

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES

Decision Made: 05 January 2012

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Issue for Decision

To consider the implications of the Kent Fire and Rescue Service consultation proposal on changes to their service.

Decision Made

That Maidstone Borough Council's support of the proposals to the current service provided by Kent Fire and Rescue Service in the Maidstone area, which state no change to the current level of service provision, be agreed.

Reasons for Decision

Background

In 2008 Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) commissioned a project to look at how it provides emergency services in Kent and Medway. The aim of the project was to identify the way KFRS delivers its services to the community by matching the right level of response to risk in the area. To achieve this, stations were grouped into 'strategic review areas' so that detailed analysis could be completed to build an understanding of the risk in the area and the type of activity currently being attended.

At the same time KFRS started to go through a restructure which sees traditional station boundaries replaced with a new concept of 'cluster working' where stations work together in groups to best meet the risk in the area. A cluster includes two or more stations which have been grouped together based on operational response. A 'strategic review area' may contain more than one cluster and/or cut across cluster boundaries. The outcomes of the review were used to inform the definition of cluster boundaries.

A number of options were developed for the Maidstone cluster by drawing on the findings of the review for Maidstone and also the Weald strategic review areas, including comments and suggestions received through focus groups held with staff in the area.

An impact assessment of the cluster area was completed and considered when developing the options. In order to make a comparison between each of the options, strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangement were also explored; this includes costs associated with each

option.

Base Option: Existing Arrangements

Each area within the review of emergency response provision has a base option of the fire engines in the cluster as at 31 March 2011, against which any changes can be compared. In the case of the Maidstone cluster, the base option is shown below. The review team looked at the available data for the Maidstone cluster, and is of the opinion that minimal change is required in this area in terms of the number of response bases needed.

Fire engine Distribution

	Fire Engine	Based at
On Call	3	Marden, Lenham and Headcorn
Positive	2	Maidstone
Positive/on-call		
Total	5	

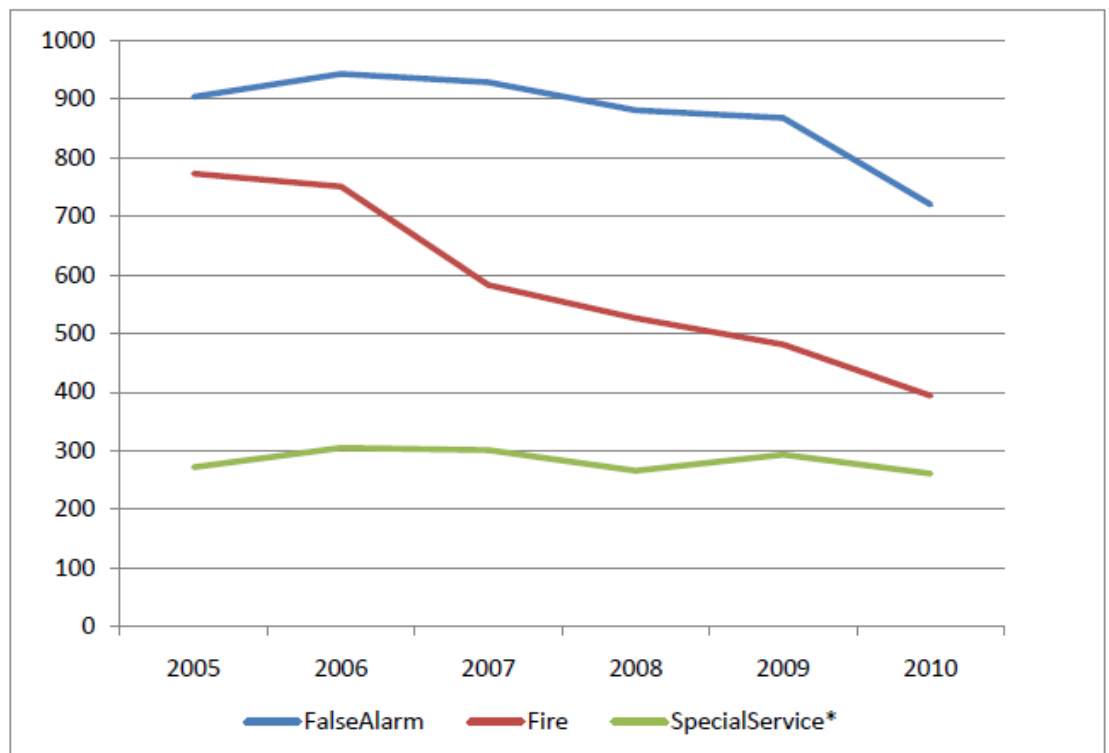
Special Appliances

	Appliance	Based at
On call		
Positive	2	Command Support Unit and Detection, Identification & Monitoring [DIM] vehicle at Maidstone
Positive/on-call		
Total	2	

Current demand pattern

Between 2005 and 2009, overall demand in the Maidstone cluster reduced by 15.7%. When 2010 is added, the reduction becomes 29.3%. The graph below shows how it has changed on a year by year basis in key incident types. The level of false alarms, the vast majority of which are caused by automatic fire alarms (AFA) and require no fire-fighting activity, have dropped as well. Another KFRS project seeks to reduce these numbers significantly and this has the potential to have a significant impact on how busy Maidstone fire station is, which may in time make the provision of two full-time fire engines an over-provision and an unnecessary cost to the taxpayer. 2,464 calls to automatic fire alarms were responded in the Maidstone cluster between 2006 and 2010 and only 40 (1.6%) of those turned out to be either fires or special service incidents.

Overall demand in the Maidstone Cluster.



* these figures exclude co-responding incidents

Demand reduction

Operational response is an important and very visible contribution that the Fire & Rescue Service makes to keep the community safe. It is however only one element of what the service does. In the Maidstone area, in the period 2007-10, the Service has:

- completed 4,035 home safety visits, which is where staff go into people's homes and provide safety advice and can fit smoke alarms free of charge;
- 23.3% of the home safety visits were carried out in households which were considered above average risk;
- Visited schools 538 times delivering education programmes at all key stages.

Across the county, since 2009, KFRS have attended 615 fetes to give out fire and road safety advice, given 439 community safety talks to local groups, and run 409 campaigns on home safety, 81 on arson prevention and 143 on road safety.

In assessing the cover requirements within the cluster the review team was mindful of the demand within Maidstone's station ground, which is the second busiest ground in the county, and dismissed any proposals which result in fewer fire-fighting resources being immediately available from Maidstone fire station. However the significant drop in activity levels since 2005 were noted and the potential impact of the project to reduce calls to AFAs was acknowledged. Within two years, the impact of this project

should be quantified as two full-time fire engines may by then be an over-provision, although at the moment it is justified.

In considering Maidstone, the review team briefly debated the advantages of moving Maidstone fire station. It quickly became clear that there was no benefit in doing so, as it is close to risk areas in the town, and has a reasonable run towards the M20 in a number of directions. Although there is demand towards the north of the town, the movement of Medway fire station to a new location near the Rochester Airport site would give a better coverage to this area compared to the impact of moving Maidstone fire station.

The surrounding part-time stations remain important to the Service in maintaining strategic emergency cover, but would rarely be deployed into Maidstone's ground, as Larkfield and when operational, Rochester, provide a quicker response due to them being on station [during the day in Larkfield's case].

The review team also considered placing a fire engine in Staplehurst. Staplehurst is the largest built up area in Kent without a fire station in its locality. However, analysis of the length of time it takes fire engines to travel to Staplehurst revealed that both Maidstone and Marden can reach the area in a time similar to other areas in the County, and therefore this was not progressed any further as a proposal.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Maidstone Borough Council could choose not to respond to the consultation but it is important that the Council considers the implications for the borough and its residents and comments on the proposals.

Background Papers

KFRS Consultation - http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/about_us/plans_policies_performance/risk_management_plan-1.aspx

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: 12 January 2012
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