Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Report of Staff Focus Groups

2015 – 20 Public Safety Plan

Purpose

The purpose of the focus groups was to give staff an opportunity to engage in a structured discussion of the Public Safety Plan with colleagues, question management associated with the organisation's planning processes and offer feedback on the Plan's content.

Facilitation

The focus groups were facilitated internally by the following officers:

- **Stuart Gowanlock**   Corporate Planning Manager   (Both Groups)
- **Nadia Al-Sabouni**   Senior Risk Management Analyst   (Both Groups)

The role of the facilitators was to answer technical questions associated with the content of the Plan and to record the views and issues raised by the participants.

Participants were assured that any feedback or comments offered would not be attributed to any named individual when reporting the findings / outcomes of the meetings.

Schedule of Meetings

Date	Number of Participants	Recruited from
30th Sept 2014	6	**Support Staff:** People and Organisational Development, Service Development, Service Delivery and Service Transformation
	2	**Operational Staff:** People & Organisational Development and Service Delivery
2nd Oct 2014	3	**Support Staff:** Finance and Assets, People and Organisational Development and Service Transformation
	8	**Operational Staff:** People and Organisational Development and Service Delivery

Recruitment

Participants were recruited via advertisements on the BFRS Intranet and through line management channels. Participation was on a voluntary basis. Also all BFRS staff were given the opportunity to feed back their views on the Plan using the online facility hosted by

Opinion Research Services Limited (ORS), online blog on the BFRS website or any other method convenient to them.

Representativeness

A total of 19 staff from across the organisation took part in the two focus groups – ten operational and nine support staff. Slightly more than half (11/19) were male, 3/19 were middle and 6/19 were supervisory operational managers. There was greater representation from the north of the county than the south.

The range of views expressed cannot be certified as necessarily being representative of staff as a whole. However all participants engaged in the process constructively and, as the findings demonstrate, offered a wide range of views and opinions.

Discussion Agenda

The basic format and process for the meetings was similar to that used by ORS for the Public Engagement Forums, however less time was devoted to providing background information in relation to the nature of the Fire & Rescue Service and its operations given much greater familiarity with this as would be expected from staff.

The meetings were structured as follows:

1. **Commercial risk** (pages 5-7): Participants were given some information about European sprinkler policy, statistics on automatic fire alarms, explanation of business continuity planning and the primary authority scheme. They were then asked whether we should consider new ways of managing risk in commercial and non-domestic buildings, such as sprinkler installation, reviewing our AFA policy, exploring business continuity planning and the primary authority scheme.
2. **Response capacity** (pages 8-10): Participants were shown information on patterns of risk and demand, which highlighted the challenge of striking the right balance between daily demand, whilst also maintaining a proportionate and cost-effective way of managing more infrequent risks. They were then asked whether we should consider new ways of dealing with infrequent large emergencies (managing resilience).
3. **Station footprint** (pages 11-13): Participants were shown information on geographic patterns of demand, highlighting natural response catchment areas. They were then asked whether we should consider adjusting our station footprint to help balance our response capacity with demand and if so, should we consider moving, merging or relocating stations.
4. **Crewing models & safeguarding communities in low demand areas** (pages 14-16): Participants were shown the challenges we are facing with providing RDS cover when and where it is needed. They were then asked to consider a range of methods for managing risk in more remote locations where we currently rely on RDS.
5. **Using our resources in different ways** (page 17-18): Participants were reminded of the different ways we currently use resources across the service and asked whether they thought our resources should be used in this way.
6. **Alternative service delivery models** (pages 19-21): Participants were first briefed on the wider economic and financial context and then shown an example of an alternative

service delivery model that grew out of the public sector. They were then asked whether they felt it was reasonable to explore other ways of delivering our service, for example: employee-owned businesses, mutuals, co-operatives, social enterprises, and/or privatisation.

7. **Other comments** (page 22-23): Finally participants were asked whether they had any final questions or comments

The meetings alternated between the presentation of key concepts and principles and group discussion and feedback. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions freely throughout the process. All feedback was captured through audio recordings which were transcribed.

Each meeting lasted from two and a half to three hours.

The Report

The report overviews the range of opinions and views offered by staff and summarises the main points made and issues raised at the meetings rather than providing a verbatim transcript. Verbatim quotes are used, in **blue**, where they capture a point succinctly or vividly and where possible assigned to the group that raised them. Each section is summarised at the beginning in a paragraph.

The fact that a particular view point or issue is included does not mean that it was agreed with or endorsed by the group(s) as a whole as the purpose of this report is to represent the range of views offered within and across the two groups rather than to necessarily reflect the 'weight' of opinion in relation to particular issues.

Commercial risk:

Should we consider new ways of managing risk in commercial and non-domestic buildings?

The groups were reasonably well aligned on this topic. **Sprinklers** were seen as a reasonable option in principle, though the financial constraints of businesses we target could be a limiting factor to its uptake, so a tiered approach might be better, furthermore some thought it could be considered hypocritical of us to push for sprinklers when we don't have them in our own buildings. **Reviewing** the **AFA policy** was considered justifiable based on the high numbers that turn out to be false alarms, but concerns were raised with regard to how this might conflict with our corporate policy of attending every AFA and this change of direction could have implications for our organisational reputation. **Providing Business Continuity Planning** was met positively by the groups as it was considered a good opportunity to diversify and adapt in line with the external changing world, however some group members had reservations in terms of how it might impact our current service delivery and how it would be implemented. The **Primary Authority Scheme** was considered good in principle, though many raised concerns surrounding the impact on our reputation if we selected our partners poorly.

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e.g. Sprinkler installation

Both groups:

- **It might be considered hypocritical of us to expect businesses to install sprinklers,** "when we don't have them in our own buildings"
- **Could have cost implications for small businesses, where** "it could be financially prohibitive in terms of installation and upkeep and may do more harm than good"
- **Legislation is needed to ensure consistency across the country. The Welsh Assembly policy was highlighted, whereby all new build residential properties have to have sprinklers installed**

Group 1:

- **A more tiered approach (compartmentalisation) would be better than a blanket approach (entire premises) to help make it less financially prohibitive for businesses**
- **What scope there is for applying more pressure via building regulations?**

Group 2:

- **We should encourage but can't enforce**
- **Should consider residential properties where risk is greater, not just commercial premises** "realistically, the last death in a workplace due to fire was in Milton Keynes in 1996 and yet since 1996 we know that people have died in their homes…work place

legislation is a lot tighter now and the onus is on those companies to manage their own risk"

- **Consider working more closely with insurance companies to help incentivise making homes safer in return for reducing their pay outs**

e.g. Review AFA policy

Both groups:

- **Seem like an unnecessary drain on resources,** "the emergency services should be the last resort, they shouldn't be relied upon to do their [business's] job for them**," and whilst we should still respond, we could reconsider amending the weight of response,** "just because an alarm sounds, doesn't mean we need to generate an emergency response", **and our call challenging process could be improved** "we ask whether they have spoken to the site manager, but we go regardless of whether they have or haven't…a lot of the time, we turn up on site and they tell us that they tried calling back to say they don't need us and it was a false alarm…but we still turn up."
- **Work being done to reduce the number of false alarms is highly beneficial and should be continued**
- **Attending all AFAs sets us apart from other fire and rescue services and we should be mindful of our current policy encouraging businesses to relocated to Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes because we respond to every AFA**
- **If we have the capacity we should attend AFAs,** "if you get just one AFA that turns out to be a fire, then you have done more good than harm"

e.g. Business continuity planning

Both groups:

- **Should use our expertise and experience wherever it is beneficial to make the community safer** "we should consider raising people's awareness so that they can preserve their businesses"
- **Should enhance our operating model to be more future proofed** "but we have to think beyond core, if you want us to have some kind of future, and potential to still be around, we've got to say we can do more than our core stuff, we've got to be prepared to be flexible"

Group 1:

- **Is there any liability when offering this kind of service?**

Group 2:

- **Diversifying and expanding our function beyond what we are legislated to do, could impact on our core work putting the organisation at risk, and introduce cost implications during the setup,** "it is not a statutory duty, so why are we proposing to use resources doing it", "when the budget is coming down, we can't then start taking on new things, because we haven't got the money to do it"

e.g. Primary Authority Scheme

Both groups:

- **Mindful of brand or ethos of company you partner with, otherwise we might inadvertently damage our reputation,** "it is a really good idea if you partner with a company that fits in with our ideas and the authority's as well", "Hertfordshire have a partnership with Tesco's…but last week Tesco's didn't have a particularly good week [in the press]…there's reputation to consider, if we have gone into partnership with these people and we end up becoming more reliant on revenues"
- **Need to understand how our organisation might benefit,** "do we get additional funding?" and "why would we want to partner with any of them, when there is no benefit to us"
- **Could introduce some unhealthy competition between fire and rescue services** "with everyone becoming focussed on trying to get the big blue chip ones"

Response Capacity:

Should we consider new ways of dealing with major infrequent emergencies (managing resilience)?

Both groups considered that there was scope to restructure the response delivery model, though the extent to which response could be re-scaled in absolute terms was viewed differently between the groups.

Participants in Group 1 discussed how changing the planning assumptions can enable greater flexibility to do more with less. In general they felt a review was long overdue and with better strategic and tactical management, there was plenty of capacity within the system for a safe reduction in overall resourcing. They wanted to take this one step further and see more analysis looking at precise skill sets and equipment needed to efficiently match response to demand, rather than the more top-level appliance-based approach.

Group 2 were less convinced that there was sufficient capacity in the system to manage a reduction safely highlighting local areas where the service is currently struggling to maintain cover.

Both groups suggested that the current RDS model (terms and conditions) was prohibitive to fundamentally reshaping the service. They also recognised that measuring capacity could be improved by reviewing the number of personnel and skill sets needed not just appliances.

Group 1:

- **A review is long over-due, there is plenty of capacity within the system if greater flexibility was enabled to manage it properly,** "it hasn't fundamentally changed for a long time…we have plenty of people in the system, we are just using them very badly at the moment"
- **Change our planning assumptions, move away from generic appliance-based perspective and consider personnel and skill sets required,** "we still view it very much as we need an appliance and an appliance needs a minimum of four persons with certain skill sets, so thinking about personnel and not just appliances"
- **Some duty-systems statuses are political remnants and not a reflection of risk**, "there are a number of stations that have the duty systems they do for political reasons, not risk based reasons"
- **Not necessary to resource for risk all of the time, we should adopt a tiered approach for scaling up from demand to risk,** "the first call would be to go to neighbouring brigades, because that is what you would naturally do, that is why we have regional arrangements with them…rather than having everybody here ready for Buncefield all of the time"
- **Joint recruitment with the TA to recruit the public to scale up from demand to risk,** "in terms of getting the public to help, I think that could be really beneficial…but it would need to be structured. You could use the TA to recruit and interview lots of

people…because we are probably going to be chasing the same kinds of people. There is also more we could do with big companies"

- **Recruit RDS according to risk and need,** "Every day is RDS recruitment day, yet we still have lots of RDS, we just use them really badly…the RDS tell us when they want to work. If we planned and recruited according to risk and need, then it might be easier to retain…we might only want them a couple of evenings or a couple of days a week. That would be better on them, better on their families and better on the employer"

Group 2:

- **Need to understand how many appliances we realistically use and have available as well as where they are coming from?** "How many times have we actually had 30 pumps available, we are lucky if we have a dozen", **if reducing overall resourcing, we need to ensure this doesn't systematically reduce the available capacity below a safe level.** "Although we have put 12 pumps there, 12 of those pumps might not even be ours anyway". **Need to understand why we don't use all of our own pumps e.g. defects, unavailable crew, not the nearest appliance etc.**

- **Need to define our public safety performance measures, the public value and understand response times and those should be preserved,** "if you were to ask a member of the public what they would measure…it would be response times…obviously 1 minute is better than 2 minutes, which is better than 3 minutes and so on…if you reshape the service, but keep the response times at the same level or better, would be my opinion".

- **Public value reassurance,** "even if you weren't doing any [operational] good, but the public were reassured, are you not doing good in a different way?"

- **If a station is moved, the rationale will have to be explained to the public, since they may have chosen to live in that location owing to the proximity to the fire station,** "you have longer response times in more remote areas and people accept that, you moved there, you live there, you know you haven't…but if you've got a fire station next door, those are the ones whose response times are going to go up and you've got to ask why"

- **Need to understand the measurable impact of Prevention versus Response before shifting away from Response, furthermore the public value Response over Prevention,** "If you can't quantify how many lives you've actually saved by doing one activity versus doing prevention work, we can put 20,000 smoke alarms up, but we can't tell you how many people we would have actually saved. So the public that pay our money and our wages, are not overly worried about the safety measures you have put in there and how you made them safer, all they want to know is that when they pick up the phone when they need you that you will be there as soon as possible."

- **Don't want to lose our good reputation as a dependable emergency service,** "I think we need to look at better ways of resourcing for it [infrequent high risk events]…the public pick up the phone and expect us to be there, we have a good reputation for doing that compared to other emergency services"

- **We need to understand how the incident type profile has changed over the past 10 years, to understand what kind of resourcing is needed and the time commitment associated with that,** "we are beginning to see more big incidents creep in, Swinley Forest in 2012, Floods in 2013/14 and then with climate change we can expect

longer drier summers and wetter warmer winters…what about chemical suicides, they might only use 2-3 pumps, but they last at least 24 hours and are multi-agency".

- **We need to better understand what our neighbouring brigades are doing, if they are reducing their pumps as well, that could have implications for our reliance on them when scaling up for risk**
- **Need to consider how many personnel are on a pump** "historic data will be showing pumps going out with 5-6 crew on, whereas now they are going out with 4 crew, so we may need more pumps to provide personnel",…"But then you don't necessarily need more fire engines to get them there"
- **The RDS model is out of date and we shouldn't factor it into our plans** "the reason we don't have 31 pumps available is because the RDS model is out of date. If we are talking about remodelling the service around them, we are not going to get it, so there is no point talking about it"

Station Footprint:

Should we consider adjusting our station footprint to help balance our response capacity with demand and if so, should we consider moving, merging or relocating stations?

Both groups were open to considering altering the station ground footprint, but highlighted the importance of considering the cost-implications of change both financially and in terms of impact on staff and the community, who may have strong views if a station close to them was to be moved further away.

Group 1 identified the Milton Keynes and M40 corridor catchments as areas where station mergers would likely be appropriate, given the close proximity of some of the stations within those catchments. This group also highlighted the reducing significance and relevance of the concept of station footprints with the introduction of dynamic mobilising.

Group 2 were keen to see more resource modelling to better understand the implications of reconfiguring resources, however intuitively felt that there was scope for change within the Amersham/Chesham and M40 catchment areas. Participants in this group tended to take a different view from Group 1 on reconfiguring the Milton Keynes catchment area by moving peripheral stations to the centre, as it was felt this did not sufficiently reflect future demand as the city/town expands outwards. This group suggested that the willingness to realign stations has always been there, but external factors, such as lack of political will or infeasibility of finding staff in the right locations were preventing this.

Group 1:

- **Be mindful of the terminology used between merging and closing,** "we should define what a merger is, because one would probably be closing and resources will be sent to the new one, you might face a lot of resistance from the first station and their community"
- **Ability to merge stations is dependent on the layout of the urban and rural areas within the catchment areas and planning assumptions.** "In Milton Keynes we could have the same number of pumps going out with fewer personnel, whereas it probably wouldn't work in Aylesbury, given the shape of the station ground. However, Wycombe, Marlow and Beaconsfield, something could be done…there aren't any targets within the latest Public Safety Plan in terms of turnout times for example. If you had something centrally in Milton Keynes you could get everywhere with the grid roads, so that would make sense"
- **Retirement degradation profiles are causing problems for maintaining cover and training [in the current management framework], so it would be good to formalise merging stations either physically or virtually.** "It [merging] could be positive for Milton Keynes, because of the retirement profile leading to shortages of staff on each station, when combined with leave, this is throwing up issues. We are being sent to support other stations anyway because we can't maintain levels on our own. This creates a lot of problems for management and moral. One of the things we struggle with

is maintaining our training and competencies, there are ways of managing it, but it is often very reactive and makes it difficult for us to plan".

▪ **Need to consider human resources when embarking upon change,** "they are all options we need to look at, but no matter what we look at, we need to consider the impact on staff, because there will be costs associated with merging stations, new ones, closing them and only having a short-term benefit of selling them, but that money could be reinvested".

▪ **Should move away from fixed station grounds and consider resources dynamically,** "this is where scenario modelling would come in. I think one way to approach it would be to move away from station grounds completely and identify optimal locations and then build up to determine the resourcing needed and the training".

Group 2:

▪ **Mindful of how information was presented in terms of reputation,** "to a general member of the public, it is going to look as though a firefighter is just sitting around for 50% of the time, not doing anything".

▪ **Would like to see [historical] analysis of station locations and rationale,** "haven't we done previous research that says our stations are roughly in the right location?"

▪ **Impact on public safety of reconfiguring station locations. This shouldn't be a purely financial decision.**
  - "There is debate around whether you should have 3 stations in Milton Keynes on the periphery versus a more central station, Milton Keynes has the advantage of the grid road network, which allows you to get across more quickly"
  - "Milton Keynes centre might be high risk during the day, but at night the risk is at the periphery"
  - "Peripheral stations versus a central location, seems to be more about the line of thinking at the time [a fad]. Ideally we have a site there and another there and they all come into the middle and it seems now that we are deciding that now that isn't right and we should be coming out from the centre. We also need to consider that Milton Keynes is growing further and expansion, so I think our stations are probably in the right locations, especially in Milton Keynes where it is sprawling and growing outwards. If we are going from the middle outwards, then our response times will be affected, but if we start from the periphery going inwards, we are in a much better position. We run the risk in 5 years' time of saying that we have moved to the wrong position, because we won't get out in time"

▪ **Managing clusters of stations as collective enterprises will require careful consideration into how you manage the process,** "I think that is a different discussion, because that talks about how well you train and maintain those people, how they will keep their skills up, how you move them around, what arrangements have we got in place to move them around"

▪ **Could consider holding points**, "I know Oxfordshire have gone down that route, where a wholetime pump goes to a holding point. That has been successful for them".

▪ **Consider cost-implications of change,** "but no matter what change you make, you are going to need as many people in head office to organise it, so the number of firefighter roles you save, you will have to create in head office or more. So there is no point in doing that in the first place"

- **Should be sharing our resources and assets with other agencies more effectively,** "sharing services would be a better option in my mind…whenever you walk into headquarters there are tonnes of empty spaces, why aren't we using that space more effectively"

- **Scope for merging some stations, but the political will hasn't been there,** "there is scope for one station at Amersham and Chesham, or Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross, we have all encountered opposition whenever we have gone outside the service, because people don't want the fire station on this location, or the council don't want to sell that piece of land, because whilst it would make a great location for a fire station, it also makes a great location for a motorway service station"

- **It isn't always about community risk, sometimes it is about the feasibility of finding the staff,** "it is not about whether we have the right amount of stations, or the right amount of people on them or whether they are in the right place, it is about recruitment, which is going to make things happen in a way you can't do something about. For example, there is no way you can have a day-crewed fire station if you haven't got the personnel to crew it. So it can't always be about what is best for the public, it is about what you've got left and that is what is happening at the moment"

Crewing models & safeguarding communities in low demand areas

What options should we consider when trying to safeguard our communities in low demand areas, such as rural areas (where we currently rely on RDS)? For example: Encourage installation of sprinklers in remote locations, where it takes longer to get there; prioritise prevention work in more remote locations above urban areas; make greater use of smaller rapid intervention appliances that require fewer crew to be made available; prioritise training given to RDS so they are trained to tackle more routine incidents, thus leaving more specialist skills to WT firefighters, who have more time available for training; modernise the RDS working contract to align it with demand. For example, instead of contracting 120 hours per week of the FFs choosing (usually evenings and weekends when demand is lowest), to contract fewer hours when it is actually needed; pay a premium for RDS cover during working hours to help incentivise people to work those hours; move crew around to provide support to RDS stations when cover is low at those stations.

This topic drew out some interesting and insightful debate, both groups suggested that we could have **officers working on stations** rather than in headquarters to provide extra cover and resilience where it is needed. It was also felt that a late response is better than no response, so we could **amalgamate RDS crews** to enable movement between stations more easily and provide greater coverage.

Group 1 felt that prevention initiatives and fire suppression systems should be **prioritised** in areas with weaker response coverage (e.g. more remote rural areas). They also thought we should explore **more time- and cost-effective ways** of reaching dispersed communities such as attending parish council meetings rather than door-to-door visits. It was also considered that we could increase our emergency cover by **requiring fewer crew on smaller rapid intervention vehicles**. This group also felt that **RDS training should be tiered and focused on the basics** as this would aid with recruitment, retention and support supervisory managers in ensuring their crews are competent.

In terms of **amending the crewing structure:**

An interesting observation came from Group 1, suggesting that we might be artificially constraining the scope of the crewing reviews by thinking of them in terms of terms and conditions and we **should be thinking of staff holistically**, including the use of volunteers. In response to the idea of paying a premium for RDS at peak demand, it was suggested that this may result in **unforeseen consequences**, where more personnel book available, which could end up costing more. Instead it was felt that RDS should be **paid more in general, reduce the numbers of them we require and ask for better commitment**.

Participants in Group 2 also made some insightful observations, e.g. we should **stop trying to struggle** with the resource intensive process of trying to fit RDS into the Wholetime model **and actually fit Wholetime into the RDS model** - if we have plenty of RDS available at night, then we should use RDS to provide the majority of night time cover and rely on Wholetime during the day and redistribute them as needed **irrespective of minority political views challenging changes to terms and conditions**. It was also highlighted

that it is inappropriate of us to request support from other businesses for RDS **until we can demonstrate that we are using our current workforce to its maximum efficiency**.

Group 1:

e.g. Sprinklers in remote locations

- **Sprinklers in remote locations is a good idea, but there could be cost implications of retrofitting them**
- **What are the building regulations in terms of sprinkler fitting in new-builds?**

e.g. Prioritising prevention work in remote locations

- **Worth considering prioritising prevention work in remote locations, but not using crews,** "four crew in a truck in remote locations, I would question whether the cost can be justified"
- **Worth considering other outreach methods for communities in remote locations such as talking at Parish meetings**
- **Should consider our staff holistically, including volunteers,** "so not having a day crewing review, an RDS review, let's look at what we need, when we need it and where we need it, rather than reviewing things by terms and conditions".

e.g. Pay a premium for RDS at peak demand

- **May have unforeseen consequences where more personnel book available and could end up costing more**
- **Consider paying RDS more in general and reduce numbers and ask for better commitment,** "we might see people who can commit part of the day and cover the peak demand periods"

e.g. Rapid intervention vehicles

- **Could increase emergency cover through requiring fewer personnel to make it available**

e.g. Prioritise training given to RDS

- **Prioritised or tiered training would help with recruitment and retention and support supervisory managers ensure their crew are skill competent,** "so that they could make sure those crews are good at the basics"

Other comments

Both groups:

- **Amalgamate crews to enable movement between stations more easily and provide more robust cover,** "for example, Haddenham, Waddesdon, Brill and Thame", "we could have two RDS at Waddesdon and two at Haddenham, coming to one station and yes it might take longer, but it is better than nothing"

- **Have more officers working on retained stations to provide extra cover where it is needed,** "we don't all need to be based at headquarters", "if you look at stations, we have got sites across the county where staff could be working on them and provide on-call cover and when I look at headquarters there are a lot of people there that don't need to be", "we have a lot of people at headquarters, but are we fully utilising our other buildings. Let's establish which locations we struggle to have on the run and locate staff in those buildings for their day job".

Group 2:

- **Have to be careful who you target to recruit and understand the likely cover they can commit to,** "careful moving towards the ideas like stay-at-home mums, which is great until you get a fire call at 14:30 and they have to collect their kids from school, so it's just not realistic", "I disagree…in fairness that is what we do with RDS anyway, when they say they have to get away at 17:00".
- **Need to make RDS model more attractive to modern lifestyles**
- **What is the return on investment of the RDS review/project,** "the work you are highlighting shows that we don't need RDS anyway, we only need them once a year, so [why are] we are investing a massive amount of money and resources in the on-call project?"
- **Can't assume that what works in other countries will work here,** "the comment about, it works in Europe and they don't get paid, we don't have that culture"
- **We should look at what cover RDS can provide and build the resourcing model around that, use wholetime during the day and RDS at night,** "if you've got RDS at night and they aren't available during the day when we are busiest, shouldn't we look at what we've got and then adapt around it. More wholetime during the day and more RDS at night, redistribute our wholetime during the day and use RDS at night. Instead of struggling with something we have no control over."
- **Should consider different ways of working such as the bank system, rostering for duty. The political views of those preventing that move do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider organisation,** "if you have loads of wholetime available at night that could have been used during the day, we could utilise them better if we adopted a system like the bank system", "so there have to be other ways of working and more openness to different ways of working", "there are some who don't like the bank system and they seem to be quite influential and that's not right. If I want to earn my living as a firefighter on my days off I should still be allowed to and not be worried that if I go on that station, I will get hard [time]."
- **Need to demonstrate net improvement of one crewing model versus another**, "there is no point having that bank system if it doesn't give you more flexibility or savings, if you've got to have three people on every single shift in the bank system, you might as well employ three more people."
- **We should demonstrate that we use our current staff to maximum effect before attempting to recruit from other organisations,** "I don't think it is right that we go to other organisations and attract their staff to come and work for us part-time, unless we can show them that we use our staff to maximum effect and how we do it and be an example of good practice in the first place and I don't think we are using our staff effectively e.g. making our own staff available to drive appliances. It isn't that the staff

are reluctant, but their line managers are…all the staff at headquarters that don't need to be, so I think we should start by setting an example and practice what we preach."

Using our resources in different ways:

We currently use our resources for non-fire and rescue purposes such as co-responder; renting office space to other agencies; refuel tanks; mobile phone aerials on drill towers; and solar panels on roofs. Do you agree that we should be using our resources in this way?

Both groups felt it was a good idea to use our resources and spare capacity in different ways, provided it didn't impact negatively on what we are legislated or expected to do. Group 1 felt that anything that can bring in extra revenue is a good idea. Group 2 voiced a recognition that the world is changing and that the fire service needed to embrace change and accept the need to adapt. A pertinent point was made, whereby most firefighters are motivated by wanting to save lives and the circumstances under which this is achieved shouldn't matter, i.e. co-responding or firefighting. It was also identified that using resources differently and expanding our function could make us more essential and therefore resilient to future cuts. Preserving assets was deemed important, irrespective of their use because selling assets only generates a short-time benefit, whereas using them for something else could generate an on-going revenue. Again the issue of empty building space was raised and it was suggested that we partner with organisations that can not only share the overhead costs, but shared learning and training i.e. organisations we naturally work closely with, in areas such as emergency planning.

Both groups:

▪ **Worth considering using our resources and spare capacity in different ways such as long as it doesn't affect what we are legislated to do**

Group 1:

▪ **Anything that brings in extra revenue is a good idea**

Group 2:

▪ **Need to embrace change and adapt to the changing environment,** "It is a changing world and we need to look at different ways of working"
▪ **Key motivator of any firefighter is to save lives, the situation under which this is done is irrelevant,** "our first priority is to save lives, we shouldn't differentiate how we achieve that"
▪ **Using resources differently could help make the fire and rescue service more essential and resilient**, "if we look at the history of New York in the 1970's, they were closing 3-4 fire houses a year and the commissioner at the time saw the model in Los Angeles and said we'll run that model and since took on the paramedic role, they haven't closed a fire house since, firefighters have a combined role, the more they do, the harder it is to get rid of them"
▪ **It is better to use our assets rather than sell them on, which is not an ongoing saving**

- **Should partner with other agencies we are required to work closely with to share the cost of overheads, knowledge and training,** "at certain times of the week we have a vast amount of empty office space across all of our brigade buildings, if we got into partnership with the right people such as the council, there is scope to spread the costs there…perhaps we should consider people we need to work closely with, for example other emergency planners…it is important to think about what other value we can get, what other benefits, like ambulance crews for joint training, it is not just about getting revenue."

Alternative service delivery models:

Is it reasonable to explore other ways of delivering our service? For example: Employee-owned businesses (e.g. John Lewis), mutuals, co-operatives, social enterprises, and/or privatisation?

Both groups were willing to explore the idea of alternative service delivery models to help make the fire and rescue service more robust in its economic and 'business' context. However, there was a dichotomy between the two groups in terms of approaching this alternative model route, with participants in Group 1 being more willing to consider this challenge outright and Group 2 tending to want to see more evidence on how a new model could be achieved first. Both groups felt very strongly that a private takeover was a bad idea, since they considered that the public sector rarely comes out well under that model and that profits may become the overriding driving force, rather than offering a proper service to the public at the point of need. Group 2 felt that merging with other fire and rescue services could be beneficial in terms of sharing support and senior management functions, whereas Group 1 felt that this wouldn't bring the innovation and scrutiny required in the sector.

Group 1 raised an interesting comparison with the private sector, stating that a private business wouldn't just sit back and watch their market shrink away, which suggested a desire to diversify the business model, identify opportunities and capitalise on them. It was suggested that the public sector model is perhaps not flexible enough to allow us to adapt at a sufficient rate with the changing external world, so a more flexible service delivery model may be worth considering. There was interest in the idea of a cooperative or social enterprise model, where it was felt that staff could have greater influence in how the service was run and where money could be invested where we saw fit, such as more vulnerable communities and fire sector research. The group considered that the appetite to be pioneers was greater in Buckinghamshire than Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services, and given the joint control project, we may have to factor in their mind set as well moving forward. This group was also interested in the Fire Authority's view on whether they wish to be free of government funding. Participants also related consideration of business models to the things that motivate our staff to work for the Service stressing that it was because they "love it" and that ethos should be protected and preserved in any future arrangements.

There were some concerns raised in Group 2 as to whether our Medium Term Financial Plan was overly pessimistic, and could precipitate a degree and rate of change that was greater than that needed to address the issues faced by the Service, potentially doing more harm than good by cutting back too far and too quickly. The group could see the benefit of generating revenue and introducing greater flexibility, but were concerned about how success would be measured in the future, particularly if profits were given more weight over public service at point of need.

Group 1:

- **Worth exploring, but should consider what other fire and rescue services are doing and how this may affect us,** "would be interesting to explore, but would we need to factor in Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, who have less of a risk appetite for change, and how might this affect the vision?"

- **Does the Fire Authority want us to be free of government funding?** "Important to understand how the Fire Authority views us, is this something they wish to explore, namely to be free of government funding?"

- **Public sector model is not adaptable enough for a changing world,** "at the moment we are constrained by not being able to generate profits", "Most private businesses don't just sit around watching their market shrink away", "we could find another way to venture out, rather than just shrinking back"

- **Would enable greater flexibility and influence on how we run the service,** "Could bring greater scope to run the fire service as more of a business and have greater control of how revenue is reinvested", "Co-ownership would allow us to make money and bring it back into the organisation and redistribute it as we saw fit"

- **We could be empowered to invest in areas where more money is needed such as research, or more vulnerable communities,** "I think if we could reinvest, then we could put it into areas that aren't served well such as research, so that we can better understand what is going on, we don't have a lot of resources in that area, but we are expected to have all the answers", "or we could invest into our best customers [the vulnerable]"

- **Should avoid privatisation, but a cooperative or social enterprise would enable staff to buy in to what they do, namely we do it because we love it,** "I was looking at it from a privatisation route, with somebody coming in and taking over, but if you are doing it from a cooperative or a social enterprise, then you are buying into what you do, which is what I think the fire service is, you do it because you love it. You do your role to the best of your ability, because it isn't a private company, you don't get a bonus, you do it because you love it. If we did it as a cooperative, then you are building on what you love"

- **Should avoid privatisation because the public sector rarely comes out well through this process, but we could work more closely with private sector companies such as delivering parts of our service or collaboration,** "I think we should do this [explore alternative service delivery models] immediately, we should avoid privatisation because public services don't come out well through that model, so that should be avoided, but there are other things in there, could we work with private sector companies to deliver parts of our service, or work with them and go into collaboration"

- **Should think beyond partnering with other fire and rescue services, because we need more innovation and scrutiny, which will be better achieved through opening ourselves up externally,** "I would be very hesitant about merging with other fire and rescue services, because we are only as good as a fire service and there is no external scrutiny, we are our own little kingdoms and we don't bring in any new skill sets or experience, we just have the same ideas going around the fire service"

Group 2:

- **Shrinking the service too far and too hastily relative to a worst-case scenario may be detrimental and not needed,** "you are saying that the medium term financial plan says we need to get down to £26m, but what I am saying is I don't think it will be

like that. That is the worst case scenario, we shouldn't be getting rid of things until we need to…we aren't really that dependent on government grants, so it isn't that much money"

- **Generating our own revenue would enable greater flexibility in how to run the fire and rescue service,** "you could put all the money back into the business again…you can go and explore other areas of the business, you can grow the business".

- **Not convinced that generating our own revenue is better than lobbying government for more money,** "how does making money help you [fire and rescue service]…we could lobby government to say we could do that in the fire service anyway".

- **Does the current service delivery model need changing?** "The most sensible financial sense is that if it ain't broke don't fix it" - "but it is broke, the whole country is broken, the money isn't there to do the things the way we used to".

- **If you run the fire service as a private enterprise with the objective of making profits, it might lead to reduced resources from the front line where it is needed,** "if you take it [ownership] away from the public sector, then someone will be looking to make a profit from it, you'll need people to run the business, which takes it away from where it is needed [front line]", "If you were quite happy to see two guys on a hydraulic platform, going round pointing chimneys for private builders so that we get more money, then that is what you will end up with".

- **What would be the measure of success of private versus public?** "If you move something out of the public sector, then what kind of service are you actually getting?", "If you compare the British Health model to America, our input and output is a hell of a lot better, I think we are ranked about 9th in the world and they are about 37th. It is how you measure success with privatisation: Is it the shareholder, or is it better for the person that rings the fire brigade?", "isn't there a model of private sector involvement in the fire service anyway, and society decided they didn't want it? It is about offering a service that is available to the user at the point of need. If we go down the private route, what are the benefits?"

- **Can you provide an example of where it has worked?** "Can you give us an example of where this [privatisation] has happened and the service given is now better, without the model to actually see it [don't feel qualified to provide an opinion]", "Point me to a good example of where it has happened, until we see a model where we can be convinced that it has been working and it will benefit the community that we are serving then [we can't really comment]", "because we care passionately about the service, we only have concerns that we don't have enough information, we can only see bad things, because you haven't really shown us any good things"

- **Perhaps we could look at partnerships or shared services with other fire and rescue services,** "there are lots of things the fire service can still do, we could do more with Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, those sorts of partnerships, shared resources…it doesn't matter how it is run at the top, at the front it will always be local"

Other comments:

Group 2 had some additional commentary relating to the engagement process and how decisions will be made and implemented following the proposals: It was felt by some that there had not been enough publicity in local papers or on radio, whilst others suggested the limitations in terms of return on investment when adopting those outreach methods. It was also voiced that the public may not be engaging in the process because fire and rescue is not a primary concern for them relative to other day-to-day factors such as bin collections, but perhaps this viewpoint will change if the service we offer is reduced. It was felt that there was a degree of discontentment surrounding change across the workforce, but that staff generally aren't willing to do something about it e.g. many haven't even read the latest PSP. Concerns were also raised regarding the integrity of the decision making and implementation process following the proposals, which were considered to be too vague. There are concerns that many of the proposals are a 'done deal'.

Group 2:

Engagement process

Public:

- **Felt there was insufficient publicity surrounding the PSP, but recognised the limitations in return for investment,** "I don't think we can call it a public safety plan, because we haven't put it out to the public enough…I don't think the normal run of the mill person is getting any input", "There is an element though, that you can throw a lot of money at it and not get anything in return"
- **Fire and Rescue is not a primary concern to the majority of the public, but if service was diminished it could be,** "people care about their libraries, schools, pot holes. There are lots of other things out there that are being changed, in the scheme of things, if you go to your local council meeting they get very animated about their bins not being collected every week", "the public aren't worried about fire because they know the back-up is there"

Staff:

- **Some felt that many staff seem disgruntled by the change of direction,** "lots of people are willing to say, I don't like this, I don't like that, but if you're not willing to do something about it [then they don't have a leg to stand on]"
- **Our own staff aren't as engaged as they should be,** "to be honest, I don't think many firefighters have read it"

Decision making and implementation

- **PSP seems like a 'done-deal',** "I think the document is very good, but you can almost see where the outcomes are going, what I worry about is that it is very vague in what we

can do, so once this gets passed, we can pretty much do whatever we want…I know it is part of the process, but it does look like a done deal…you have drawn up something that nobody can argue with, yeah of course you should look at this, should look at that, well yeah of course, look at everything"

▪ **Would like greater clarity around the decision and implementation process,** "I don't get how the infrastructure works, so once this is done how the rest all fits, so once you've got that, does it make it easier to say, right now we are going to shut that station", "but some of the proposals have already started, the day-crew review, the RDS review, the Milton Keynes review", "with the degradation policy, you are kind of forcing the shape of things"