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
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Item No. 9

REPORT AUTHOR: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SUBJECT: ENHANCING OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE THROUGH THE SHARING OF BRIGADE MANAGERS WITH CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

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Background Papers: None

Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		✓	FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES			EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL			POLICY	✓
CORPORATE RISK	Known		OTHER (please specify)	
	New			

Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.

PURPOSE:

To advise the Fire and Rescue Authority on opportunities to extend the existing collaboration between Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) for sharing Area Commanders to also include the sharing of Brigade Managers, thereby further enhancing the resilience of the strategic operational command structure within both services.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Authority agrees to establish formal arrangements to share Brigade Manager operational cover between Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services and delegates the development and implementation of these, including any appropriate legal agreements, to the Chief Fire Officer.

1. Background

- 1.1. To discharge the Authority's duties under both the Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004) and Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA), BFRS is required to plan for, and respond to, all reasonably foreseeable events and emergencies. In addition, the Authority has legal duties to secure the provision of suitably trained personnel to carry out its core functions including responding to emergency incidents.
- 1.2. The Incident Command System (ICS) constitutes the doctrine of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in the context of emergency incident management and is recognised as the 'nationwide safe and effective system for managing incidents'. The system effectively enables all FRS to not only manage their own operations and when working with other FRS to resolve emergency incidents, but also allows them to operate as part of a multi-agency incident management team as required under the CCA. In adopting the ICS, each FRS must also ensure an effective incident management structure and arrangements are in place.

- 1.3. To fulfil the requirements of the ICS at the strategic level, the Authority employs suitably trained and experienced operational officers at both Area Manager (Area Commander x4) and Brigade Manager (Principal Officer x2) levels.
- 1.4. Like other FRSs, Bedfordshire has experienced a long term reduction in incident demand, but is cognisant of its requirement to provide a safe and effective operational command structure in the event of an incident. It is therefore appropriate to explore alternative models that provide this level of assurance whilst affording the Service greater flexibility with regards to senior management posts. In August 2014, following a review of operational command requirements, and the areas of responsibility of each Principal Officer (PO), the Authority realised efficiency savings through removing the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) post and elevating the responsibilities of the Area Commanders to include the provision of strategic level command operational response.
- 1.5. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) provide Brigade Manager level operational cover and both are conditioned to work a continuous duty system meaning they are available 24/7 to respond to the needs of any emergency incident or urgent Authority business, and one or other must always be in the country and within 6 hours travelling time of the Bedfordshire county area.
2. Improving resilience in Brigade Manager level cover – collaboration opportunity
 - 2.1. Since the removal of the ACFO post in 2014, these arrangements have been suitable and sufficient to meet all requirements allowing for rotation, rest and recuperation during long and complicated incidents and whilst maintaining normal business as usual activities.
 - 2.2. However, there are a number of foreseeable scenarios where the resilience of these arrangements may not meet the legislative obligations placed upon the Authority. For example, either the CFO or DCFO could be incapacitated due to illness and/or injury. Another example could see either one more than 6 hours travel away from the County area on holiday or Authority business and whilst they would make immediate plans to return, this would result in a significant delay in their physical involvement with a major operational and/or organisational incident. Either example would leave just one of the operational POs (with delegated authority) to deal with a long, complex and protracted incident, as well as business as usual activities, which would be unsustainable. Whilst the likelihood of these scenarios occurring is low, the risk it presents the Authority is very high.

- 2.3. Our colleagues in Cambridgeshire face the same issue and risks as those outlined above. In 2016, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) also reduced the number of operational POs from three to two. Brigade Manager level cover is now fulfilled by the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer.
- 2.4. Members will be aware of the existing collaboration with CFRS that has successfully established a shared Area Commander rota, greatly enhancing the resilience and flexibility of the operational command arrangements across both services. Both Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire always have at least one AC available but the shared rota allows for either AC to be deployed to and, if required, take command of operational incidents in either County.
- 2.5. Recent discussions between the senior management teams of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire FRSs indicate there is mutual benefit in exploring the opportunity to extending this collaboration to include the sharing of Brigade Manager level cover across both Services.

3. Implications

- 3.1. Under the proposed arrangements, the four operational POs from BFRS and CFRS would only provide operational cover across both Authority areas. Normal functional managerial duties and responsibilities would not be affected.
- 3.2. In order, to fulfil the strategic and delegated functions of a Brigade Manager at either an operational incident or an SCG in another Authority area, the individual must be legally empowered to do so.
- 3.3. Initial legal advice suggests that the existing Scheme of Delegations for both Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire and the respective Section 13/16 agreements may need to be amended to allow for this and/or to protect either Authority from legal challenge. An appropriate Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will also need to be drawn up to provide further clarity of any such arrangements.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. The Cambridgeshire Fire Authority has already given approval to establish arrangements for sharing Brigade Managers with Bedfordshire.

- 4.2. It is proposed that, under the guidance of both Chief Fire Officers and in consultation with the respective Monitoring Officers, an appropriate legal operating framework will be established to enable the extension of the existing collaboration with CFRS to include the sharing of Brigade Manager level operational cover.
- 4.3. At this stage, it is considered sensible to move towards a shared rota in an incremental manner, building upon the success of the shared AC rota. The existing strategic operational training and familiarisation programme will also be expanded prior to any arrangements coming into effect.
5. Recommendation
 - 5.1. The Authority agrees to establish formal arrangements to share Brigade Manager operational cover between Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services and delegates the development and implementation of these, including securing any appropriate legal agreements, to the Chief Fire Officer.

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