

Annual Report to Bucks County Council 2015

Executive Summary

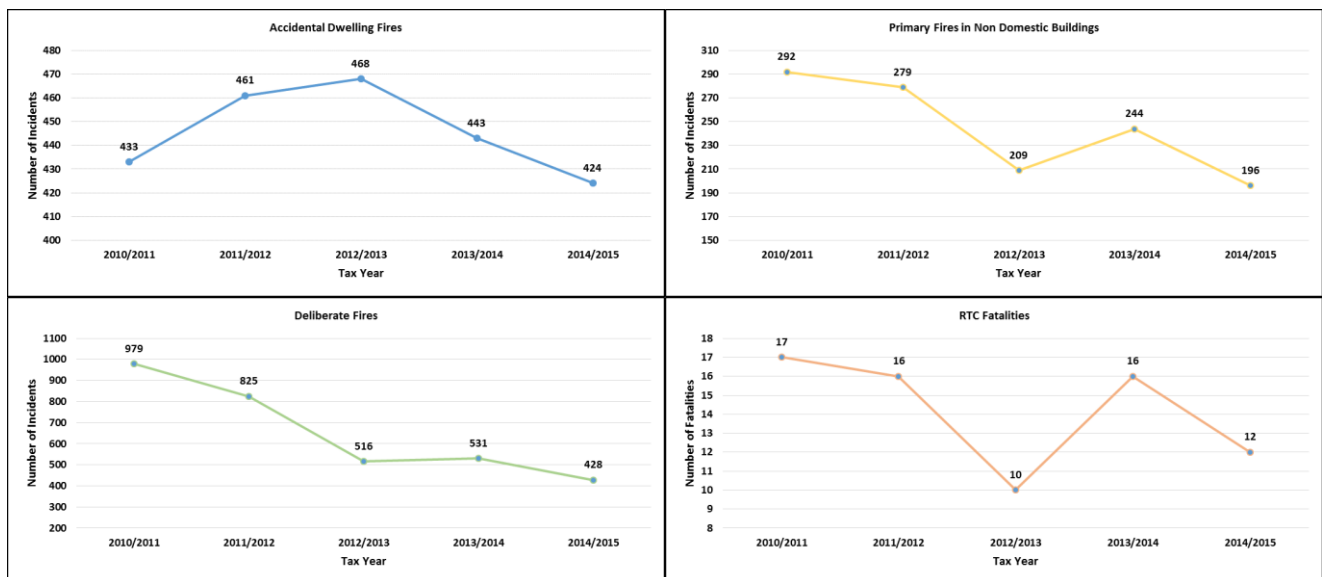
Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service continues to show sustained improvement by managing down the number of fire calls and changing how it works to provide a wider range of services to the local community. The good financial performance of the Authority continues, with savings made across the whole of the Service. It is worthy of note that Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) has not raised council tax since 2011 and in the last year it reduced council tax by 1%. It is difficult to compare different types of Fire and Rescue Services, but the cost of the Fire and Rescue service in Buckinghamshire compared to other combined fire services is now the lowest in the country.

The Service continues to push forward with providing more services, without passing the cost onto the taxpayer, and this last year started to provide emergency medical response to the communities of Buckinghamshire. So far the Service has attended nearly 3000 medical emergencies since March 2014, saving countless lives.

In short, over the last 4 years, the Fire Authority has reduced council tax, provided more lifesaving services to the community and has not removed one fire engine, closed one fire station or made one firefighter compulsory redundant whilst ensuring that the financial burden on taxpayers has been reduced.

1. Performance Trends

Preventing incidents that lead to Harm and Loss

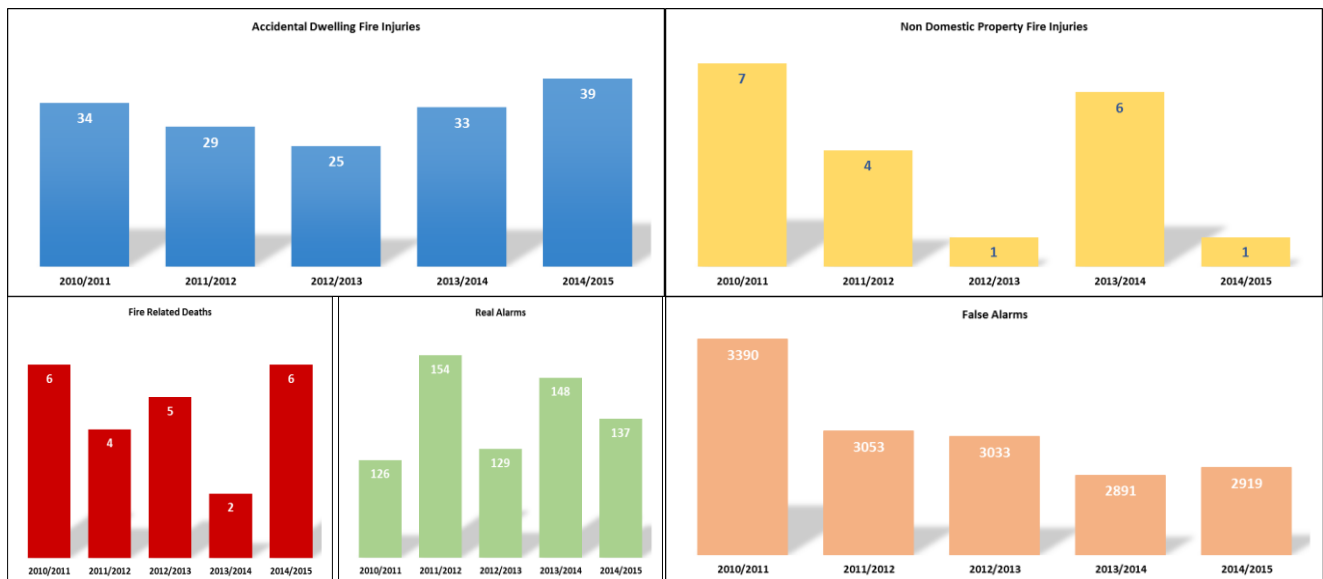


Significant progress is still being made in reducing the number of incidents that typically lead to people being harmed by fires or road traffic collisions. Deliberate fires have been reduced by 56% in the last five years. Fires in buildings in non-domestic homes have also reduced by 33%. Accidental dwelling fires are now lower than they

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

were in 2010/11 even though there has been a significant increase in the number of homes in the same period.

Protecting Homes and Businesses from Fire



Whilst the number of accidental fires continues to fall in real terms, the number of injuries and deaths resulting from these fires has plateaued in number. However, the trend has continued to be relatively downward due to the increase in the size of the population during the same period. This is proving a common statistical trait nationally.

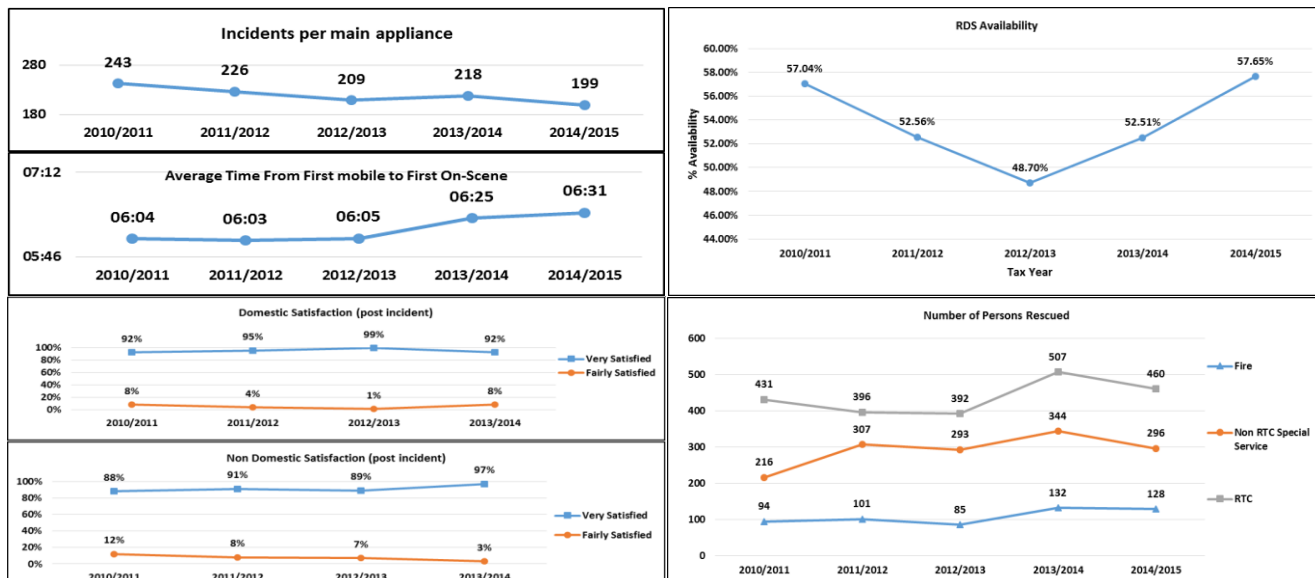
The prevention activities carried out by the Service have reduced the number of those dying or being injured to very few incidences, it has however exposed a section of the population that are especially at risk from fire. These are generally persons who are particularly vulnerable due to age or disability. They often are unable to respond to a fire starting in their home. They might also have some dependency and frequently predominantly live in a single room. The Service is increasing its efforts to identify these persons through working with partners and data sharing and welcomes ideas and help from Buckinghamshire County Council in this regard.

The Service continues to work proactively with the business community. We believe we are the only Fire and Rescue Service in the country that still attends all reports of operating fire alarms. Many businesses will not continue to trade after a major fire, the Fire Authority sees the continuing attendance at fire alarms as central to ensuring that there is sustainable growth and employment in the Buckinghamshire area. It is worth noting that the 'Real Alarm' graph shows that on 137 occasions we attended an activating fire alarm that there was actually an incident we had to deal with.

The Service has an officer dedicated to working with local businesses to reduce false alarms and improving safety in the workplace, this work continues to reduce the number of alarms that the Service attends and also prevents unnecessary loss of productivity for business.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Responding to Incidents



Because of our successful prevention campaigns, the Service is expanding the range of services that are provided to the public. The Service monitors the performance around the number of incidents that our fire engines attend. The number of incidents has reduced against the number of appliances we have. This has released capacity to work with South Central Ambulance Service to provide medical emergency response to utilise our resources for the benefit of the public. As we remodel the Service we will strive to increase this number to help save more lives in our communities.

During the previous five years our time to attend incidents has increased slightly by 27 seconds. The feedback from residents about our services show that 100% are either satisfied or very satisfied with our services. It is likely that the industrial action has had some effect on our response times in the last year. We have also recently moved to the new Thames Valley Fire Control Service facility which we share with Oxfordshire FRS and Royal Berkshire FRS. This facility has a new mobilising system which automatically mobilises the quickest fire engine available.

Nationally the number of on-call firefighters has reduced by around 9%. The Service has also experienced a reduction in the number of on-call firefighters. The main cause behind this national trend is believed to be societal changes with fewer people working where they live, or wishing to provide cover during their time off from their main employment. However the Service has introduced new and innovative employment methods to ensure that availability of these vital services is at a 5 year high, following a dip in recent years.

Earlier graphs will have shown how few people are dying or are injured in fires. The Service has recently started to measure the number of incidents where firefighters have had to assist people in harm in some way. This may be leading them from a fire situation or extricating them from a vehicle. This data will be used to fully understand the nature of incidents that lead to people requiring our assistance so that we can then take action to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

2. Initiatives

Since last year's report, the Service now responds to emergency medical response incidents deemed by South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) to be life threatening. This scheme is called Co-responding and the work here has grown significantly.

The Service now operate co-responding from the following fire stations, providing emergency medical assistance to the community.

High Wycombe

High Wycombe uses an ambulance car (shown below), staffed by firefighters. This is crewed permanently from 08.00hrs through to 22.00hrs, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The High Wycombe co-responder unit is used extensively across the South Bucks area, SCAS dispatchers have the flexibility to move the vehicle where ever call demand is highest i.e. if an ambulance is tied at an incident in a specific area, the co-responding car can be moved into that area to ensure Emergency Medical Response is not compromised.

Since the inception of the scheme at High Wycombe (March 2014), High Wycombe co-responders have attended over 1800 medical emergencies.



Chesham

Chesham has operated an "On-Call" style response since March 2014. This style of response enables our "On-Call" firefighters, to take the co-responding car home and provide cover from home by booking available using the SCAS GPS trackable pagers (all co-responders are mobilised to medical emergencies this way to ensure the quickest resource is sent). Due to the increased call demand on SCAS in the Chesham, Amersham and Great Missenden area, BFRS will, from the 1st October, be putting into place a second positive hours crewed car. This car will operate between the hours of 10:00hrs and 22:00hrs. It is worth mentioning, that currently, BFRS is the only Fire & Rescue service in the UK that operates this unique model of life saving response.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Marlow

Marlow On-Call Firefighters also joined the co-responding scheme in March 2014. They similarly operate the "On-Call" scheme as used in Chesham, though not as busy, they contribute consistently to the safety and wellbeing of the community they serve.

Buckingham

On the 6th May 2015, a completely new, and again, nationally unique response model was launched from Buckingham Fire Station. Fire service staff are pioneering co-responding medical response using fire engines based there. When the crew are not engaged at fire related incidents, they make themselves available for medical emergencies in support of SCAS. The fire appliance carries enhanced medical equipment, such as a defibrillator and entonox, and the crew have received increased Basic Life Support training from SCAS (all BFRS co-responders are trained by SCAS). It is important to note however, that at no time is fire cover in Buckingham reduced, when the fire appliance is dispatched to a medical emergency, the Service puts cover moves into place the same as they would do when any fire appliance is mobilised to an incident.



Buckingham crews also have an ambulance car that can be used when crewing levels allow to enhance the lifesaving capability in the area.

Since March 2014, fire service co-responders have been sent to nearly 3000 incidents, a remarkable achievement for a relatively new initiative, supported by a relatively small but dedicated professional team. The co-responders receive regular inputs from SCAS paramedic trainers, with a stringent requalification program to ensure competence. All co-responders attend a minimum week long intensive Blue Light Driver course with SCAS's own driving school before they can respond on blue lights.

'In April, it was announced that there would be a collaborative initiative coordinating the medical response for the four fire services in the SCAS region. This project has been led by an officer from Buckinghamshire seconded to SCAS, to explore different models of medical response across the region that can support and assist SCAS in meeting their attendance times. Ultimately ensuring a quicker and more improved outcome for the residents of the communities that we serve.

There is little doubt, that the Fire Service will continue to support and develop its involvement in this field, and most reassuring that Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service are taking the lead nationally.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

3. Wider health agenda

After successfully delivering proactive prevention messages to the public over a period of many years, this Service has a thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve and also on further ways we can work to support our partners in creating and sustaining healthy communities.

Prevention is of fundamental importance to the success of the NHS and Public Health and we are identifying where we can add most value. Already Buckingham Fire Station has become part of the Dementia Friendly Community with all staff trained in dementia awareness. This has been supplemented by opening up that fire station to conduct fitness classes to make children more physically active. Currently 70% of NHS spending is on chronic illnesses which in many cases are due to lifestyle choices.

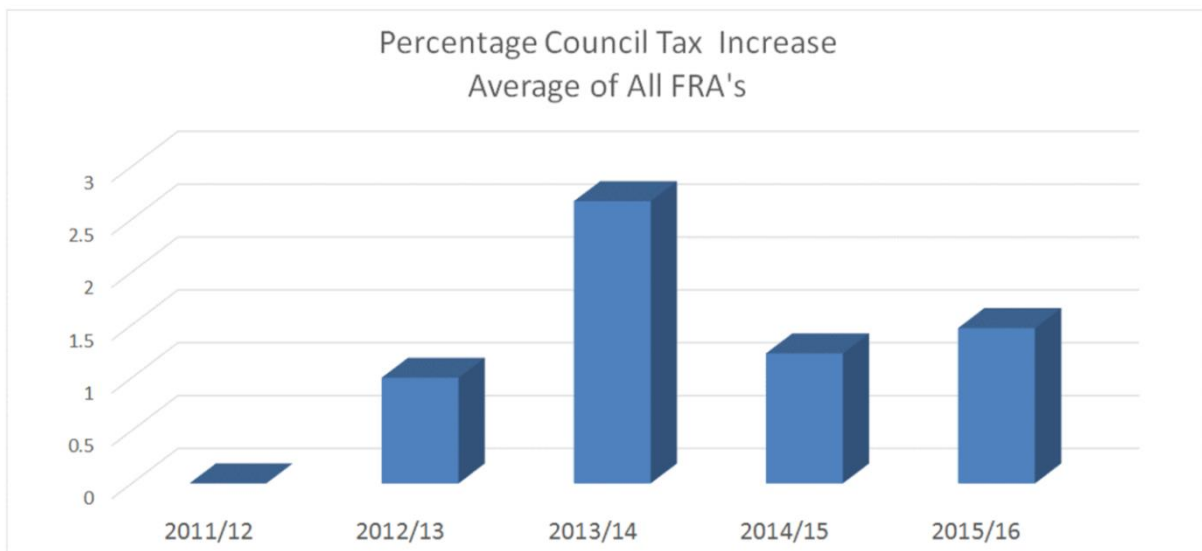
This Service is reviewing initiatives already in place in other areas to evaluate where we can add most value. We believe we can support the falls prevention agenda and become more pro-active in safeguarding children and adults. The Fire Service offers valuable data built up over many years on vulnerable people within our communities and this will be augmented by access to the NHS 'Exeter database' allowing us to identify those over 65s receiving hospital treatment. Due to our success in preventing fires we have a latent capacity in the form of a capable and trusted workforce which can be used to complement the work of partners. We also have fire stations usually based at the centre of towns and villages which are often well-placed to act as community hubs from which partners can deliver education, training and other initiatives to the wider public.

At a strategic level, we are currently liaising with Bucks County Council in order to attend a forthcoming Health & Wellbeing Board meeting to present what we can offer to the Board and partners, now and in the future. This aligns with the approach we have taken with Milton Keynes Council, where we are also looking to establish appropriate and effective joint working arrangements.

4. Costs and Financial Situation **Council Tax**

For 2015/16, six Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) froze their Band D council tax, one – Buckinghamshire (BFRS) – reduced it by one percent and the remainder increased at just below the 2% referendum limit.

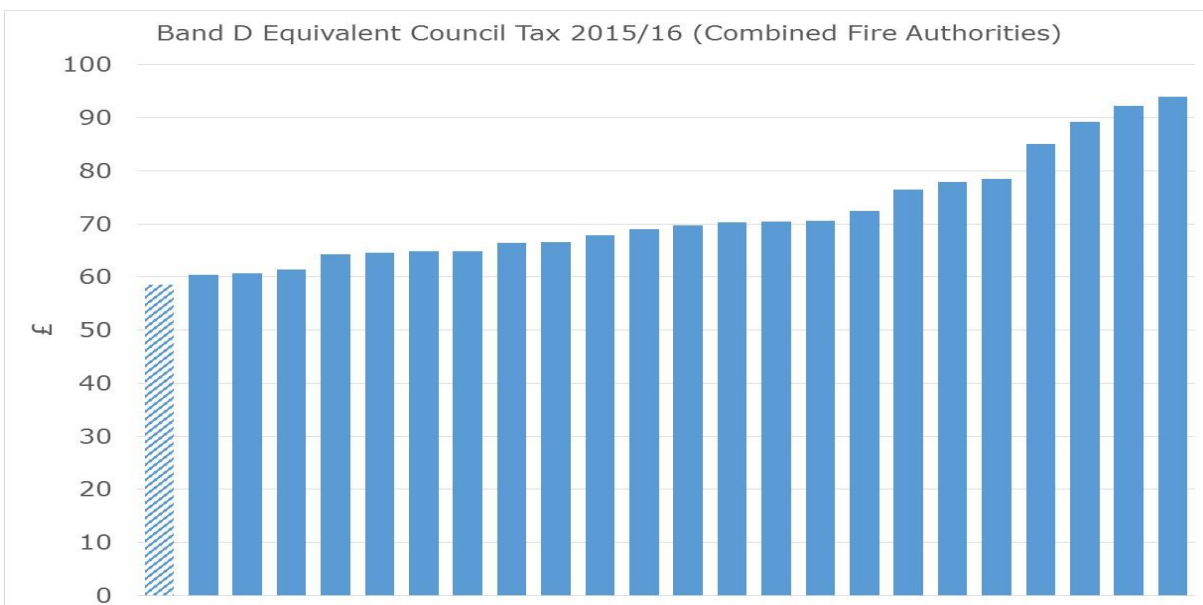
Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service



BFRS froze council tax in every year from 2011/12 to 2014/15. This was despite having the option to increase council tax by up to £5 in 2013/14 without the need to undertake a local referendum. As noted earlier, BFRS was the only fire authority to reduce council tax for 2015/16.

The average Band D council tax for FRAs is now £70 or £1.35 a week. Following the one percent reduction, the 2015/16 average Band D council tax for BFRS is now £58.54 per annum (16% below the national average), which equates to £1.12 a week.

The chart below shows the average Band D council tax for all Combined Fire Authorities in 2015/16, with BFRS shown as the striped bar on the far left.



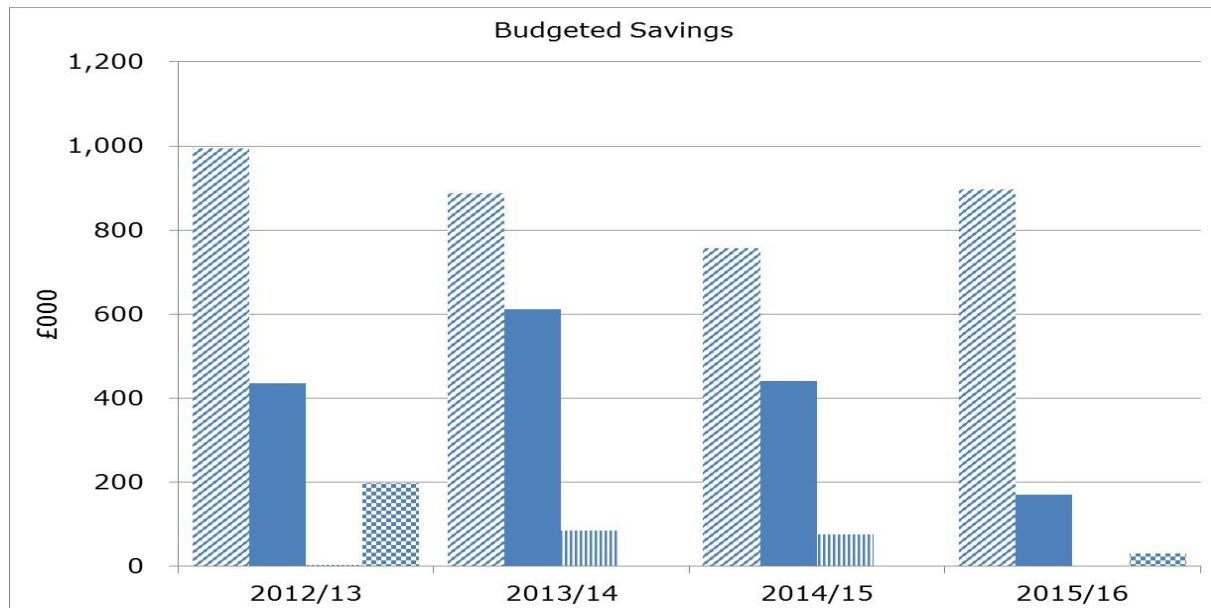
Reduction in Grant Funding

In last year's report it was noted that between 2010/11 and 2014/15 BFRS had seen its settlement funding reduced by 26%. Between 2014/15 and 2015/16 the settlement funding was reduced by a further 7%. The same level of cut was also made against specific fire grants used to fund national resilience and the emergency communications network.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Savings

The Authority has made savings across both front-line service delivery and back office functions over a number of years, without any decline in key performance indicators. The savings are illustrated in the following chart:



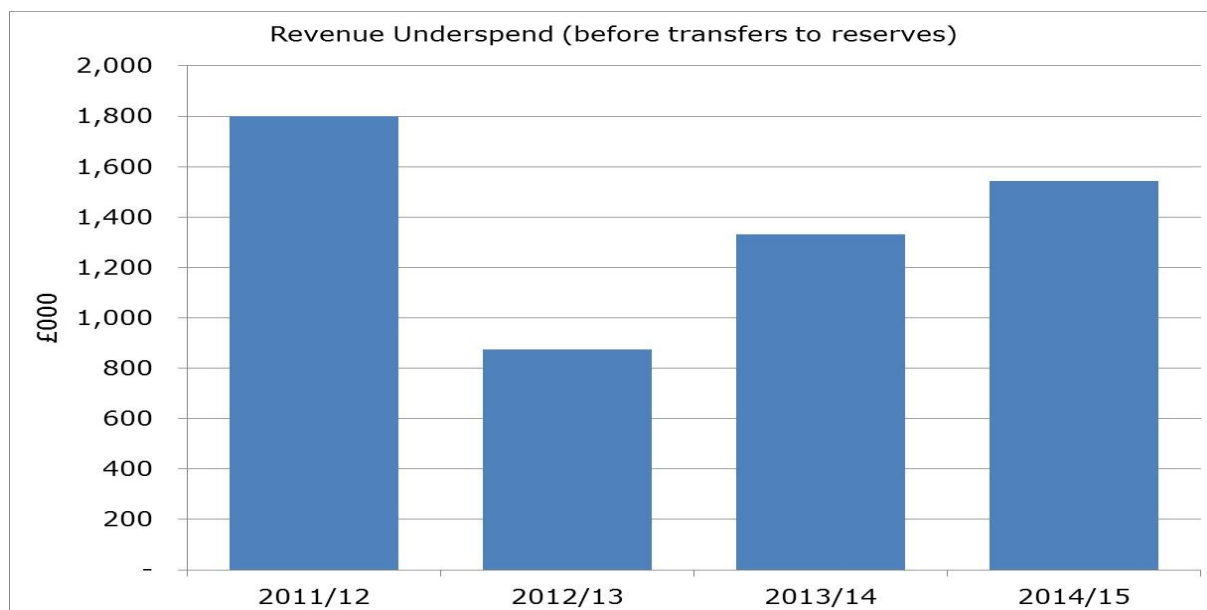
Key:

- Public Safety
- Finance & Assets
- People and Organisation Development
- Other Directorates

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Underspends

Through pro-active management of finances and a prudent approach to spending public money the Authority has consistently delivered an underspend against the budget in each of the last four years, as shown in the following chart:



5. Steps taken to reduce costs

The Authority has taken a holistic approach to reducing the cost of the Service to the taxpayer, whilst ensuring that the service to the community is enhanced. Examples of this approach have seen an increase in income from treasury management of over £60k per annum, running costs of our buildings being reduced by over £20k per annum against a backdrop of rising energy prices and training costs being reduced by over £175k per annum whilst ensuring that the quality of training is increased. The Service now shares officers across Fire Authority boundaries, shares buildings with other blue light services and operates staffing systems where the costs are reduced, staff can earn more, and the service to the public is not compromised. These steps have included reducing the number of councillors on the Fire Authority, reducing the number of senior and middle managers and empowering staff at practitioner level to take decisions which directly affect their local communities. This holistic, sustained approach from all members of the Fire Authority and the employees has allowed the Service to push forward and to be in the best possible position for the future.

6. Role of Buckinghamshire County Council members on our Fire Authority

Councillor Adrian Busby, was re-elected Chairman of the Fire Authority at its AGM in June 2015. Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE, replaced Councillor John Chilver as one of the 12 representatives from Buckinghamshire County Council, and has also become a member of the Fire Authority's Overview and Audit Committee. Councillor Phil Gomm, became Lead Member for Resource Management.

At its meeting on Wednesday 10 June 2015 Members approved the 2015-20 Corporate Plan. This sets out how the Service intends to equip and develop the organisation and its people to meet the challenges that it faces over the next five years.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Members also approved this year, and the Chairman signed, two separate Memoranda of Understanding. The first sets out commitment for collaboration with Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services; and the second, was for property sharing and co-location of the Police and Fire and Rescue Services in the Thames Valley area.

Following the Government's announcement stating its intention to enshrine in law the commitment to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020 and for public sector bodies to be set targets to help reach this figure, Members approved the introduction of an Authority-wide apprenticeship scheme. It is intended to recruit 10 firefighter apprentices a year, for the financial year 2016/17 and the 2 subsequent financial years thereafter (subject to requirements). It also intends to create a partnership scheme to support the employment of apprentices in other primary employers. The Authority intends to support businesses taking on apprentices in return for those businesses releasing the apprentices to service as Community Firefighters.

As well as attending committee meetings, Members help to shape policies by attending workshops and working groups. Members will also be visiting the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire on 28th October to see our staff training.

Members also participate in our Long Service Award Ceremony and Annual Carol Concert. At which point it would be remiss of me not to invite you all to this year's concert which is being held at St Mary's Church, St Mary's Square, Aylesbury on Wednesday 9 December at 7.30pm.

The Service continues to receive tremendous support from the Lord Lieutenant's and High Sheriff's offices and we are pleased to have good working relationships with all strategic stakeholders.

Fire Authority Members for 2015/16 from Buckinghamshire County Council are: Councillors Bendyshe-Brown, Busby, Clarke OBE, Glover, Gomm, Huxley, Lambert, Mallen, Reed, Schofield, Vigor-Hedderly, Watson and from Milton Keynes Council: Dransfield, Exon, Marland, Morris and Wilson.

**CFO/CE JASON THELWELL
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**