



Annual Report of the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service 2017

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 remains 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.

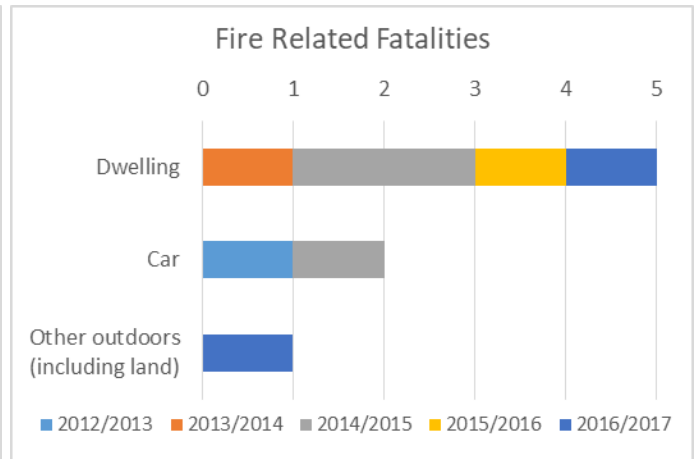
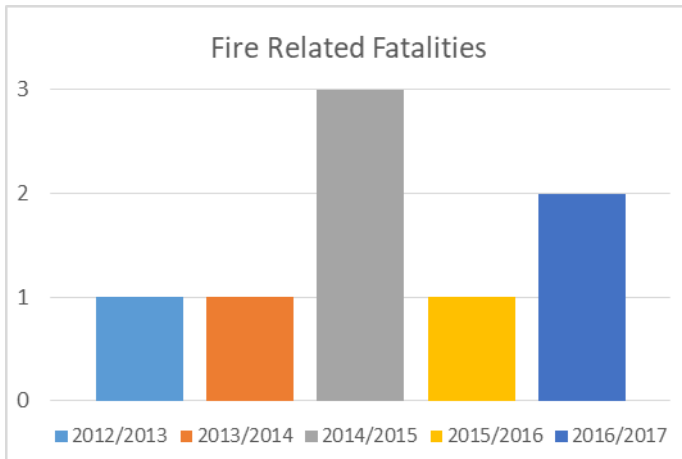
Performance Trends (Buckinghamshire only)

Total Incidents (excluding co-responder)

2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
3962	4209	3863	3791	4087

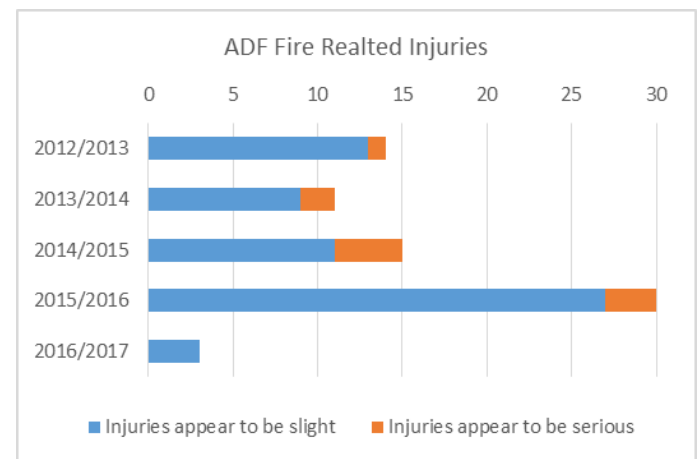
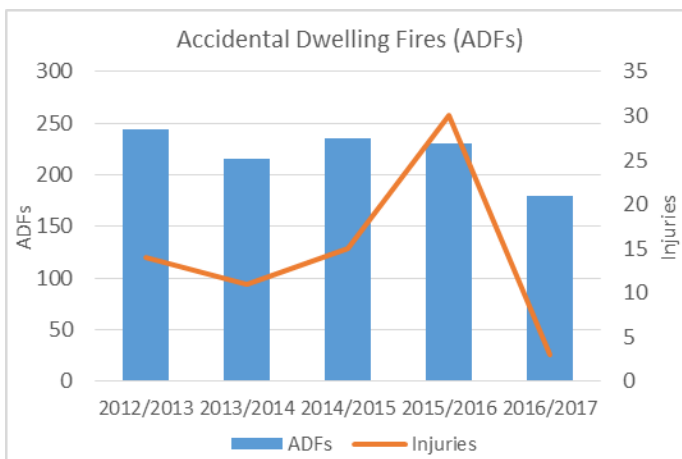
BFRS continue to experience a plateau in the overall trend in incident demand within Bucks, with the number of incidents remaining around the 4,000 figure for the fifth year. BFRS also attended over 1,000 Co-Responder incidents within Bucks during the same period.

Fire Related Fatalities

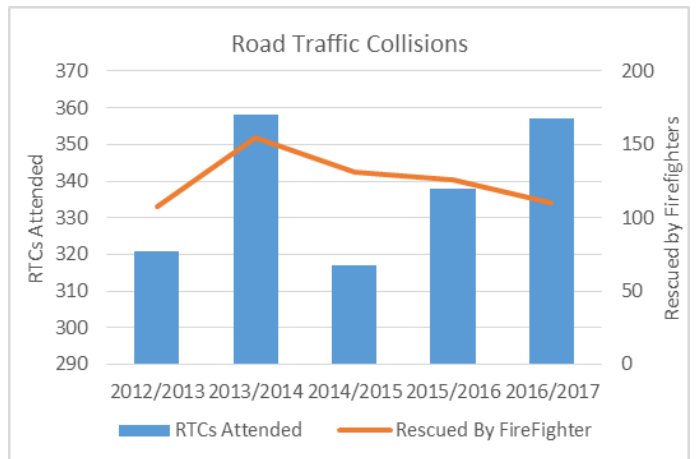
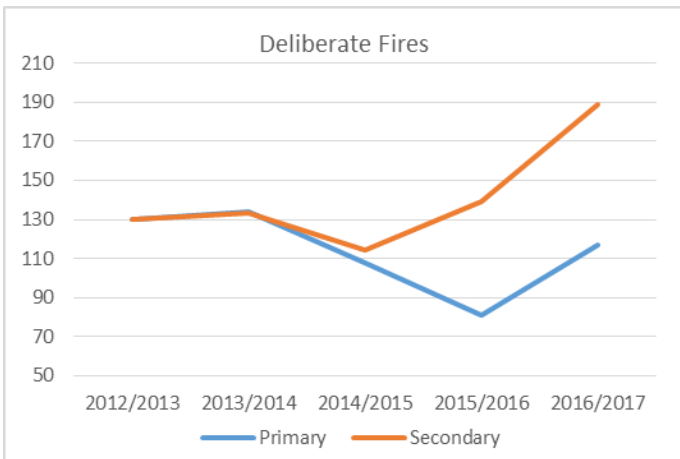


During 2016/17, two **fire related fatalities** were recorded in two separate incidents. Both were suspected to be deceased at the time of arrival of the fire service.

Preventing Incidents that Lead to Harm



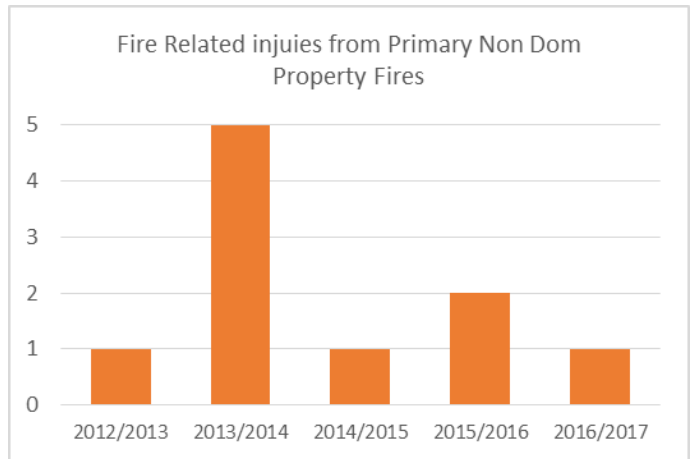
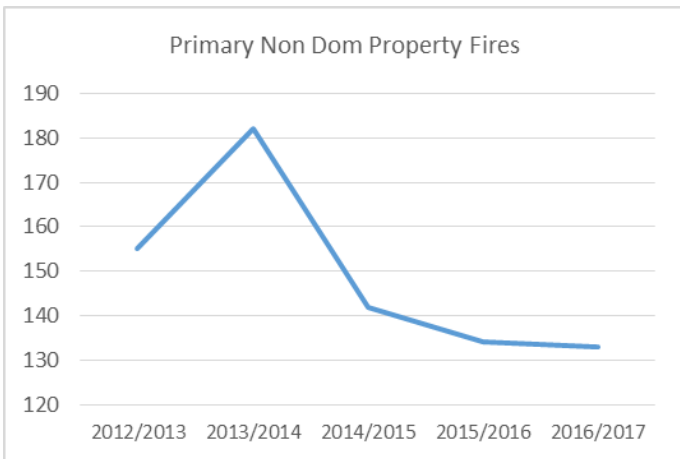
The **Accidental Dwelling Fire** trend has continued this year with the number of incidents reducing. The most dramatic change of the year has seen the Accidental Dwelling Fire related injuries drop from 30 to 3, all of which were injuries that appeared to be slight. This decrease in injuries is in contrast to what we reported last year. There was an increase in minor injuries against a backdrop in falling accidental dwelling fires. This was reflected not just nationally, but also in other European nations who collect fire data. There is still 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 Bucks did see a rise last year in Primary Deliberate Fires, we are expecting the downward trend to continue again.

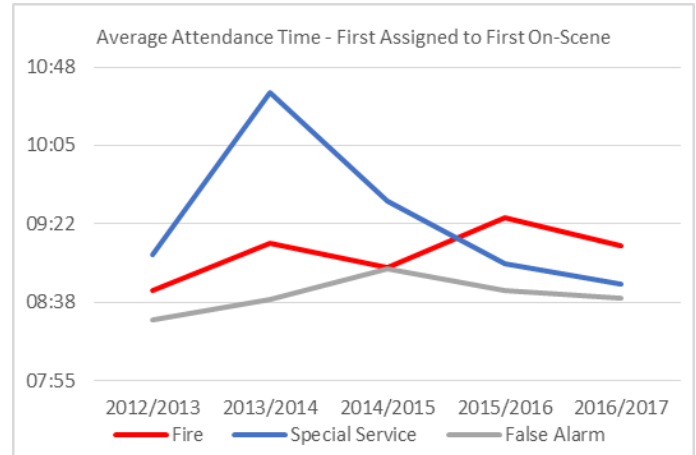
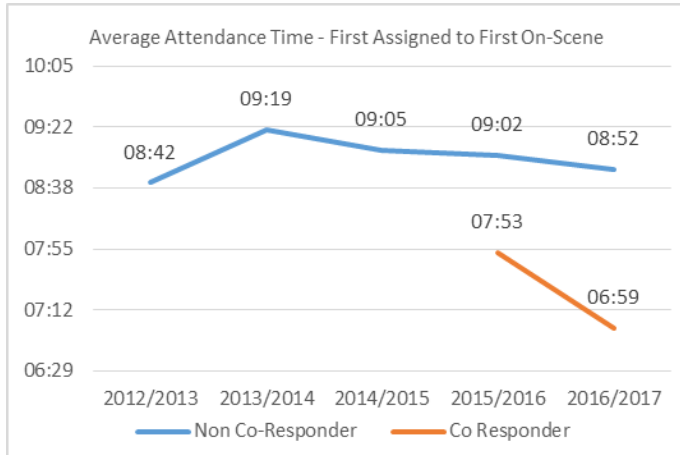
The Service subscribes to a Contract for Service with Thames Valley Police for an Arson Reduction Officer, a resource shared with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. This has resulted in more effective and simplified lines of communication with Thames Valley Police and allowed for trends to be identified in a co-ordinated manner. The Arson Reduction Officer has also initiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the local prisons to create a consistent approach to investigating incidents involving suspected arson and supporting the prison officers to prosecute offenders.

Protecting Homes and Businesses from Fire

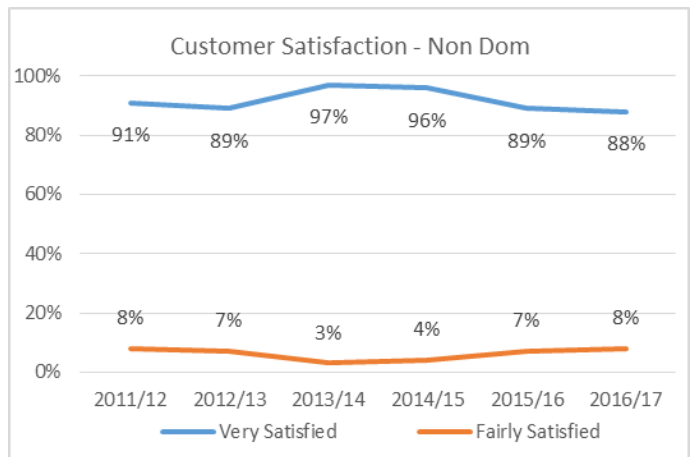
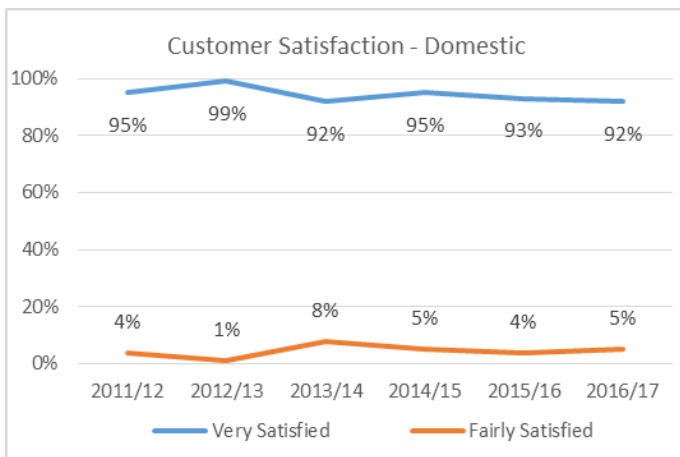


Our **Non Domestic Property fire** figures continue to improve. These figures have been helped by proactive work with the businesses community and strategic targeting. The percentage of unsatisfactory audits demonstrate that BFRS has a robust targeting approach for audits, identifying those commercial premises that present a higher risk.

Responding to Incidents



The **average attendance time** has reduced for the third year running. As reported last year, 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 independently 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 @ 04/09/2017)

(Data collected from our Incident Reporting System 'IRS' and Open Research Services)

Workforce Reform

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

Our interactive People Strategy sets out our approach and is the foundation for delivering ongoing workforce reform; it illustrates the innovative work we do and is a showcase of

the exceptional work all employees are involved in. The people strategy is available for you all to see and can be viewed here: people.bucksfire.gov.uk

Our workforce continues to be flexible in their approach to contracts, terms and conditions and duties. The Operational apprentices recruited last year have proved invaluable resources. They are truly embedded in the operational workforce. Learning from this positive initiative, we take on a further 12 operational apprentices this September, continuing to support the Government's agenda for more, higher quality, employer led apprenticeships. This is one element of a blended approach the work to replenishing our workforce which looks to maximise skills, experience and diversity for the positive benefit of the public services we provide.

Work is underway to review our On Call Fire Fighter employment proposition to ensure the Authority is well placed to attract, continually develop and retain the right skills and levels of flexibility required for the future. This includes our approach to local community engagement and this initiative is actively supported by District Councils within Buckinghamshire.

Our Support Services Staff continue to work hard to provide essential support to the frontline and are an important and integral part of the Authority. Again we have several support staff apprentices who are involved in key functions and whilst working are learning new skills, and gaining a recognised qualification. We are proud of all our staff and all they do.

We look to properly reward our staff for their work, recognising them in a variety of ways where they are providing outstanding services and undertaking extra responsibilities. Our approach to reward looks to positively underpin our resilience needs

Well-being support is a high priority, as our staff are often faced with difficult situations in their everyday work.

Work continues to develop staff for the future, especially with leadership and technical skills including new skills as services continue to diversify; to ensure we have the right mix to enable the Authority to optimise the contribution and well-being of our people to deliver our objectives.

We continue to initiate collaborative working arrangements and the sharing of best practice with other Emergency Services and new partners within the Thames Valley and beyond; and continue to provide opportunities for other Fire Authorities and Government officials 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.

Embers – An initiative based at Aylesbury Fire Station following on from a previous course at Buckingham Fire Station. This course is designed to encourage young people to become more physically active. Station staff work 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.

Employability Course – Working with Bucks County Council staff, Aylesbury Fire Station has conducted an employability course for those young people not involved in any form of employment, training or education. This course develops self-confidence and supports the attendees to find employment.

START (strengthening tenancies to achieve respect and trust) – This programme runs in MK with station-based staff providing 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. We are currently developing a new database which will allow us to target more effectively and share information with partners more efficiently. All of our front-line staff have been subjected to DBS checks and all have undertaken dementia awareness training. Specifically we have become involved in the following initiatives:

Blood donation – We are working with the blood transfusion service to offer our premises to be used for blood donation. This enables our own staff to attend whilst also providing a free venue to the service. We use the opportunity to share fire safety information with attendees.

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.

The Grenfell Tower Fire Incident

The tragic fire at Grenfell Tower has challenged the organisation to review how we enforce fire safety legislation to ensure the safety of occupants whilst supporting businesses to thrive. Whilst we already knew of the high-rise premises within our area, we have taken the opportunity to review our operational procedures and the risk critical information available to our staff at any incidents. We have shared information with partners to ensure there is a common operating picture for all agencies. Our operational crews have visited premises with our inspecting officers to ensure statutory compliance whilst giving reassurance and fire safety advice to residents. We have also conducted multi-agency training scenarios at the Fire Service College to ensure a common understanding amongst blue light partners.

We have worked with businesses to help them comply with fire safety legislation, delivering advice and guidance where we can add value. We have also conducted briefing sessions to a range of strategic partners to create a consistent communications message.

As the various investigations progress, this Authority will ensure any recommendations and findings are incorporated appropriately and we will continue to share information across the sector.

Thames Valley Fire Appliance Collaborative Procurement

The three Thames Valley fire and rescue services have worked together to develop and procure a standard fire appliance with exactly the same equipment specification to serve all three Counties. This has effectively given Buckinghamshire residents the buying power of being the fifth largest fire and rescue service in the Country, reducing cost and improving the services we can provide when neighbouring services attend incidents together. Over the life of the contract the three services will purchase over 35 new appliances to refresh the old fleets. In Buckinghamshire, we have also renewed our four wheel drive and bulk water tanker capability this year.

Included within these Thames Valley fire appliances is the next generation of firefighting and rescue equipment, which includes but is not limited to, electronic hydraulic rescue equipment which is more versatile and operates without the need for a noisy generator and hydraulic hoses, improved portable scene lighting and communications equipment, bigger hose for high rise firefighting, bariatric rescue equipment and light weight thermal imaging cameras to assist firefighters when searching.

The other benefit of standardising our equipment across the three counties is that we can reduce stock levels of spare equipment by sharing our requirements. This further reduces the burden on the tax payer.

National collaborative procurement of Personal Protective Equipment

Throughout 2016/17 we have been actively engaged in a national collaborative Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) procurement project for a complete new firefighting uniform. The project has explored ways of providing Firefighters with the next generation of Firefighter PPE which fully considers the work streams of a modern, reformed workforce, delivering a wider range of public services, whilst providing best value for the Authority through collaborative working.

Drone

The use of the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service drone is increasing, with benefits ranging from the gathering of aerial imagery for risk information and pre-planning purposes, to assisting partner agencies in the search for missing persons. Operationally they have provided significant benefits to the Incident Commander and partner agencies by informing their decision making processes. The use of drone imagery for collapsed structures has assisted fire investigation officers to determine the likely origin and cause of the fire, whilst providing structural engineers with the data they require to make informed decisions about the structural integrity of a building. In terms of building fires, they provide critical information such as the location of previously unseen gas cylinders, or the direction and speed of fire spread in buildings and large open areas. This information influences an Incident Commander's tactical plan, making fire ground operations safer and more efficient.

Cardiac Arrest Response

For every minute that passes, following a cardiac arrest, a patient's chance of survival reduces by 10%. It is therefore critical that a rapid response to a cardiac arrest incident is made. Employees of Buckinghamshire fire & rescue service are proud to save lives every day and an opportunity exists now to support our colleagues in South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) and mobilise our resources in partnership. This will ensure a resource gets to those cardiac arrest incidents as quickly as possible. By attending such incidents alongside our SCAS colleagues we all contribute further to our vision of, making Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest places to live, work and travel.

Assisting SCAS to effect entry to premises at medical emergencies

The Effecting Entry, Concern for Safety initiative relates to emergency calls where there is concern for the safety or welfare of a patient inside a premises and the ambulance service are unable to gain access. Responsibility for effecting entry in these circumstances rests with the Police but due to a lack of resources, average response times are in the order of 20-25 minutes. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been developed, which details how the three Thames Valley fire and rescue services shall support South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) by mobilising appliances to gain entry to premises on behalf of Thames Valley Police (TVP).

This initiative aims to reduce the length of time that SCAS crews are on-scene but unable to gain access to a patient. If the trial is successful it should provide a number of positive outcomes:

- Better clinical outcomes for patients
- More efficient use of SCAS resources
- Less damage to patients' homes due to FRS expertise in effecting entry
- Reduced demand for TVP to attend

Costs and Financial Situation

The total of all funding available to an authority, excluding grants for specific purposes is known as its core spending power.

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

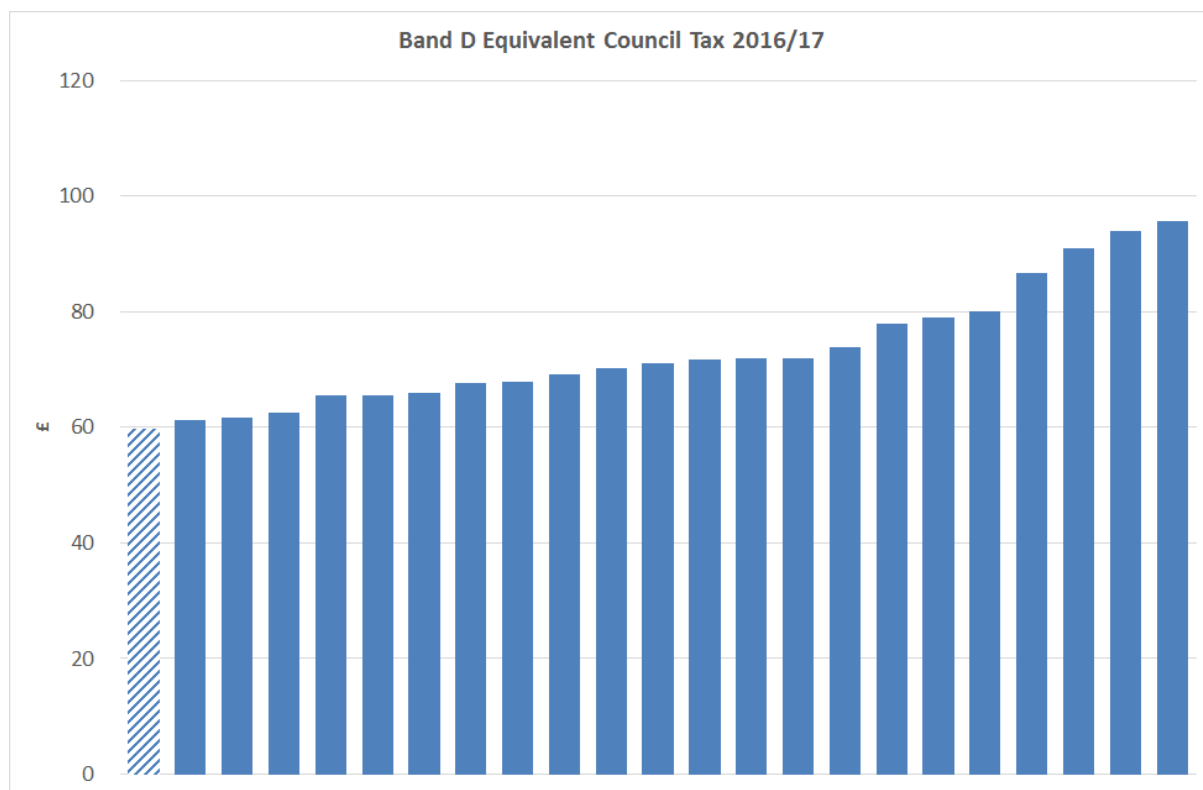
- That the average growth in council tax base between 2013-14 and 2016-17 will continue through until 2019-20
- That authorities will increase their Band D council tax at least in line with the forecast for inflation each year.

This reflects the shift away in recent years from freezing council tax to using council tax to generate additional funding.

Underlying the core spending power figures is a decrease of 57% in revenue support grant that we are due to receive between 2015/16 and 2019/20.

BMKFA had frozen council tax every year from 2011/12 to 2014/15 and even reduced council tax by 1% in 2015/16. However, given shift in Government funding policy BMKFA increased the band D equivalent council tax by 1.98% in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. 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 around 15%.

The 2017/18 band D equivalent council tax for BMKFA is £60.88 (which equates to approximately £1.17 per week). The average band D council tax for combined fire authorities for 2016/17 is £74.44. BMKFA charges the lowest band D council tax of all combined fire authorities in the country (see chart below). BMKFA is the striped bar on the far left.



The biggest financial challenge the Authority now faces is in respect of any changes to public sector pay constraint. All planning assumptions are based upon the Governments wish to see public sector pay increases capped at 1% for the current spending review period and the finance settlement up to 2020 has been agreed on that basis.

For the Fire Authority, a 1% increase in the pay bill is broadly equivalent to a 1% increase in Council Tax. If settlements are made above 1% with no increase in either government funding or an ability to raise council tax above the capping threshold, this will have a direct impact upon the service the Authority can provide the consequences of which could be closure of fire stations not just in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, but across the UK.

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 that is well on its way to completion. The 'Blue Light Hub' is a joint facility hosting Fire, Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service in shared premises.

The systems integration project has already replaced our Finance, Payroll and HR system and will consolidate a number of other disparate systems across the Authority, including finance, 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

Due to changes in the ratio of local government electors between Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) and Milton Keynes Council the Authority saw a reduction in its BCC appointments. There are now 11 Members from Buckinghamshire and 6 Members from Milton Keynes (previously 12 and 5).

Councillor Roger Reed was elected Chairman of the Fire Authority at its AGM in June 2017. He and Councillor David Carroll were appointed to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee which is the governance board for the shared emergency call handling centre for Royal Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire fire and rescue services.

BCC Members were prominent in the appointments made by the Fire Authority to five of the six Lead Member roles. Councillors Teesdale, Lambert, Glover, Carroll and Reed lead on Community Protection; People and Equality and Diversity; Health and Safety and Corporate Risk; Property and Resource Management; and Collaboration and Transformation respectively.

Fire Authority Members for 2017/18 from Buckinghamshire County Council are: Councillors Carroll, Glover, A Hussain, N Hussain, Irwin, Lambert, Reed, Sullivan, Teesdale and Watson and from Milton Keynes Council: Brunning, Exon, Marland, McCall, McDonald and Wilson.

It should also be noted that Councillor Alan Walters MBE was a Member of the Fire Authority this year and everyone at Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service was saddened to hear the news of his death.

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.

The Service is also grateful for the assistance provided to it by Mr Steve Taylor from the BCC Member Services team.

**JASON THELWELL, CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & MILTON KEYNES FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**