



## Annual Report of the Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

20 September 2018

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

### Executive Summary

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) continues to show sustained improvement through its response and business safety activity and changing how it works to provide a wider range of prevention 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 has had a particularly busy and challenging period over the summer. However, by utilising our unique response and resilience model and working closely with our neighbours and partners, our crews and officers have coped magnificently, successfully responding to the demand. These arrangements work both ways, and we have also supported our neighbours as demand increased across the area. The Service also continues to push forward a wider range of community services, without passing the cost onto the taxpayer. In one example, the Service has attended nearly 3000 medical emergencies since April 2015, 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.

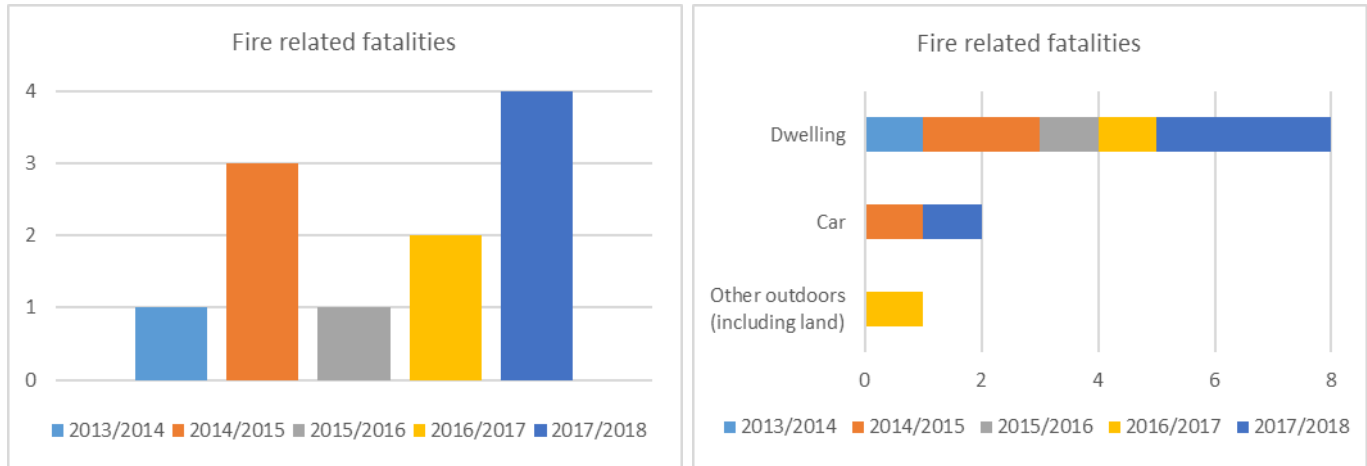
### Performance Trends (Buckinghamshire only)

Total Incidents (excluding co-responder)

| 2013/2014 | 2014/2015 | 2015/2016 | 2016/2017 | 2017/2018 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 4209      | 3863      | 3791      | 4087      | 4249      |

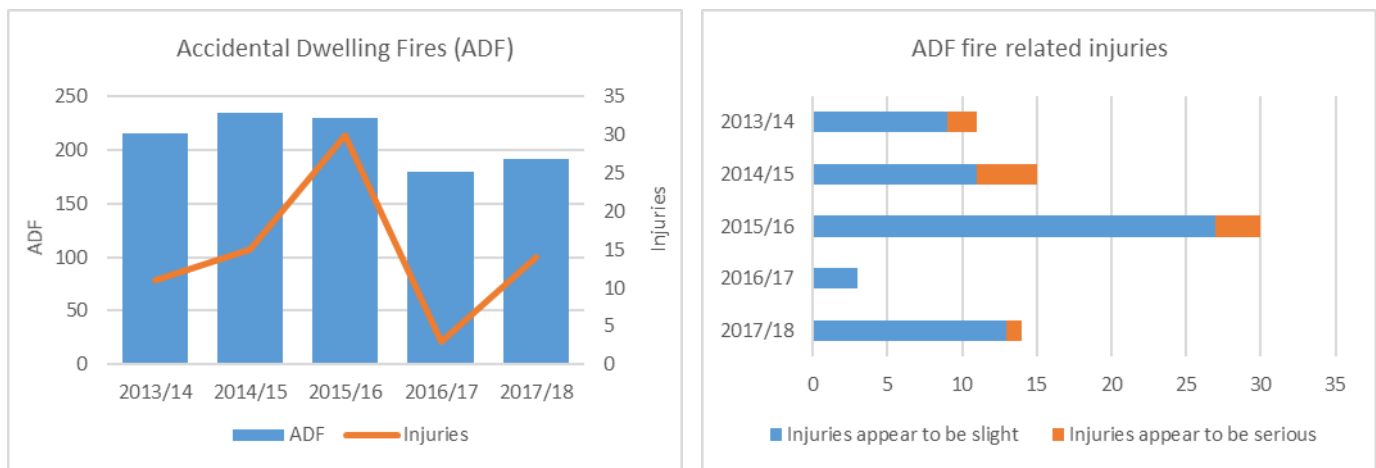
BFRS continue to experience a plateau in the overall trend in incident demand within Bucks, with the number of incidents remaining around the 4,000 figure for the fifth year. BFRS also attended over 450 Co-Responder incidents within Bucks during the same period.

### Fire Related Fatalities

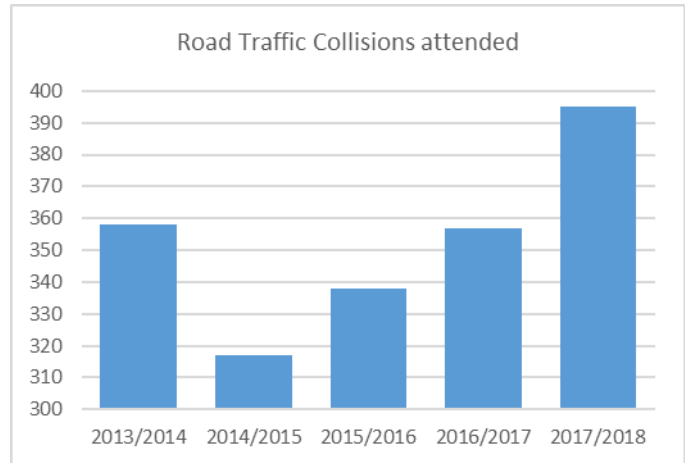
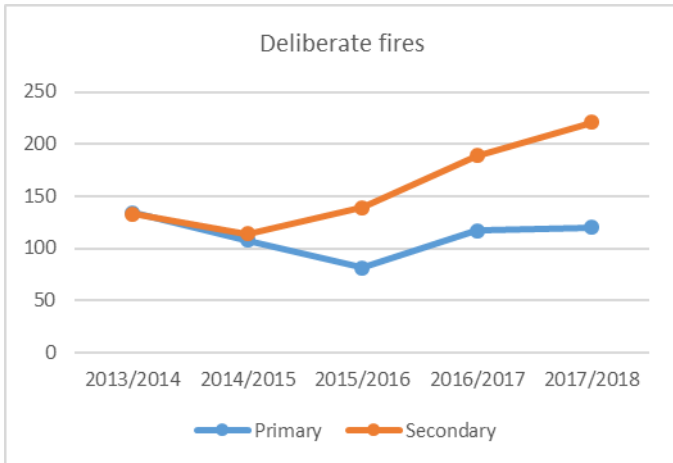


During 2017/18, four **fire related fatalities** were recorded in three separate incidents. All were suspected to be deceased at the time of arrival of the fire service. Three of the four were the result of accidental dwelling fires and were all smoking related. The fourth fatality was believed to be a suicide.

### Preventing Incidents that Lead to Harm



The **Accidental Dwelling Fire (ADF)** figure increased slightly on 2016/2017. However, the number of incidents remained under 200 for the second year running, continuing the overall positive trend. These figures only reflect the actual number of incidents and does not take into consideration the increase in dwellings over the same period. Fire related injuries sustained at an ADF were nearly all minor. However, with new software and better data now being used, targeting those most vulnerable will be more accurate and effective.

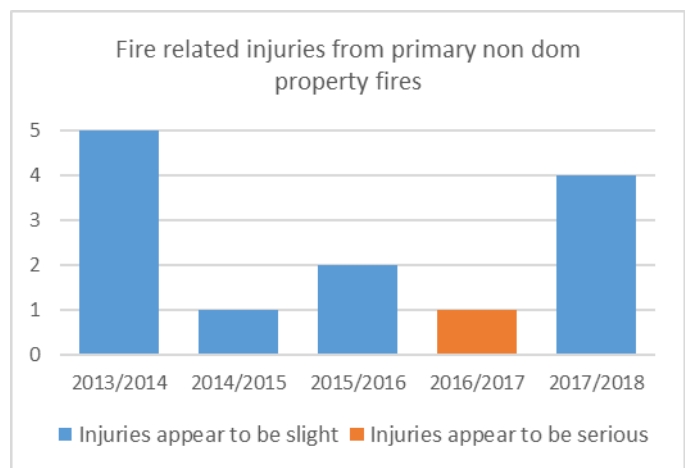
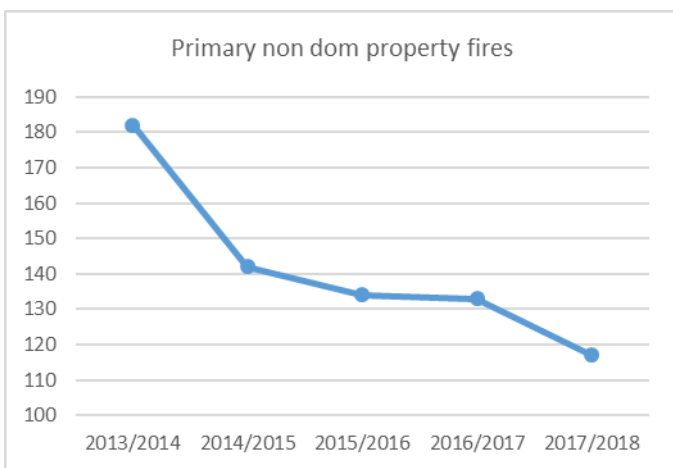


As detailed last year, the past 10 years has seen one of our most dramatic trends – the reduction in **Deliberate Fires**. They have reduced by huge numbers and although Bucks did see a rise again last year, we do not expect to see the trend to continue. Even with this rise, Bucks remains one of the best performing areas in relation to deliberate fires compared to similar comparable locations (Family Group 2).

The Service has a contract 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 trends to be identified in a more coordinated manner.

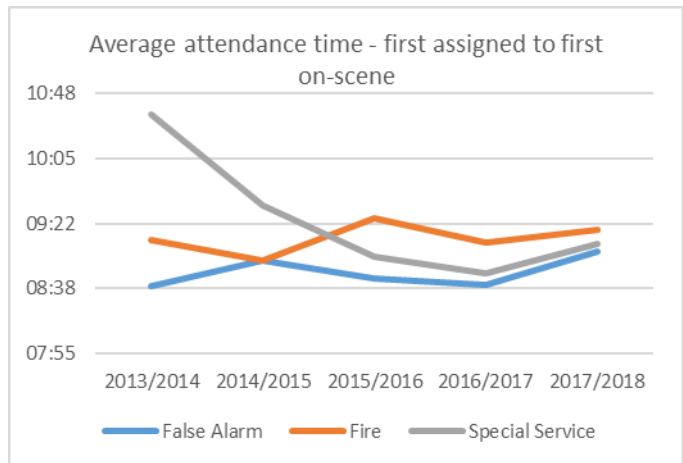
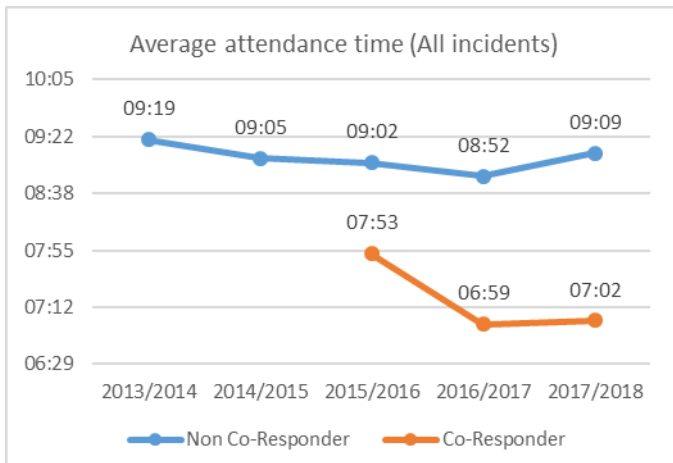
Though our attendance at RTCs has increased, we have seen a 40% reduction in the number of ‘severe’ rated RTCs.

Protecting Homes and Businesses from Fire

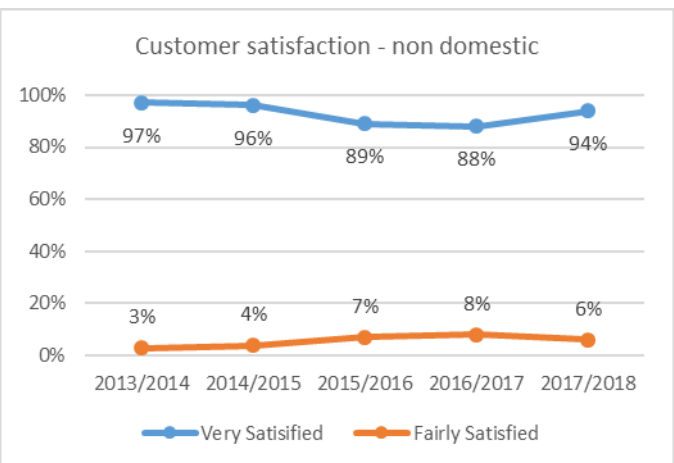
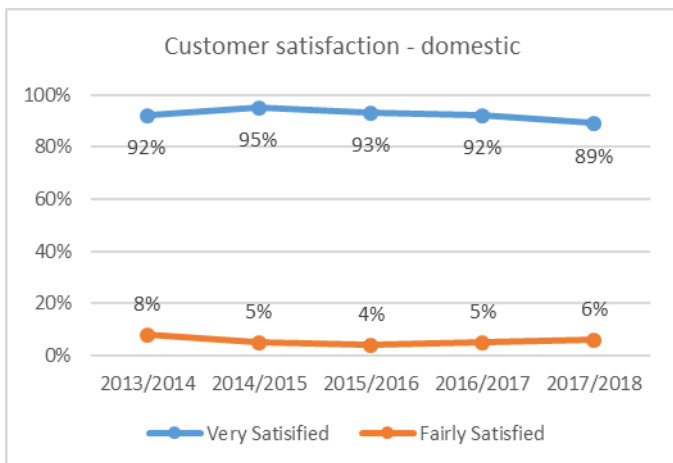


Our **Non Domestic Property fire** figures continue to improve. These figures have been helped by proactive work with the businesses community and strategic targeting. The percentage of unsatisfactory audits demonstrate that BFRS has a robust targeting approach for audits, identifying those commercial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

## Responding to Incidents



The **average attendance time** demonstrates the benefits of the technology within our Thames Valley Fire Control mobilising system. As reported last year, nationally attendance times are increasing. All our incidents are resourced by the nearest appropriate appliance(s), which is facilitated by the joint Thames Valley Fire Control room function, utilising Automatic Vehicle Location System (AVLS). This has assisted us to buck this national trend and maintain 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. BFRS continually achieve 90% customer satisfaction in both domestic and non-domestic.

(Incident Data as @ 31/08/2018)

(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. The Authority's effective workforce planning ensures sustainable, fit for purpose, effective leadership and that workforce capacity and capabilities are available to deliver the Public Safety Plan, Authority's vision and corporate priorities. The plans also consider building in ongoing and increasing flexibility to accommodate fast-paced external workforce change drivers, balanced by current and predicted changes to workforce demographics.

Our areas contained within our interactive People Strategy ([people.bucksfire.gov.uk](https://people.bucksfire.gov.uk)) drives our strategy for delivering our employee proposition to:

- Adapt and refresh the workforce to improve service delivery, resilience and deliver Public Safety Plan outcomes.
- Where appropriate move to flexible, affordable and local terms and conditions to support demand and risk-led people resourcing.
- Ensure the people strategy, employment policy, supporting contract and building capacity and capability systems are established to support demand and risk-led people resourcing.
- Adapt the employee proposition to optimise employee motivation, attract and retain the right caliber, high performing people.
- Ensure the utmost well-being of our people

Our Operational Resourcing Strategy continues to be developed through a Development of Operational Resourcing programme. The Service provides a phased approach to operational resourcing and a number of flexible staffing arrangements support this. These arrangements offer a range of contracts and working patterns that provides both existing and potential personnel with enhanced working patterns to fit their personal circumstances. There is further development within this area, where a role for support staff employees will be able to assist in operational support activities.

Technological work streams are being developed to support the key areas of focus, and an example is a new resource management system being designed bespoke to the Service's resourcing requirements.

The Service continually analyses and reviews operational resourcing activity, to ensure the operational resourcing model meets current and future risk and demand requirements.

The Authority introduced its apprenticeship programme in 2016, ahead of the Governments Reform agenda and driven by its workforce plan. Its key areas of focus being: how apprentices can be utilised most effectively; highlighting the importance of improving the diversity of our workforce; offering career development opportunities to our existing employees and increasing the resilience of our workforce.

The Authority has exceeded the Government's public sector target of 2.3 per cent apprenticeship new starts each year, with our third tranche of firefighter apprentices joining this summer. In September 2018, we launch our Leadership & Management apprenticeship programme, which we are running with the Bucks College Group as part of our commitment to upskilling existing staff and our retention strategy.

The Authority endorsed the submission of a pledge, and were the first fire and rescue service to be accepted by the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) in February 2018. Our innovative apprenticeship programme provides an excellent opportunity to improve the diversity make-up of the Authority. Targeted "have a go" days were organised for female and ethnic minority applicants and further dates are being organised.

This is one element of a blended approach to replenishing our workforce, which looks to maximise skills, experience and diversity for the positive benefit of the public services we provide.

The Authority has invested in an integrated HR & Payroll System, improving value for money by being able to use the data to better inform and plan for people related decisions. Aligned to this, we are reviewing process to ensure process optimization and effectiveness.

We continue to work with Thames Valley Fire Service partners, through regular resourcing meetings, to determine a collaborative approach to operational and apprenticeship recruitment. This is one of the priority work streams for the Workforce Reform Group. More recently, links have been established with Thames Valley Police (TVP) on apprenticeships and, in particular, in looking at improving diversity and working together to resolve common issues.

## **Prevention Initiatives**

BFRS continues to increase the range of services that it provides to the community. These include proactive education engagement sessions and programmes designed to reduce young people's risk of death or serious injury from fire, water or incidents on the road, to supporting the wider health agenda. The following section highlights some of the services we offer.

### Education

Our aim is to provide high quality, fire safety education lessons to all children in Year 5 as they reach the end of primary school and road safety education to children in either Year 12 or 13. Since April, crews across the service completed 72 education sessions in schools across Buckinghamshire County Council's area, providing 2,191 (38%) Year 5 children with potentially life-saving fire safety advice.

Following a revision of our education engagement strategy, we have been working towards increasing the provision available for the most vulnerable school age children and young people, those in specialist or SEND settings to ensure they have an appropriate level of safety education. Since April, BFRS personnel have delivered carefully tailored education engagement sessions to 43% of BCC's specialist or SEND settings.

For some groups of children and young people, visiting the fire station environment is the best way to meet their needs. Groups of children and young people from a specialist autistic setting, the Young Deaf Association and MacIntyre at Home have all recently enjoyed education sessions at our sites. The ultimate accolade for the quality of BFRS' education provision was attained in June when we passed the assessment process for the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge. It should be noted that BFRS continues to be the only Fire and Rescue Service in the country to have met this standard of education provision!

### Youth Engagement

EMBERS – Is an initiative 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. Participation in the EMBERS programme has supported the attendance, and development of self-confidence as well as the health and wellbeing of the children involved. Following on from the success of last year's programme, operational crews from Aylesbury Fire station ran another EMBERS programme this year, and a further programme is in place to improve the outcomes for a group of children in a school identified as being in an area of high deprivation in High Wycombe.

START (Strengthening Tenancies to Achieve Respect and Trust) – is a programme originally piloted in Milton Keynes, which provides support to young people who are moving from living in care to living independently. The course comprises practical elements including cooking skills, and basic DIY, as well as advice about managing a budget and how to be a good neighbour. We are currently working with the Youth Services Manager of Bucks Children's Services to offer a START programme to children leaving care in Buckinghamshire. In addition to this, we are supporting the establishment of a forum involving wider stakeholders, with the aim of offering a gateway to education and employment opportunities, coaching and mentoring, or just a life experience to improve the prospects of young people leaving care, assisting the council with its corporate parenting responsibility.

### Road Safety

The Service's road safety officer works in partnership with the road safety officers for Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and Thames Valley Police. This work encompasses delivering Biker Down, a free crash scene management and basic life support training course for motorcyclists, enabling operational crews to plan and deliver local road safety initiatives and supporting the multi-agency delivery of Safe Drive, Stay Alive to children in Years 12 or 13. The Safe Drive, Stay Alive campaign is designed to reach new and pre-drivers in an emotive and hard-hitting way, influencing their behaviour and attitude on the roads and although not due to be delivered for another month, 66% of Bucks schools have already booked in to attend.

## Wider Health Agenda

BFRS has offered a Home Fire Risk Check to households across Buckinghamshire for a number of years and we are currently piloting a modernised Safe & Well visit to ensure we provide a service tailored to the needs of the public. During these visits, staff will still offer advice on fire related safety issues and where appropriate, fitting ten-year smoke/heat detectors but, following additional training about lifestyle factors, they are able to offer much wider advice. Signposting and referring householders to appropriate agencies who can offer advice and support in areas including mobility and falls, scams, dementia, loneliness, support for carers and general lifestyle guidance.

As part of this move to Safe & Well visits, we are piloting a new customer relationship management system, the 'Premises Risk Management System' which will not only allow us to record data more accurately, but allow us to target vulnerable households more effectively sharing information with partners more efficiently.

The use of our premises by wider groups and organisations continues to grow, in particular in areas served by on call stations, where we have been able to utilise meeting rooms and facilities free of charge to benefit the people of Buckinghamshire. Over the last year we have worked with the NHSBT; SSSFT, NSPCC, Dementia Friends, Police Cadets, NHS Falls Clinic, Bucks Search & Rescue, Driving Instructors Association, Livewell Staywell, Bucks County Council and Milton Keynes Council to benefit the communities surrounding our service premises. Further discussions are taking place for the Stroke Association to utilise our venues as a training program base for their volunteers.

Specifically this year we have become involved in the following initiatives:

**Blood Donors** – We offer one of our premises as a free location for the NHS Blood and Transplant service, to run donation sessions. Utilising our site in this way has enabled BFRS staff to donate blood but has also given us the opportunity to share fire safety information with attendees.

Aylesbury Fire Station was the pilot location for this initiative and is already booked to be a venue until May 2019, with plans being finalised to run regular sessions at Beaconsfield and Great Holm fire stations. By modifying how we work in just one fire station for six days a year, we have been able to save the NHS between £2,400 and £5,400 in venue costs. Rolling this model out to two further fire stations will increase that annual saving to between £7,200 and £16,200.

**Hoarding Support Group** - A monthly Hoarding Support Group began this year at our service headquarters in Aylesbury as a result of collaborative work between BFRS and the Partnerships Officer for Aylesbury Vale District Council. The group was set up to assist people with hoarding issues to gain awareness, information, and support and is attended by people from across the county. The Bucks Herald recently ran a two-page feature about the group, which was taken up in the national press. With between 2% and 6% of the population believed to have hoarding issues, many of whom are 'hidden', it is essential to raise awareness of the hazards related to hoarded materials, specifically the heightened risk of blocked exits, danger of collapsing materials, increased fire loading and risks from inappropriately used cooking or heating equipment.



Mental Health Training – We have worked with South Staffordshire and Shropshire Foundation Trust to utilise capacity within our on call stations to provide training venues for Bucks NHS staff to improve mental health provision within Buckinghamshire. A series of eleven training sessions is in progress encompassing areas as diverse as drugs and brain chemistry, working with alcohol using clients, needle exchange and safer injecting, supervision refresher skills, and acupuncture. On completion of this eleven-day project, a total of 1,309 hours of mental health training will have been delivered to 187 Bucks NHS staff. This demonstrates further examples of how our station premises are being utilised as wider community assets.

### The Grenfell Tower Fire Incident

Following the tragic events which unfolded at the Grenfell Tower fire, London, in June 2017, an independent review of building regulations and fire safety was undertaken by Dame Judith Hackitt. The full report released in May 2018 has made recommendations across a number of areas:

- a new regulatory framework is required
- design, construction and refurbishment
- occupation and maintenance
- residents voice
- competence
- guidance
- products
- golden thread

Until these recommendations have been through Parliament and they become Regulations, we will not fully understand the implications for us as an enforcing authority, but there will be implications and we will continue to engage and inform where we can and ensure we are fit for purpose to deliver fire safety for the future. This includes reviewing our fire safety capacity, maintaining our competent and experienced workforce and exploring new ways of identifying and engaging with the premises that are at the high risk of fire. One way of achieving this is through the use of data and trends, and our data intelligence team is currently working on this methodology.

Amongst recommendations made within Dame Judith Hackitt's report, the benefits of fire sprinkler systems are reiterated as part of the layered approach to fire safety, as they both prevent a major fire event and provide mitigation should one occur. BFRS support of sprinkler systems has been promoted through regular communications with building control departments/approved inspectors, wider promotional activities and encouraging organisations to install sprinklers through a supported part-funding scheme.

BFRS has continued to be successful in reducing the total number of Unwanted Fire Signals (UFS) it receives from non-domestic premises. The service attends all calls for assistance and does not delay attendance to calls based on the number of previous UFS or the premises type.

This approach provides a consistent safety message to industry and commerce, fostering an improved fire safety culture within premises; supporting businesses in managing fire safety by giving additional opportunities for engagement, education and enforcement where necessary.

### New Appliances

In 2016, The Fire Authority approved funding for a programme of fire engine fleet replacement, enabling the Service to commence a Thames Valley collaborative project focusing on standardised fire appliance specification and procurement. The collaborative approach created considerable financial efficiencies and by taking the opportunity to standardise equipment at the same time has created further efficiencies and enhanced effectiveness at operational incidents when working with crews from neighbouring Services. Buckinghamshire has now taken delivery of eight standard fire appliances with two more scheduled for delivery in September and a further four to arrive in year three, completing the contract.

The Authority also approved the procurement of four new 4-wheel drive appliances. All are now in service, providing an enhanced degree of capability and additional resilience in times of inclement weather.

### New Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In September 2017, the Fire Authority approved funding for a new PPE contract with Bristol Uniforms. The Authority chose the preferred option of a Fully Managed Service (FMS) with the additional rescue jacket, as part of the national PPE collaborative framework. The contract will see Bristol Uniforms taking care of our PPE provision, maintenance and laundry over the next eight years, and is an excellent example of how collaboration can create efficiencies whilst enhancing the quality of the products we buy. The project team have worked with Bristol Uniforms to deliver a 12-month implementation plan and during September, we will be the first fire and rescue service in the country to go live on the FMS.

### Missing Persons

A trial went live as planned in early July to support Thames Valley Police in the search for missing persons. As part of the trial, fire crews can be deployed wherever resources permit, to support our partners and assist in the search for missing persons. We are also proactive in supporting TVP with our drone capability, which can also be mobilised to such incidents. This is another example of collaborative work exploring how we can enhance our services to the public.

### 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 limited response and average response times of 20-25 minutes a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed. This details how the three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue

Services support South Central Ambulance (SCAS) by mobilising appliances to gain entry to premises on behalf of Thames Valley Police (TVP). This arrangement have been evaluated and has demonstrated 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**

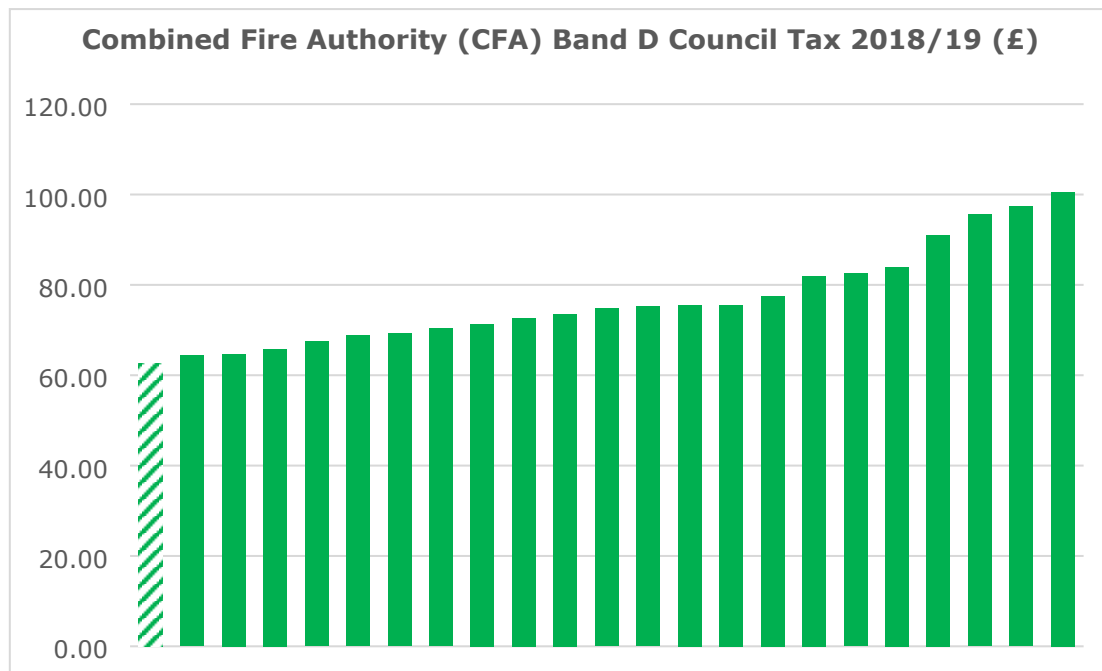
This 2018/19 Local Government Finance Settlement continued the shift away from freezing council tax to using council tax to generate additional funding. As part of the announcement, the Government published headline changes in core spending power between 2017/18 and 2018/19 for every authority. The headline change for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) was an increase of 1.5%. However, this headline increase was based on two fundamental assumptions:

- That the growth in council tax base between 2017/18 and 2019/20 will be 2% per annum.
- That the Authority will increase its Band D council tax in 2018/19 and 2019/20 by 3%, which is the maximum increase permissible without triggering a referendum.

The actual growth in the council tax base between 2017/18 and 2018/19 was only 1.4%, which negated much of the benefit of the increase in the referendum limit from 2% to 3%. Despite this Authority's response to the settlement consultation, no specific additional precept flexibility was afforded to fire and rescue authorities.

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

The 2018/19 band D equivalent council tax for BMKFA is £62.70 (which equates to approximately £1.20 per week). The average band D council tax for combined fire authorities for 2018/19 is £75.40. 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 were based upon the Government's wish to see public sector pay increases capped at 1% for the current spending review period and the finance settlement up to 2020 was 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 relate to operational staffing. The Authority has developed 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.

There are currently two major projects in progress within the Service, 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 fleet, assets, premises risk management and rostering. This project has already delivered a large number of non-operational staff savings.

### **Role of Buckinghamshire County Council Members on our Fire Authority**

Councillor Roger Reed, was re-elected Chairman of the Fire Authority at its AGM in June 2018. 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. Councillor Watson was reappointed by the Overview and Audit Committee as its Chairman; with Councillor Cranmer as its Vice-Chairman.

Fire Authority Members for 2018/19 from Buckinghamshire County Council are: Councillors Carroll, Clare, Cranmer, Farrow, Glover, Irwin, Lambert, Reed, Roberts, Teesdale and Watson and from Milton Keynes Council: Exon, Geary, Hopkins, Marland, McDonald and Wilson.

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.

**CFO/CE Jason Thelwell**  
**Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service**