

**Status of Report: Public**

**Meeting: Combined Fire Authority**

**Date: 12 December 2018**

**Subject: Impact of Proposed Control Room Collaboration By NFRS & DFRS**

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**For: Information**

## **1. Purpose**

This report informs Combined Fire Authority (CFA) members of the impact of a proposed control room collaboration between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services. It further advises on the options being considered to deal with the impact.

## **2. Recommendations**

The CFA is asked to note the contents of this report to support considerations of the preferred future approach. The final decision on a future approach will be the subject of a further report to the CFA at a future meeting.

## **3. Executive Summary**

3.1 Fire Authorities have a statutory duty to provide call handling and mobilising facilities.

3.2 Derbyshire CFA and Nottinghamshire CFA members approved in September 2018 that a full business case be conducted into Control Room collaboration between their services.

3.3 There are implications for our own Control room should the proposed collaboration go ahead, including an impact on the resilience afforded by our current tri-service control room function.

3.4 An impact appraisal has been conducted and at a future stage CFA members will need to make a risk based decision on their preferred future approach should the collaboration go ahead.

## **4. Background**

4.1 Section 7(2)c of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires Fire Authorities to “make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel”. This CFA discharges this function via a tri-service control room arrangement between Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Fire and

Rescue Services (FRS).

- 4.2 Each FRS in the tri-service maintains its own staffed control room and call handling and mobilising system. The same system is used in each control room and they are networked to enable seamless interoperability. The system provides resilient fall back, meaning each control room can take calls, mobilise resources and manage incidents for each other. Fall back is instigated when a control room becomes unable to handle all the 999 calls being presented by BT or when unusually high demand (spate conditions) can't be dealt with by a single control room. Spate conditions normally occur during major incidents or as the result of extreme weather conditions.
- 4.3 The current system, arrangement and governance model was put in place using £5.6m of central government funding following the collapse of the FiReControl Project in 2012 (£1.8m per service).
- 4.4 Each control room employs enough staff so at least twelve people are normally at work across the tri-service, four per control room. Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Combined Fire Authorities are considering joining their services in a single control room, based in Derbyshire. Their proposed staffing model ensures they would have at least six people in the control room at all times. This reduces the current minimum staffing level across the tri service to ten. They believe this remains sufficient to deal with significant call volume across the three services.
- 4.5 Currently, if one of the control rooms becomes unavailable, the calls are answered, resources mobilised and incidents managed by the two other control rooms. Unavailability can be the result of system failure or planned maintenance. If we continued to support each other under the proposed future model, only one control room would be available to deal with the calls across the tri-service. If the control room in Derbyshire went offline, the four staff on duty in Leicestershire would deal with call handling, mobilisation and incident management for all three services. This would be until additional resources could be put in place or the Derbyshire system was restored.
- 4.6 Additional resilience is in place in the form of geographically distant, reciprocal 'buddy' arrangements with another service. Leicestershire has such an arrangement with Durham and Darlington and Rescue Service. However, this is only for the receipt of calls, the buddy service is unable to then mobilise resources or manage incidents. They can do no more than collect information from the caller and pass it back to the relevant service to deal with themselves. The benefit of a geographically distant partner is that they are less likely than a neighbour to be suffering extreme weather conditions at the same time or to be mobilising resources across borders to support a large scale incident.
- 4.7 The proposed model for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire creates a new risk for this CFA. This is because our own control room may not be able to deal with demand from within our area as a result of dealing with demand across the tri-service area.
- 4.8 The impact analysis conducted recognises this risk and suggests measures to mitigate it. These measures include:

### **Option 1: Maintain Current Arrangements, accepting Notts/Derbs proposal**

This option maintains current arrangements and maintains the current budget. Additional staff can be brought in to use spare operator positions during planned maintenance.

However, only one control room would be operable if there was a system failure or need to vacate the other. It would take approximately two hours to transfer staff from the affected control room to the one that remains operable. During this period there may be insufficient staff deal with high demand.

Also, there are limited operator positions in each control room; Leicestershire has seven. Not all staff are contracted to work outside their own service area, so there is no guarantee that enough people would be willing to relocate. During the fall back period there is no additional resilience in terms of a third tri-service control room to direct calls to.

### **Option 2: Hybrid - Current arrangements plus other Control Consortium**

As per Option 1 plus use of a geographically distant 'buddy'. The buddy arrangement would start up if call volumes exceeded an agreed threshold or on a risk assessed basis.

The buddy service would only be able to receive calls, not to mobilise resources or manage the incident. The affected control would continue to mobilise and manage incidents using manual processes.

Within this option is also the possibility of incident information being passed to the remaining control room to action; the ability to do this would be risk assessed on the basis of how busy the remaining control room was. The remaining control room within the tri-service may still find itself overwhelmed with resource and incident management, albeit eased by the 999 calls themselves being answered elsewhere. Also, they must still provide an ability to receive the call information sent back from the buddy service and deal with the incident. There is no guarantee that the statutory duties of the CFA could be met.

### **Option 3: Other Control Consortium provides resilience**

This is the same as Option 2 in terms of the buddy service, except it automatically triggers use of the buddy service for call handling, rather than on a risk assessed basis

### **Option 4: Increase LFRS Control Room Staffing Levels**

Four additional staff, one per watch, would provide limited additional capacity to deal with calls and incidents in the event of Derbyshire's control room being unavailable. The cost would be around £146,000 each year. This may be considered as poor value for money as the main benefit would only be realised in the event of spate conditions or large scale incidents during a time when Derbyshire's control room was not available. Also, while it would provide a fifth person in our control room, total staff numbers across the tri-service would

remain low at five out of a normal ten.

### **Option 5: Standalone**

This option would require the CFA to withdraw Leicestershire from the tri-service arrangement. We would no longer provide fall back arrangements to the Derbyshire control room. We would need to seek alternative arrangements for resilience in the event of our own Control room failing or needing planned maintenance. We could ask Derbyshire to continue to provide that for us with their higher staffing levels (six), however there is not a guarantee they would be do so. We may also be concerned about the level of service they could provide to the three services in the event of spate conditions and having only six staff on duty.

In this event an alternative fall back arrangement would be needed. If a reciprocal arrangement was not available there would likely be a cost to the other service that provided our fall back. There are also likely to be technical challenges and costs for networking and integration with a different system provider.

## **5. Report Implications/Impact**

### **5.1 Legal (including crime and disorder)**

The CFA has a statutory duty to make provision for handling emergency calls and mobilise resources.

### **5.2 Financial (including value for money, benefits and efficiencies)**

Some of the options could or would require additional budget. This would be determined in detail once the future provision in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire is confirmed.

### **5.3 Risk (including corporate and operational, health and safety and any impact on the continuity of service delivery)**

There is a risk that the CFA would be unable to meet its statutory duty as set out in 5.1. This would potentially lead to emergencies not being responded to and leaving the public in greater danger.

Partner agencies, including the other emergency services, may be unable to contact our control room, increasing the risk of failure to share information in the event of a major incident or terrorist event.

### **5.4 Staff, Service Users and Stakeholders (including the Equality Impact Assessment)**

Leicestershire Firefighters (Control) might be required to take on the task of dealing with emergencies for the tri-service for short periods of time with insufficient staffing levels. This could create anxiety and place them under undue pressure.

Members of the public may be unable to get through to the control room in the event of an emergency and may face delays in receiving an emergency response.

5.5 Environmental

None identified.

5.6 Impact upon Our Plan Objectives

Fire Control either enables or supports the following aspects of the Response Strategy:

- manage calls to fires and other emergency incidents
- provide a 24/7 response to local, regional, national and international incidents
- supply the appropriate resources and attend incidents to meet the needs of our communities
- meet our community's expectations in resolving emergencies

**6. Background Papers**

None.

**7. Appendices**

None.

**8. Officers to Contact**

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