

MEETING: 12 OCTOBER 2020

SUBJECT: MOBILISING CONTROL ESTABLISHMENT

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report seeks the Fire Authority's approval to maintain the current mobilising control establishment and for the Authority to no longer look to reduce the control room by four firefighters, which was part of the 2017-20 Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), agreed by Members to put on hold at the Fire Authority meeting on 18th February 2019.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members previously agreed (Minute 8/July 2020) that proposal two and three from the 2017-20 IRMP, would be carried over to the 2020-23 IRMP and this paper looks at the control room establishment as part of proposal three.
- 2.2 Members will recall that, at the Fire Authority meeting on 5th November 2018, proposal three of the 2017-20 IRMP looked to introduce a range of duty systems based on risk and demand:
- Amending staffing levels in mobilising control following the introduction of mobilising and resource management system upgrades and ensuring opportunities are taken to maximise productivity within the control room.
 - Adjust start and finish times of shifts to provide a dayshift of 8 hours duration starting at 09:00hrs ending at 17:00hrs and a nightshift of 16 hours duration starting at 17:00hrs and ending at 09:00hrs;
 - Formalising arrangements to introduce further flexibility into staffing facilitating greater effectiveness and efficiency across the operational workforce;
 - Removing the extended day shift from the whole time duty system;
 - Moderating staffing levels across the Service;
- 2.3 However, following the public consultation period, it was agreed in the Fire Authority meeting on 18th February 2019 to put proposal three (along with proposal two) on hold to allow the Chief Fire Officer to fully consider the implications. This included the potential of reducing staffing levels within the control room by one firefighter on each of the four operational watches.

3 MOBILISING CONTROL ESTABLISHMENT

- 3.1 The control room is part of the wider Community Safety function and has a key role in both firefighter and community safety. They are the first contact with the community when they are most in need and then support the Incident Commander through deployment of resources and providing information to successfully manage the incident.
- 3.2 The control room is the key function within mobilising control and has an establishment of twenty-eight full time employees with seven per watch and a minimum staffing level of five per shift.
- 3.3 Since 2019, work has been undertaken to improve the efficiency of the workload of control, to enable a more effective delivery of service. The handling of fire calls and mobilising of appliances is just one part of the key and critical role that is carried out to manage incidents and facilitate out of hours administration of the Service.
- 3.4 Prior to the 2017-20 IRMP, most messages from the fire ground to the control room were sent via the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT), however as a result of negative feedback from debriefs, the Service re-introduced verbal communications in the dynamic stages of an incident. This has impacted on the role of the control room firefighter, which is now more demanding and the workload for incidents have increased. It is the control rooms' responsibility to respond to all informative and assistance messages from the Incident Commander via radio communications and record these on to the incident log, as well as ensuring all MDT messages are actioned. This can be a particularly demanding role when demand for the Service is high.
- 3.5 The ability for Incident Commanders to pass radio communications in the dynamic stage of an incident has improved firefighter safety, as both informative and assistance messages can now be send immediately and without delay.
- 3.6 The role of the control room is also evolving to enable a more dynamic approach to mobilisation of assets, based on a wide range of factors that now support control using their professional judgment to increase or decrease appliance pre-determined attendances, as well as a more risk based approach to moving of appliances to cover for operational incidents.
- 3.7 Administrative work in the control room has also increased due to do providing more flexibility and value for money as a department. There are a number of different roles now carried out and these include collating the Service staffing to ensure appliance availability; liaison with the staffing department to arrange overtime on evenings, during weekends and bank holidays; providing out of hours contact for operational staff to book unavailable for work and out of hours contact for the logistic cell to support activity through the current pandemic.

- 3.8 Through the work carried out to make efficiencies, it became clear that control is not only a key and critical function within the Service but one that can expand to better support both operational and administrative activities.
- 3.9 In 2019/20 the total number of emergency calls taken was 28,749 and the total number of administrative calls taken was 44,362. In addition, there is an approximate ratio of three to one incoming to outgoing calls, where for every single incoming emergency call, control make approximately three outgoing calls.
- 3.10 The reduction of one control firefighter from each watch would significantly reduce the effectiveness of control and, as the minimum staffing in control is five, it would mean a high dependency on control staff working over time to cover shortfalls. There is always one leave group off and this then gives limited flexibility for development through courses or for any type of absence. This would not be sustainable long term and could have a significant strain on the department and the staff within it.
- 3.11 A further option considered was to reduce minimum staffing levels from five to four, but with the increase in both the operational and administrative activity, it was deemed too high a risk to reduce the resilience provided by the five control operators. There are times within control when activity is reduced, but this time is used effectively to deal with the wide range of watch and personal development activity that is critical to maintaining competence.
- 3.12 The annual cost of the four firefighter control post reduction proposed in the 2018 IRMP at current pay scales is £159,966. It must be noted that while this would have been the annual saving accruing if proposal three had been approved, no savings have been or will be realised, as the control room establishment remains unchanged.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial costs or savings related in respect of this report.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members are recommended to:

- a) Endorse the contents of this report;
- b) Approve to maintain the current control room establishment at twenty-eight and remove from options for consideration presented in the 2017-20 IRMP;
- c) Receive future reports as required.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- 5 November 2018 Fire Authority Meeting
- 18 February 2019 Fire Authority Meeting
- 13 July 2020 Fire Authority Minutes
- 2017-20 IRMP