
Report to Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

26 March 2021

Report of the Task and Finish Group – Joint Fire Control Centre

Report by Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

Electoral division(s): All

Summary

A Task and Finish Group was established by the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee. Its purpose was to scrutinise the Joint Fire Control Centre's work since its establishment on 4 December 2019 (JFC), specifically examining:

- Whether the JFC collaboration project had produced the project deliverables;
- Whether the JFC delivered the project to agreed cost and savings;
- What improvements the JFC collaboration has achieved in the last 12 months since;
- The improvements and benefit deliverables over the next 12 months;
- Future partnership expansion opportunity during 2021; and
- Staffing implications.

The TFG undertook its work at a single meeting on 18 January 2021 with the conclusions being forwarded for consideration by the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee on 26 March 2021 through this report.

The TFG comprised the following members: Cllr Lionel Barnard (Chairman), Cllr David Barling and Cllr Bob Smytherman.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to review the conclusions from the Task and Finish Group for the Fire and Rescue Service, as detailed in paragraph 3, namely:

1. The TFG agreed that the Joint Fire Control collaboration project has produced the project deliverables including cost and delivery date;
2. The TFG considered and noted the improvements the Joint Fire Control collaboration had achieved over first 12 months;
3. The TFG considered and noted the planned improvements and benefits over the next 12 months;
4. Members requested that a detailed breakdown is provided on the £1million savings that have been delivered;
5. The TFG requested that a visit is arranged for members to the Joint Fire Control Centre at an appropriate time; and

6. That this item on the Joint Control Fire Centre is reviewed in one year's time.

Proposal

1. Background and context

- 1.1 West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) has chosen to outsource mobilising arrangements since 2012 under section 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. In 2018/19 the service took an opportunity to review its mobilising arrangements and IT infrastructure. A thorough options appraisal was completed in partnership with West Sussex County Council IT team.
- 1.2 Following the options appraisal, a business case was written, and member scrutiny undertaken following which a key decision was made by the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities to collaborate with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).
- 1.3 The project was delivered within the estimated project cost, in addition a saving was identified within the fire service budget and £1 million of savings were realised in year one of the project.
- 1.4 The project has transformed the way WSFRS mobilise resources to emergency incidents with the mobilising technology at the heart of all the new systems. One year on from the transfer of the fire control capability, the service continually seeks new collaboration opportunities to deliver a more effective and efficient IT road map with several areas of work completed and underway between the two collaborating services.
- 1.5 The Joint Fire Control Centre was transferred to West Sussex County Council on 4 December 2019.
- 1.6 East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service will join the Joint Fire Control Collaboration in September 2021 which will create further efficiencies and economies of scale in addition to the wider operational benefits that this wider partnership will offer.
- 1.7 The Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee agreed at its meeting on 30 September 2020 to establish a task and finish group in order to scrutinise the first year of the JFC.

2. Findings of the Task and Finish Group

- 2.1 The task and finish group met on 18 January 2021 and concluded its work at a single meeting.
- 2.2 Members heard evidence from officers within the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, as well as representatives from Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.3 Members of the TFG questioned officers and made a number of points:
 - The £1m savings stemming from the new arrangements break down as 75% from transferring to the new control centre and 25% from supporting functions

- The Joint Fire control utilises an efficient staffing system which has four watches of eight staff with six on duty at any one time and is supported by modern state of the art technology.
- Surrey Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) already uses the market leading mobilising system, VisionDS, which is paired with the Emergency Services Network (ESN) ready resilient Communication System
- The Airwave communications network that West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service currently uses is likely to be replaced by ESN which can transmit data faster
- Governance arrangements consisted of a strategic leadership board and a project delivery board during the delivery phase before moving to Operational and Strategic Joint Governance boards with rotating chairmen
- Each authority will continue to have its own scrutiny arrangements
- Inflated business case figures meant the figures had been increased to take into account cost of living expenses
- The business case was delivered within budget
- A dip in performance was to be expected whilst new systems were embedded but it was expected that the Joint Fire Control has add to overall performance improvements.
- Mobile IT devices provide crews with information such as maps and hazard data to improve fire fighter and public safety help respond to incidents.

3. Conclusions of the Task and Finish Group

3.1 Members of the Task and Finish Group concluded the following, to be considered by the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26 March 2021:

1. The TFG agreed that the Joint Fire Control collaboration project has produced the project deliverables including cost and delivery date;
2. The TFG considered and noted the improvements the Joint Fire Control collaboration had achieved over first 12 months;
3. The TFG considered and noted the planned improvements and benefits over the next 12 months;
4. Members requested that a detailed breakdown is provided on the £1million saving that have been delivered (this has been provided in Appendix A);
5. The TFG requested that a visit is arranged for members to the Joint Fire Control Centre at an appropriate time; and
6. That this item on the Joint Control Fire Centre is reviewed in one year's time.

4. Other options considered

4.1 No other options were considered.

5. Consultation, engagement and advice

5.1 The Task and Finish Group heard from officers from West Sussex and Surrey Fire and Rescue Services.

6. **Finance**

- 6.1 All financial implications were considered as part of the original work undertaken on the JFC, there are no further financial implications from the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group.

7. **Risk implications and mitigations**

- 7.1 During the Joint Fire Control project each individual area of the project was risk assessed as contained within the original business case. Ongoing assessment of risk is undertaken through the fire and rescue service Strategic Risk Team. There are no open risks regarding the Joint Fire Control.

8. **Policy alignment and compliance**

- 8.1 This report has positive implications for the community and it supports the benefits of an effective fire and rescue service to all residents in West Sussex.
- 8.2 In terms of environmental sustainability, the IRMP makes clear the Authority's commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations, and provides an indication of work done to date.

Lionel Barnard

Chairman of Task and Finish Group

Background papers: None

Appendix A: Detailed breakdown on £1m saving