



Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service Annual Report to the County Council 2016

Thursday 22nd September 2016

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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. The council tax level for 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 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 council tax for taxpayers remains the lowest in the country.

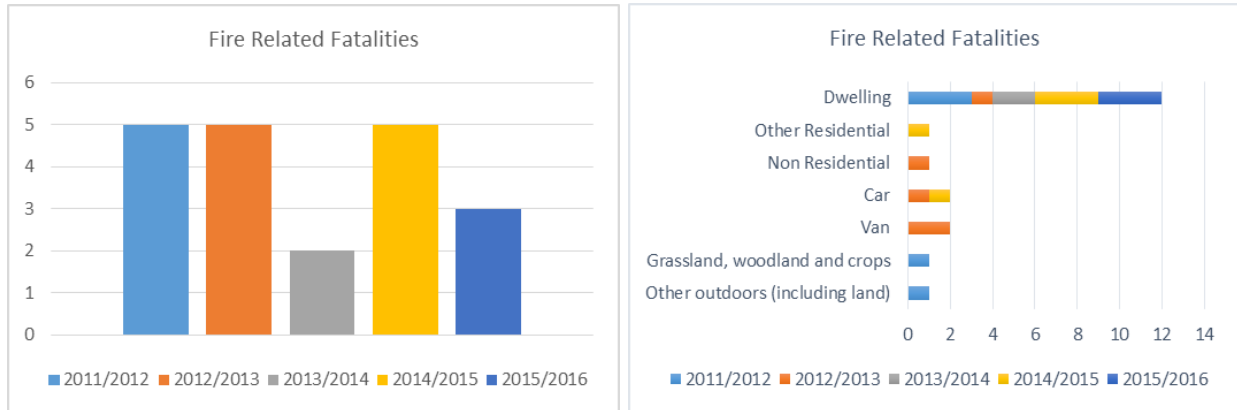
Performance Trends

Total Incidents (excluding co-responder)

2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
7015	6468	6750	6207	6276

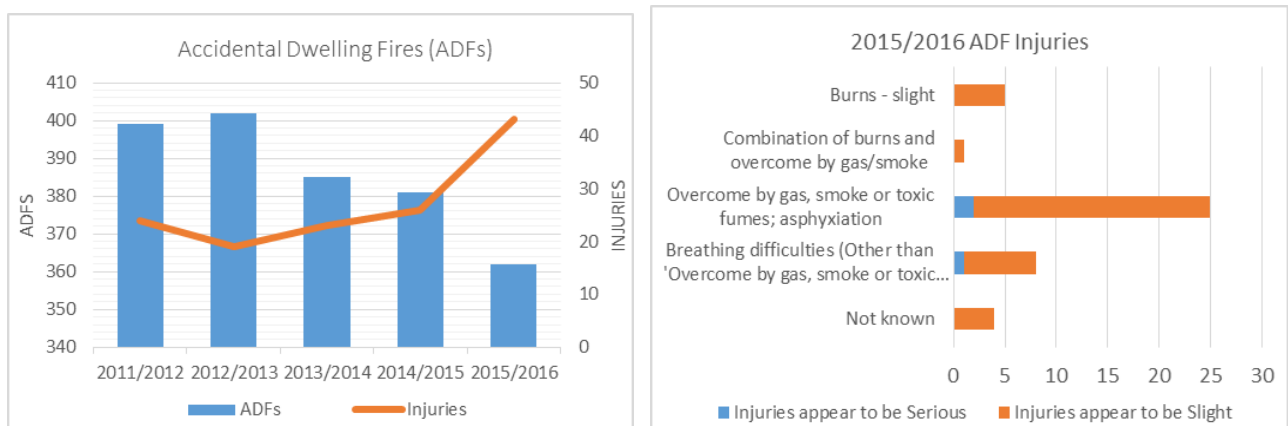
BFRS continue to experience a plateau in the overall trend in incident demand, with the number of incidents remaining below the 7,000 figure for the fourth year. BFRS have recognised the opportunities this trend presents and a positive increase in demand is now being reported where BFRS are attending medical emergencies in the co-responder role.

Fire Related Fatalities

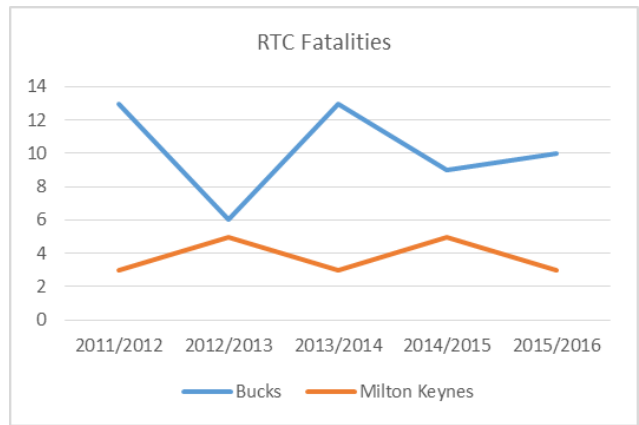
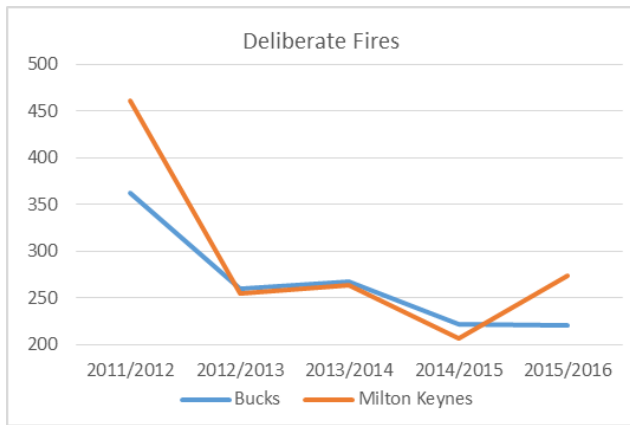


During 2015/16, three **fire related fatalities** were recorded in three separate incidents. The three incidents were all in the home, with one fatality over pensionable age, all were suspected to be dead on arrival of the fire service and located within the room of the fire's origin. The causes pertaining to each of the incidents vary, though immobility, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs appear to have contributed to these deaths.

Preventing Incidents that Lead to Harm

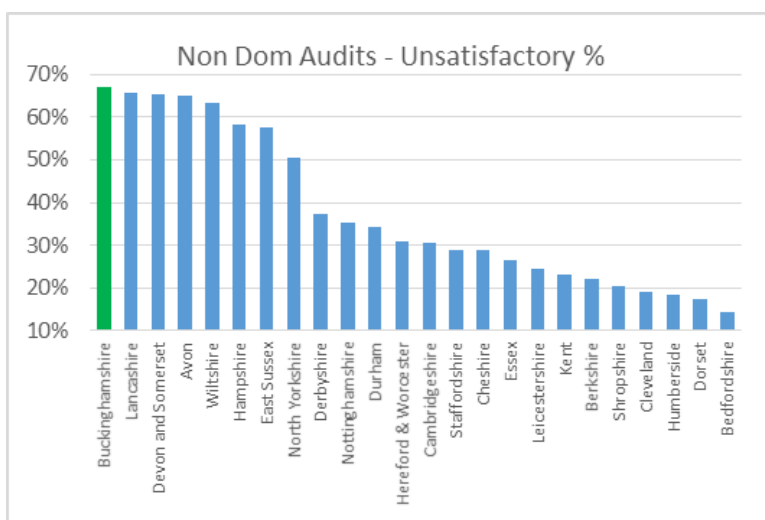
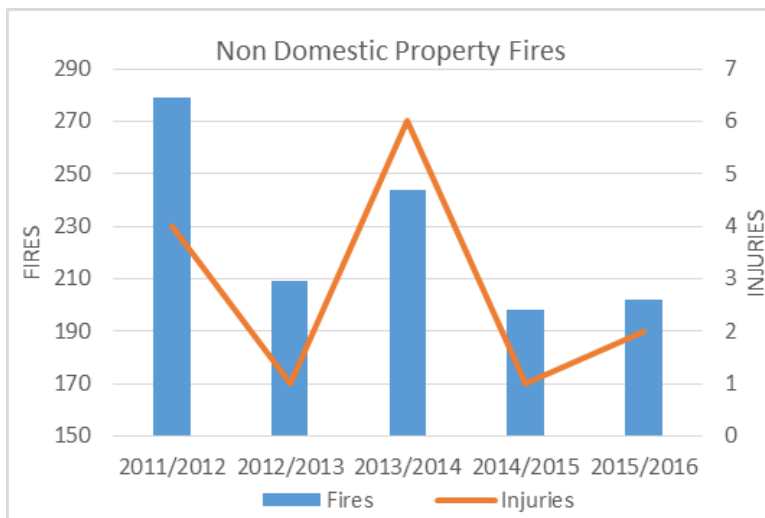


The **Accidental Dwelling Fire** trend has continued this year with the number of incidents reducing, but the number of injuries increasing. The number of 'serious injuries' remains low (3 in 2015/2016). However, the 'slight injuries' have increased for the third year in a row. This anomaly with an increase in minor injuries against a backdrop in falling accidental dwelling fires has been reflected not just nationally but also in other European nations who collect fire data. There is currently some significant research underway around human behaviour in domestic fires which is starting to explain why this may be the case.



Over the past 10 years, one of our most dramatic trends has been our **Deliberate Fires**. They have reduced by huge numbers and although MK did see a rise last year, we are expecting the downward trend to continue again.

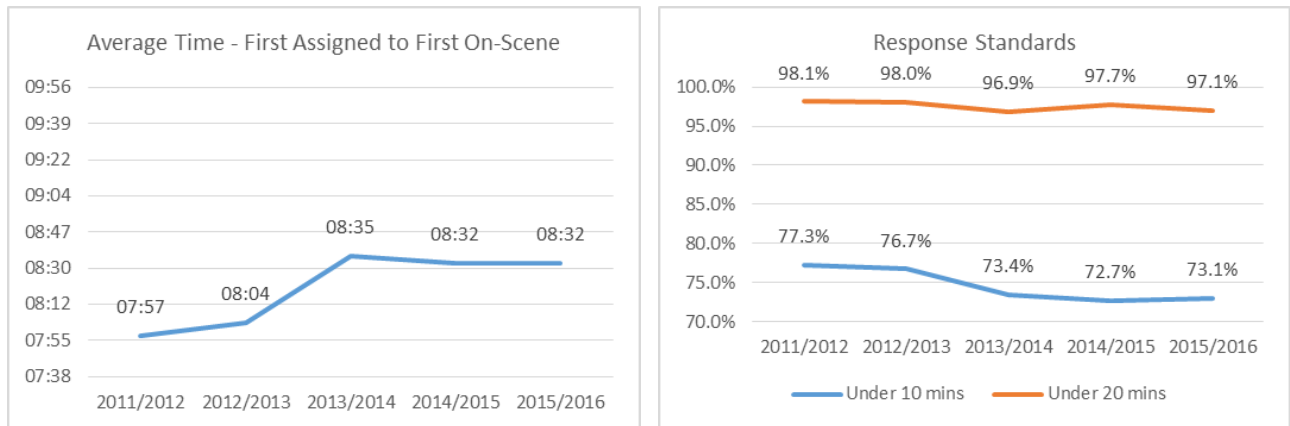
Protecting Homes and Businesses from Fire



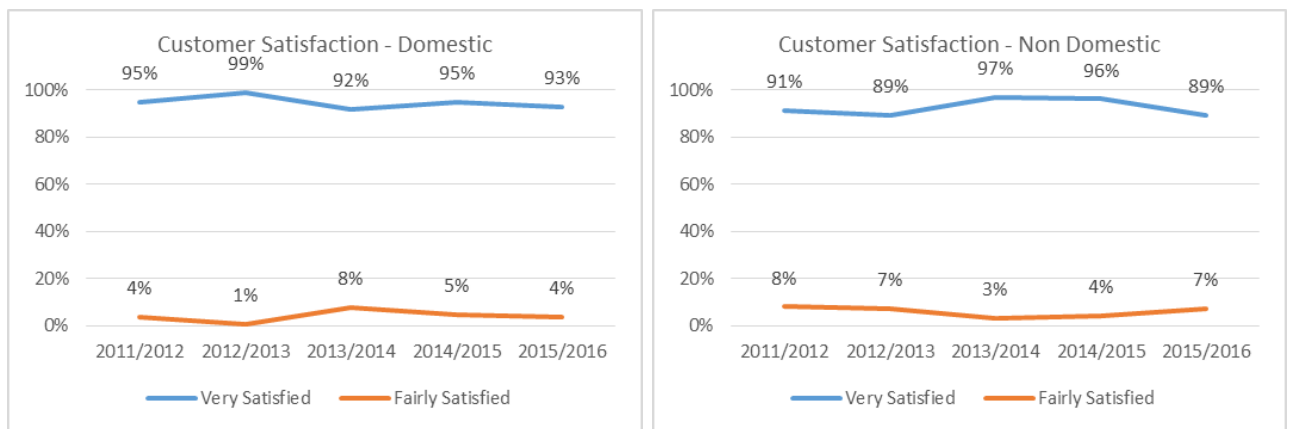
Our **Non Domestic Property fire** figures rose slightly last year, but in general remain at a one of its lowest levels in the past. These figures have been helped by proactive work with the businesses community and strategic targeting. The percentage of unsatisfactory

audits demonstrate that BFRS has a robust targeting approach for audits, identifying those commercial premises that present a higher risk.

Responding to Incidents



The **average attendance time** has reduced this year reversing the upward trends of previous years. Nationally, attendance times are increasing reflecting the impact of austerity measures on other fire and rescue services and how they have responded to them by often removing appliances and closing stations. This has attracted interest in the national press. However, due to the way we prioritise our resourcing, coupled with the move to new technology making sure the nearest available appliance is mobilised to an incident, we have managed to buck this national trend and improve our performance.



After the incident questionnaires are sent following incidents at domestic and non – domestic premises (except where serious injury/ fatality or significant damage has occurred). The questionnaires are returned to Opinion Research Services who analyse the returns and publish the results. BMKFRS continually remain in the 90+% brackets for customer satisfaction in both domestic and non-domestic.

(Incident Data as @ 31/08/2016)
 (Data collected from our Incident Reporting System ‘IRS’ and our Rota Management Tool ‘Gartan’)

Workforce Reform

The Authority strives to adopt modern and flexible working arrangements to ensure it best serves the public and maximises the use of all resources.

A refreshed, innovative People Strategy sets out our approach and is the foundation for delivering ongoing workforce reform; enabling the Authority to optimise the contribution and well-being of our people to deliver its objectives.

The workforce reform programme aims to ensure that the Authority has a resilient, sustainable, high performing, diverse, flexible, agile workforce, motivated to act as advocates in the community. This is achieved through aligned strategic workforce planning, skills development programmes and a range of flexible local resourcing models and terms and conditions; all against a background of a continual reduction in the operational workforce through planned retirements.

Our staff are often initiating and piloting new ideas and ways of working, which add value to the public in addition to enhancing their own skills. As an example we have 11 “flexi Firefighters” who work on local terms and conditions. They are contractually required to work anywhere in the county, have no fixed duty pattern, undertake any training including medical response at the discretion of the Authority and provide resilience in the event of industrial action.

We have also taken on 22 Firefighter apprentices who started in August and will be operational from October, plus four support staff apprentices.

We continue to initiate collaborative working arrangements with other Emergency Services and new partners; and continue to provide opportunities for other Fire Authorities to view what we do and learn from us and vice versa.

Initiatives

BFRS continues to increase the services that it provides to the community. These range from enhanced rescue capabilities to supporting the wider health agenda. The following section highlights some of these services.

Youth Engagement

Junior Firefit – A High Wycombe Fire Station initiative aimed at improving the health, fitness and self-confidence of young people not previously undertaking regular exercise. The local station staff work with a local school to identify those young people who would most benefit from this approach. The staff are supported by *Sport England* and *LEAP*.

Team HOSE – A Buckingham Fire Station project similar to Firefit, involving working with a local school to identify those young people who would benefit from the course. This has supported the attendance, self-confidence as well as the health and wellbeing of the children. This course has been supported financially by the local supermarket and is going to be showcased at a fundraising event in London in November.

D of E – Staff at Aylesbury Fire Station have worked with the BCC D of E team to provide the service element of the D of E Bronze Award.

START (strengthening tenancies to achieve respect and trust) – This initiative has been run as a pilot in MK and station-based staff have provided support to young people who are moving from living in care to living independently. The course comprises practical elements such as cooking and basic DIY, as well as advice on managing on a budget and how to be a good neighbour. This course has been supported by a local supermarket, which has provided food and equipment for the young people.

Now the courses have all been run at the above locations, the intention is to strive to offer these at as many fire stations as possible. We want to provide gateways for young people to access support at fire stations, with pathways to ensure the support and personal improvements are maintained. The longer-term aim is to work with local businesses and educational establishments to identify training, work-placement and even employment opportunities for our young people from across our diverse community.

Wider Health Agenda

Building on our approach of using data to ensure we use our resources to conduct Home Fire Risk Checks in those premises where the occupants are most at risk from fire, this has led us to interact more with people who have complex needs. The result of this is that we have expanded our training to frontline staff so they can best support our communities. For example, this year all of our operational crews have been subjected to DBS checks and all have undertaken dementia awareness. Specifically we have become involved in the following initiatives:

Falls Prevention – We work with partners to deliver stability classes within our fire stations for those people who are most at risk from falling. The classes help attendees to become stronger and to gain in self-confidence and fitness.

Guided Walks – A number of our staff have become walk leaders, who have identified and risk assessed walks in a number of locations around Bucks. These walks are aimed at those people who would benefit from regular exercise as well as helping to stop them becoming socially isolated.

Use of Premises – We see our buildings as community ‘hubs’ and our partners are now regularly using our fire stations to deliver training sessions to their staff as well as opening up the buildings for community and voluntary groups.

Co-Responding to Medical Emergencies

BFRS Co-Responded to 1954 medical emergencies alongside South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) during 2015-16. This is a 13% increase on the previous year. A new scheme has been established at our HQ site in Aylesbury, with 25 medical calls attended by operational and support services employees in the first 3 months. A fire appliance response model in Buckingham continues to succeed, responding to 109 medical emergencies in year 1. And the response cars at High Wycombe & Chesham continue to be highly valuable and reliable assets, with the High Wycombe car attending 1445 calls in 2015-16, a 28% increase on the previous year.

Looking forward, BFRS employees are now shadowing SCAS Paramedics on ambulances to enhance their medical skills and build confidence. A Service-wide Cardiac Arrest Response trial will be launched soon, involving the nearest fire assets responding alongside SCAS to their most serious incidents. We have launched a trial where fire officers respond to medical emergencies in their response vehicles. SCAS are preparing to deliver even more enhanced medical training to our fire-fighters, and we continue to develop new schemes across the County.

The Co-Responding initiative continues to expand, and is just one example which demonstrates our commitment to finding new ways of adding value to the role of a modern Fire-fighter and how we work closely with our external partners to save more lives in the community.

Animal Rescue

Animal rescue is a specialist skill that has been developing over a number of years in the British Fire Service. In 2015 the planning and implementation began to provide an Animal Rescue capability within Buckinghamshire. This proving invaluable for the safe and professional management and subsequent resolution of incidents where animals have been involved.

Having an animal rescue capability enables BFRS to provide a professional and skilled response when called to the rescue of trapped and injured animals both large and small and the safe management of animals that are involved at any incident.

To provide this capability we have purchased an amount of specialist equipment that will be carried in pods which when required will be delivered to the incident on a demountable chassis. To ensure we have the correct skills we have trained the staff at Aylesbury Fire Station and a number of Officers to nationally agreed standards. As part of the implementation we have worked closely with our Thames Valley Partners; Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services and developed a partnership with a local charity, The Horse Trust. These partnerships have contributed to the successful implementation within Buckinghamshire.

Water Rescue

In 2016 we improved the resilience of our Water Rescue capability by having our own Water Rescue instructors and increasing the exposure of our Water Rescue teams to national wide area flooding incidents by joining the National Flood Rescue Asset Register. The National Flood Rescue Asset Register has been set up to enable a national coordinated response of water rescue asset capability from across the country to assist an area or region affected by wide area flooding.

BFRS has made only one of its two water rescue units available on the register for a national emergency, this ensures that there will be always be one water rescue unit still available for incidents within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

To enable our water rescue teams to be on the National Flood Rescue Asset Register, BFRS must ensure that they train in white water. BFRS has committed to annually sending its water rescue teams to a white water training venue to practice their water rescue skills. Our water rescue crews will also be offered advanced development courses in subjects such as rescues from vehicles in water.

By joining the National Flood Rescue Asset Register, BFRS Water Rescue crews will benefit from increased exposure and experience at large scale flooding incidents, working with water rescue teams from other fire and rescue services and working with other organisations deploying to national emergencies.

BFRS Drone

We recently purchased an Inspire 1 Drone, as part of a Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS), to support firefighting operations and other emergency services in the Thames Valley area.

The drone is capable of capturing 4K video and transmitting an HD video signal back to a ground controller, to assist with situational awareness and decision making for operational and tactical commanders, help reduce risks to fire-fighters by early identification of hazards. It can also support other emergency responders in providing aerial imagery,

which was recently undertaken for Thames Valley Police during the Didcot Power Station incident, and to help with the search and locating of missing persons and rescues from water using its thermal camera capabilities.

Since its introduction, the drone has been used at many incidents across Buckinghamshire, where it has been used at fires and in the support of fire investigations, and also to provide assistance to Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue service and Thames Valley Police.

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)

Our USAR Unit continues to provide support to incidents involving collapsed structures and major transportation collisions. Based at Aylesbury Fire Station the team specialise in rescues from height, large vehicle extrication and rescues from collapsed buildings.

In February the team responded to a collapse at the Didcot Power Station. They worked as part of a multi-agency response, supporting Oxfordshire and West Midlands FRS, Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service. During the incident the team utilised their Search Dog and listening devices to attempt to locate the missing workers. We have continued to provide support to this on-going incident as required, building structures that are preserving the scene and setting up safe systems of work for all agencies during the recovery phase of the incident.

Costs and Financial Situation

The most recent local government finance settlement introduced a new measure of spending power, referred to as core spending power. This is the total of all funding available to an authority, excluding grants for specific purposes.

The headline change in core spending power for BMKFA between 2015/16 and 2019/20 is an increase of 1.2%. However, this figure relies upon two key assumptions relating to council tax:

- That the average growth in council tax base between 2013-14 and 2015-16 will continue until 2019-20
- That authorities will increase their Band D council tax in line with the forecast for inflation each year, which is an annual average increase of 1.75%

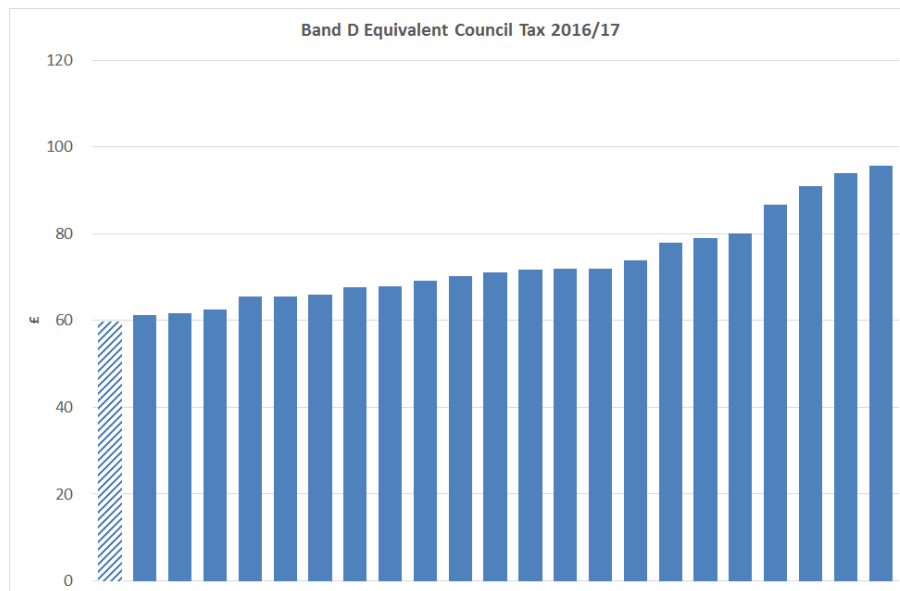
The announcement set out some important shifts in the Government's principles. Most noticeably, there has been a shift away from freezing council tax to using council tax to generate additional funding.

If council tax was frozen throughout the upcoming spending review period the reduction in core spending power in cash terms would be a decrease of 9.8%. It should also be noted that the change in spending power is based on cash. In real terms this movement would represent an even greater decrease in spending power over the period. Underlying the core spending power figures is a decrease of 57% in revenue support grant that we receive between 2015/16 and 2019/20.

BMKFA froze council tax every year from 2011/12 to 2014/15 and even reduced council tax by 1% in 2015/16. However, because of the significant shift in Government policy BMKFA increased the band D equivalent council tax by 1.98% in 2016/17. Our medium term financial plan is based on the assumption that we will also raise council tax by 1.99%

for the next three years. This would still represent a real-terms decrease in council tax over ten years of almost 15%.

The 2016/17 band D equivalent council tax for BMKFA is £59.70 (which equates to approximately £1.14 per week). The average band D council tax for combined fire authorities for 2016/17 is £73.14. BMKFA charges the lowest band D council tax of all combined fire authorities in the country (see chart on next page).



(BMKFA is the striped bar on the far left)

Steps Taken to Reduce Costs

The largest savings that the Authority has made, and that are budgeted for the future, relate to operational staffing. The Authority is developing flexible and resilient resourcing models that better meet the known risk and demand of the service, as well as maintaining the current response standards. This is due to the innovative way the Authority is now crewing appliances. Rather than having a large standing resource, a smaller regular establishment is complimented by firefighters (on-call and whole time) working bank shifts, and a number of firefighters on local terms and conditions to enable more flexible and mobile working.

Within the savings assumptions are two major projects, which are the construction of a new 'blue light hub' in Milton Keynes and a programme of systems integration. The 'blue light hub' is a joint facility hosting Fire and Thames Valley Police in shared premises and work is progressing positively to include South Central Ambulance Service too.

The systems integration project will replace and consolidate a number of disparate systems across the Authority, including finance, payroll, HR, fleet, assets, premises risk management and rostering. This project is key to realising a large number of the non-operational staff savings that are planned for future years.

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 2016.

The service continues to collaborate with Thames Valley Police and other Fire & Rescue Services, sharing stations and property.

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. The Authority recruited 26 apprentices including 22 firefighter apprentices and these started in the organisation last month.

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.

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 Tuesday 6 December at 7.00pm.

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 2016/17 from Buckinghamshire County Council are: Councillors Busby, Carroll, Clarke OBE, Glover, Gomm, Huxley, Lambert, Mallen, Reed, Schofield, Teesdale, Watson and from Milton Keynes Council: Brunning, Exon, Marland and Wilson.

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