



### Leicestershire FBU Briefing Note on Leicestershire Fire Service Cuts

#### Foreword

Like the vast majority of firefighters and members of the public, the FBU were shocked and angered by the scale of the solely front line cuts proposed in last month's announcement by Leicestershire Fire Service management. Particularly in light of the previous cuts agreed by the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) in April of this year, which amounted to the removal of 104 Operational Firefighters and 2 Fire Engines.

In this latest round of cuts, the worst ever faced in the history of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS), the following further devastating cuts have been put forward for consultation:

- **The closure of Central Fire Station** – the busiest station in the county.
- **The closure of Kibworth Fire Station** – that will leave a rural community with little or no fire cover.
- **A further reduction of 88 Operational Firefighters**, in addition to the 102 already agreed, taking the **total reduction to a staggering 192 out of the 650** Firefighters we currently have. **This constitutes a loss of 1/3 of all operational firefighters in Leicestershire**; taking this to the lowest number since pre First World War times.
- **The removal of a further 9 Fire Engines taking the total to 11 that will be removed out the 30 we currently operate with, leaving just 19 for the entire county.**
- Introduction of 3 small fire units (TRV's) - which are untried and untested in Leicestershire and will be crewed with just 2 Firefighters and a fraction of the equipment of a fully kitted Fire Engine. 3 TRV's are being proposed to replace 3 of the 11 fully equipped Fire Engines that are being removed.

What does all of this ACTUALLY mean to the public of Leicestershire...?

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### Response times WILL be slower

For firefighters, response should be measured in both speed and weight of attack, speed being the time it takes to get the 1<sup>st</sup> attending appliance in attendance, weight being the time it takes to get sufficient crews and resources there to safely carryout a rescue or deal with an incident.

In the Central Station area and Kibworth Station area these proposals would mean that the speed of the first attending appliance would be significantly delayed, often doubled in the city especially during times of busy traffic.

The proposals at Loughborough, Hinckley and Market Harborough would mean that although the speed of attack would not always be delayed, the weight of attack would be significantly delayed, the position of surrounding appliances DOES NOT mean that there will be sufficient crews in attendance to carry out initial lifesaving actions, crews would literally have to WAIT before taking some action or carrying out a rescue, which is unacceptable.

The argument that there would be an upgrade in fire cover in Market Harborough is misleading, the speed of the first attending appliance might be slightly quicker, but they would actually have half the current resources so their actions would be limited, they would frequently have to wait before they have sufficient resources to act. This is a prime example why 'weight' of attack is vital.

### Tactical Response Vehicles are NOT capable of ANY lifesaving action

They are basically a pick up van, crewed with just 2 Firefighters with a jet wash fitted to the back. Amazingly LFRS plan to send this vehicle to all incident types, including house fires and high-rise incidents, very much against what they are designed to do.

Firefighters are very proud that their hard work has resulted in the number of calls reducing nationally, however the county trend is that rescues are on the rise. Therefore We NEED appliances that are capable of carrying out rescues WHEN THEY ARRIVE, TRV's do not have the equipment or sufficient crew to carry out ANY rescues.

Imagine in Billesdon or Kibworth, you are a firefighter first to arrive at a house fire in a TRV where a family is trapped inside, family members are screaming at you to rescue their loved ones. There are only 2 of you, you have just 1 breathing apparatus set and a hose that amounts to just a jet wash, you know that under every procedure locally and nationally it requires you to WAIT for supporting appliances, but you know they could be another 5 – 10 minutes and people are dying.....what would you do....wait?.....or have a go? This is the dilemma that firefighters could have to face EVERY DAY. **Massively increasing the risk to the public and firefighters.**

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## Resilience reduced to dangerous levels

Reducing from 30 Fire Appliances to just 19, and 3 TRV's is a reduction of 1/3 of our firefighting capability.

Fire and Rescue Services are required to plan for **ALL** potential incidents. Clearly an incident such as the Kegworth air disaster does not occur frequently, however Leicestershire do frequently attend incidents that require a level of response that we would not be capable of providing if these proposals are agreed. You will remember the Melton Road Fire that required 10 Fire Engines, Jayplas that required 16 or the high rise incident only last week that required 5, even an Automatic Fire Alarm at a high rise requires 4 appliances to attend. When incidents do occur all resources would be used up very quickly, the closure of Central Station for example would frequently pull all the Fire Engines from the county into the city, leaving these areas exposed and not leaving anything else to deal with ANY other lifesaving incident should they occur.

It is true that we can call upon our neighbouring Fire & Rescue Services for assistance, but this all takes time to put into place. Appliances will be constantly on the move to back fill others, leaving their area vulnerable. This happening at a time when all of our neighbouring services are facing significant cuts.

Warwickshire for example have a policy not to commit anybody into a fire wearing Breathing Apparatus unless there are at least 2 of their appliances in attendance. Therefore, the arguments that (Warwickshire) Nuneaton could cover the Hinckley area if their 2<sup>nd</sup> appliance is removed is a flawed and misleading argument.

The closure of Central in conjunction with the loss of Western Station's second Fire Engine on Aikman Avenue amounts to a **50% cut in fire cover in the city of Leicester**. This means 6 Fire Engines would be cut to a devastatingly inadequate amount of just 3 Fire Engines, to cover a city with a population of 330,000 and rising.

The City (Central, Eastern and Western Station) currently receive well over 5000 calls a year, which is over half of the whole counties calls. This means there is often a number of incidents at any one time in the city. Therefore to have a high-rise incident, along with a house fire at the same time can easily tie up 7/8 Fire Engines, meaning fire engines would have to be travelling in from outside the city, and from rural areas in some cases, causing further delays to the public who need us most.

**This very likely 'multiple call factor' in the city has not been adequately addressed by LFRS** and it could have devastating consequences to the public.



## Alternatives NOT explored sufficiently

There have been many alternatives suggested by councillors, employees and most recently retired senior officers. Despite a cross party letter from Leicestershire MP's asking management to explore alternatives with representative bodies, this has not happened and these ill-conceived proposals were produced with NO consultation whatsoever in their development.

Currently LFRS has a half empty, unneeded and expensive £11 million Headquarters at Birstall. We propose to sell HQ and relocate the small team from HQ to the empty offices at Central, requesting through DCLG to use the funds as a transformational budget to allow us to do much more collaborative working.

Use Fire as a Health Asset. Firefighters frequently enter people's homes to carry out Fire Safety checks, this presents opportunities' to take on additional roles. There is so much work we could take on from the Health Service which could be funded.

Share ALL support departments with either Council or other Emergency Services such as the Police and EMAS. Departments like HR, IT, Estates, Finance, Corporate Communication could all be shared.

Reduce or share senior management roles. If they are proposing to reduce the service by 1/3, then surely Senior Officers should be cut by 1/3, particularly when they collectively cost £1/2 million pound a year. Which is equivalent to running a day crewed Fire Station for the same period.

**ALL of LFRS' proposals are FRONTLINE, and will result in 1/3 less fire cover for the public, which will clearly compromise public safety. Before ANY such proposals went forward, all non-front line options (mentioned above) should have been fully exhausted – which disappointingly has not occurred.**

## Financial situation has been exaggerated

Attached to this document is the 'Medium Term Financial Strategy' presented to the CFA during the meeting on 24th September. This was presented immediately before the proposals were.

Page 10 shows the spending forecasts 2016 – 2020. It has been identified that there is no statutory requirement to have this forecasted 'Planning Provision' seen half way down this page.

If this expenditure is removed this would make a significant change to the deficit figures, leaving little requirement to make further cuts.

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Page 18 concludes that the merger of control room with Nottinghamshire is 'on hold' and we have been informed that this is unlikely to proceed simply because the two services cannot agree on the governance of this. This is entirely unacceptable.

Finally, Page 23 identifies £6.8 million reserves. The 'General Reserve' (£1.8 million) is a 5% reserve in place in case of a significant protracted incident. It has NEVER been used. Many other services have made the decision to reduce this to just 2%, releasing £1 million. This would go a significant way to fund the cost/risks of a referendum to raise Leicestershire Council Tax precept.

## **Referendum**

Leicestershire is the lowest council tax precept of any Fire Authority in the country, it cannot be right that we are feeling the impact of government funding cuts more than others simply because of this fact.

Just an additional 60p per household per month would remove the necessity to find any further savings. In a recent survey by the Leicester Mercury 93% of the public stated that they would be happy to pay this.

A joint referendum with the PCC referendum next year would significantly reduce the costs. In addition, the potential £1 million from the 'general reserve' could underwrite any risk of rebilling in the unlikely situation that a referendum is lost.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that this briefing demonstrates to you that not only are these proposals extremely dangerous to the public of Leicestershire but also that the financial situation has been exaggerated and there are many alternatives that could make these cuts entirely unnecessary.

These proposals are neither PROPORTIONATE OR SAFE, and must be REJECTED before any LIVES ARE LOST as a result of this ill-thought out plan.