
Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

4 March 2022

Joint Fire Control Centre Update

Report by Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Summary

Following a decision by Cabinet in February 2019 arrangements were put in place for the control and mobilising arrangements for West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) to be delivered by Surrey County Council (SCC) which went live in December 2020. Twelve months into the new arrangement the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee (FRSSC) requested a task and finish review of the performance, progress and resilience of the new operating system, which was undertaken in January 2021.

There have been significant changes to Joint Fire Control since this review including the expansion of the mobilising service to a tri-service arrangement taking on mobilising responsibilities for East Sussex Fire and rescue service (ESFRS). This report provides an update to the Committee on the developments since the Task and Finish Group report over the last 12 months.

Focus for Scrutiny

- (1) To consider whether the planned developments to the Joint Fire Control Centre collaboration project have been delivered.
- (2) To agree the consequential changes to the performance and assurance framework.
- (3) To acknowledge the steps that are being taken to improve the delivery of the service from Joint Fire Control.

1 Background and Context

1.1 WSFRS have a statutory duty under Section 7(2)(c)¹ of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel. This legislation also allows for making arrangements for discharging this statutory duty under Section 16. On the 4th December 2019 mobilising arrangements for WSFRS were outsourced, under Section 16, to Surrey County Council (SCC).

In January 2021 the FRSSC task and finish group considered if: (1) the joint fire control centre collaboration project had produced the project deliverables; (2) identified improvements the collaboration had achieved in the first 12 months; and (3) acknowledged planned improvements and benefits over the

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/part/2/crossheading/core-functionsn3>

next 12 months. The most significant planned improvement was that ESFRS were to join the Joint Fire Control Collaboration in September 2021.

- 1.2 The Findings of the task and finish group were presented in March 2021 to the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee. It was concluded that the arrangements in place are satisfactory. A further review was planned for 12 months' time, once the move to a tri-service control had been completed

2 The introduction of a Tri-Service Control

- 2.1 In the last year, the most significant change to the fire control arrangements has been the move from a dual service control to a tri- service control with SCC now providing mobilising arrangements for Surrey, West Sussex and East Sussex fire and rescue services. This change occurred in November 2022 and was achieved without any impact on delivery of services. The changes to a tri-service control has resulted in updated governance and legal arrangements, performance standards and the technological roadmap for future improvements. The change has also brought about an increase in staff at the control centre to take account of the 3 Service model including arrangements for dealing with spate conditions and the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
- 2.2 The changes to the legal framework are that ESFRS and WSCC now have arrangements for their control functions to be undertaken by SCC; under separate Section 16 agreements. There is also an overarching collaboration agreement which details how all three services work together on this arrangement.
- 2.3 These new governance arrangements extend the membership of existing operational/tactical/ and strategic boards and commit all parties to acknowledge and follow principles of joint working to ensure the efficient operation of the delegation. This is intended to achieve key objectives around improved resilience, efficiency and effectiveness. Specifically, these principles also focus on the future of the collaboration to ensure a tri-service 'investment roadmap' for the next 3 to 5 years in JFC and active promotion and facilitation of policies, operational procedures and ways of working.
- 2.4 The move to a tri-service control has also required changes to the existing performance standards. This is to ensure that the JFC is working to the same set of standards across all three services. (see Appendix A for the full range of new measures.) The most significant change is to the existing KPI on 'time to answer call' which has changed as follows:

previous target	98% of calls within seven seconds, with an amber target of 95%
new Target	95% within 10 seconds with no amber rating

This new measure has been taken as the benchmark as it aligns with the Public Emergency Call Service (PECS) Code of Practice as referenced within national operational guidance.

- 2.5 As part of the acceptance of this change it was agreed that, as the target is 95%, there is no amber rating for this measure.
- 2.6 The original decision to move the arrangements for the delivery of the Fire Control to SCC delivered financial benefits to WSCC. The move to a tri-service control room has delivered further efficiencies. However, to meet the requirements arising from the Grenfell report, specifically around Fire Survival Guidance, there has been additional resource provided as part of the 2022/23 budget. This also provides greater resilience for spare conditions which can impact on control performance. The benefit of the tri-service arrangements is that WSFRS now share these costs which we would otherwise have had to find independently.
- 2.7 Within JFC, business continuity arrangements exist for all eventualities. These include a back-up mobilising system and a staff degradation plan. In addition, SCC have invested in a complete back-up control centre which is available for use in the event of any incident impacting on the primary control room. There are also mitigation measures in place to enable the 999 system to continue to operate while continuity arrangements are put in place. These are the fall-back arrangements with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, which are tested weekly.

3 Current performance

- 3.1 There are some challenges with current JFC performance that we are addressing with SCC with a particular focus on three current areas. The governance arrangements are established in a way that supports SCC in delivering improvement with support from all partners.
- 3.2 The first area is for 'Time to alert' where we have requested from SCC a deep dive analysis to be undertaken on the specific performance measure of 'time to alert' prior to go live with the tri-service arrangement. This deep dive indicated areas for improvement and an action plan has been produced. The second area is a performance improvement plan, that has been implemented following some technical issues and work to further improve systems and resilience. Finally, the protocol that has been produced that describes how SCC IT will support WSFRS Mobile data terminals on fire engines needs to be formally resolved through an addition to the IT schedule of the Section 16.
- 3.3 Due to these issues a full review, with legal support, was undertaken on the revised collaboration and Section 16 agreement. The opportunity of the revised JFC operating model has allowed us to fully evaluate the contract management and governance arrangements. This has led to a tightening up our procedures for reporting and escalations to ensure that robust continuous improvement model is adopted at JFC in the future.

4. Technological developments

- 4.1 Another change that has taken effect in the last 12 months has been the trial of The Dynamic Cover Tool (DCT) software, that is used to support dynamic decision making and enable effective and efficient resource use in control (JFC). This was stage three of the delivery of this tool which went live in July 2021. This tool is used to visualise response times on a live basis and inform

evidence-based decisions on how to deploy our resources. This replaced all previous standby processes and the requirements for officers to manage appliance moves, strictly enabling JFC the accountability to do so.

- 4.2 Some of the key benefits of the DCT include: The ability to visualise risks and coverage on a live basis; Testing the impacts of potential redeployments before approving standby moves; Providing a retrospective view of how the service deployed its resources; Assessing upcoming challenges for resource availability. The performance of this approach was reviewed after six months and an enhancement to the DCT was made that provides more detail around district level of response times. The next stage of this development is to provide access to the DCT to flexible duty officers and managers within WSFRS providing improved situational awareness remote from an incident.
- 4.3 Other developments include the delivery of a mobile app that gives officers mobile real time intelligence detailing incident information. (BOSS mobile) and 999eye which is a smartphone solution that enables 999 callers, with compatible mobile, to securely send live footage or images of incidents to the control room thus improving situational awareness and incident details in the control room.
- 4.4 A full technological road map is now being developed which includes the replacement to the current airwave mobilising system through the National Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP). There are delays in the implementation of this national programme but all UK blue light services will have to cease to use airwave by December 2026 as this national contract runs out. WSFRS and JFC are on track within this overall national program with a projection for switch over by July 2026. Opportunities will be available to adopt early update status which will enable WSFRS/to better understand system functionality and user requirements The benefits of collaboration will be demonstrated through the expected reduction of financial and resource impact on each authority as this program is progressed.

5. Assurance & Monitoring

- 5.1 As well as internal monitoring through the governance arrangements and core measures, the [HMICFRS inspection for SFRS, that was published in December 2021](#), provides an external assurance on these control arrangements. The inspectorate found that: 'the mobilising system used in joint control means that the nearest fire engines from either service are sent to incidents in Surrey and West Sussex. This supports firefighter and public safety'; 'fire control can provide fire survival guidance to multiple callers'; 'Control staff were confident in the continuity arrangements for control'; and that 'Control has good systems in place to exchange real-time risk information with incident commanders, other responding partners, and other supporting fire and rescue services.'

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The performance measures and the governance arrangements in place allow for a focus on performance and the drive for continuous improvement. Whilst the delivery for fire control activities is outsourced, the statutory duty rests with the authority. The collaborative approach that has been taken to the development of the JFC has developed these mobilising arrangements into an integral aspect of how WSFRS delivers its services to all those who live work or travel through West Sussex.

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.

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 CRMP makes clear the Authority's commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations, and provides an indication of work done to date.

Contact Officer: Steve Ash Head of Response, steve.ash@westsussex.gov.uk
07517911433

Appendices

Appendix A Revised Joint Fire Centre Performance Measures