



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Fire Authority, 12 October 2022

Report title: Summer Pressures

Lead Member: Councillor Simon Rouse

Report sponsor: AC Calum Bell, Head of Protection, Assurance and Development

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Action: Noting

Recommendations:

- 1 That the pressure experienced by Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service during the prolonged hot weather through this summer, as outlined in this report, be noted.
 - 2 That the Authority receive a further report once all the debriefing and review processes have been concluded.
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Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the summer pressures resulting from the unprecedented number of incidents attended by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (BFRS, the Service) during the prolonged period of extremely hot and dry weather.

The months of July (16 - 19) and August (9 - 15) 2022, brought record high temperatures and dry weather that presented many challenges for Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and other emergency responders across the country. On the 19 July 2022 the UK recorded its highest ever temperature of 40.3°C (104.5°F).

During these periods of extreme weather and demand on the Service, in line with established protocols, the Operational Support Room (OSR) was stood up on a number of occasions. The purpose of this function is to assist with the internal management of resources, personnel, coordination of partner agencies and welfare, which is in addition to the support that comes from Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS).

Major incidents were declared by fifteen FRSs across the country including neighbouring services in London, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, as a result of the devastating outbreak of fires.

The Service attended an unprecedented number of calls, including many fires in the open / wildfires. Due to the professionalism, aptitude, commitment, skills and hard work of our staff, we were able to service the needs of these incidents whilst maintaining operational fire cover, and this has been recognised.

Major Incidents declared by Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service*:

On Tuesday 19 July two major incidents were declared, one in the north of the county at 13:05 at Kiddi Caru Nursery, Walnut Tree, Milton Keynes and one in the south soon after at 14:37 at Whitehouse Farm, Wooburn Moor, High Wycombe. In the following three hours FRs were also mobilised to large scale, protracted incidents at Bridge Farm, Chearsley, Bees Cottage, Buckland and Field Road, Denham resulting in resources being exceptionally stretched.

*A major incident is defined as: An event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency

Declaration of a service wide major incident:

19 July 2022 was one of the busiest and most challenging periods the Service has ever faced. At the height of our demand, during a three-to-four-hour period, we were servicing five significant fires across our area, two of which were declared major incidents from the scene of operations, triggering the declaration of a Service wide major incident, supported by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TV LRF).

As a Service we were stretched by the demands of these incidents whilst also maintaining the availability of operational cover in key areas. However, we were ably assisted by many of our neighbouring Services including Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Royal Berkshire, Hertfordshire and a specialist water carrier from Dorset and Wiltshire, despite them all being under operational pressures themselves. Their support was invaluable in not just resolving these incidents, but also in maintaining business as usual across our area.

It should be noted that despite the huge efforts and cooperation of surrounding FRs and other partner agencies, the request for resources from Incident Commanders (ICs) at these simultaneous incidents were not met fully. At the peak of the busiest / hottest day ICs were informed on more than one occasion by TVFCS that there were no additional resources available to be mobilised locally or from over the border.

Furthermore, through the LRF, we initiated Tactical and Strategic coordinating groups (TCG / SCG), which were held virtually, to bring all relevant partners and stakeholders together to support all involved in bringing these incidents to a resolution. These tried and tested arrangements worked well as part of the Civil

Contingencies Act 2004, and the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP).

Evaluation of the summer pressures:

The Operational Assurance Team (OAT) requests feedback for all incidents of interest with the aim of identifying learning, making recommendations with the intention of improving operational effectiveness.

In addition, Learning Reviews of Command (LRC) are conducted for major incidents, these involve collation of feedback by means of a Microsoft form. Members of all attending services, agencies and other partners are invited to attend. During the LRC, the facilitator guides the attendees through the incident timeline inviting contributions to the narrative of the how, why, what, where and when of the incident. Other evidence is gathered prior to the LRC in addition to the feedback, such as message pads, Analytical Risk Assessments (ARAs) and decision logs. Combined, these are used to create a detailed report, with recommendations to be presented to the Operational Assurance Group (OAG).

The recommendations and resulting actions are subject to the oversight and governance of the OAG and if accepted they are added to the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan (OAIP).

The OAIP is essentially a 'live' document that is regularly updated to incorporate relevant information originating from either trend or gap analysis reports, operational incidents or exercise monitoring, themes taken from both significant local and national events and reports emanating from audits and public enquires.

Any department or individual with responsibility for completing actions on the OAIP are asked to provide supporting evidence about the progressive measures taken to suitably conclude their particular action point.

Recommendations are reviewed periodically to ensure compliance before being completed and archived. This review process ensures the Service maintains and improves standards. Thematic reviews are also held into specific areas to ensure compliance with procedures.

If appropriate, the lessons learnt are submitted to National Operational Learning (NOL) and / or Joint Organisational Learning (JOL), to ensure learning is shared throughout the UK FRS and with all partner agencies.

This evaluation of operational activity is tried and tested and works well. However, during this period of summer pressures the OAT posed itself a question. "How can we assure the Service coped through these demanding times?"

From discussions with the OAT, based on the scale and impact of the summer pressures, we identified a need to carry out a broader more comprehensive and

inclusive Service wide survey. We will be issuing a feedback form which will invite the views and thoughts of all staff groups within the Service, as well as TVFCS, not just our own Operational staff. The survey will be a Microsoft form, incorporating a range of questions designed to collate views on a range of topics relevant to the events and incidents during this period.

Once this has been collated and analysed, the results will be made available via an overarching written report to include recommendations and actions, some of which will likely be added to the OAIP. This summer pressures report will also contain and reference the three LRC reports namely Walnut Tree and Wooburn Moor.

The third incident which occurred on the 12 Aug 2022 was the Hedgerley / M40 incident. This incident was not declared a major incident, however a full LRC is planned to be conducted by the OAT on 7 Oct 2022.

It is essential to develop our understanding of the challenges that were faced and how these were met, so that as an organisation we may learn and further develop and improve our response to such events in the future.

Analytical data:

Please refer to Appendix 1 – Heatwave Summary, which provides a breakdown of the number of calls, mobilisations and utilisation of our available resources during these periods.

Service Improvements:

A range of immediate changes have been introduced to support operational response activity and crew welfare during periods of hot weather.

Personal issue respiratory protection filter masks have been issued to all operational staff following the completion of a Quantitative face fit test. The masks are fitted with a P3 particulate filter to combat solid and liquid particles that are suspended in the air. Providing high level of respiratory protection for heath and grassland fires.

Hot weather operational guidance has been reviewed and updated to ensure it provides information to support staff during periods of hot weather covering welfare and operational considerations.

Cool boxes have been purchased for all frontline appliances to ensure that bottled drinking water can be kept cool and accessed on the incident ground, encouraging staff to maintain a good level of hydration.

Electrolyte hydration tablets have been issued as part of the standard inventory to all operational appliances. Hydration tablets contain key electrolytes, sodium, and magnesium, that help Firefighters quickly absorb fluids and restore a healthy level of hydration after periods of arduous activity.

Looking forward, climate change is likely to lead to continual changes in the rainfall patterns that affect the UK. If we experience longer drier summers, this will increase the risk of drought and could lead to more frequent, larger wildfires. A risk that has been recognised in the National Risk Register.

To help address this emerging risk, the Thames Valley Operational Alignment Group are reviewing our capability, exploring the opportunity to increase the number of Wildfire Tactical Advisors (WTA) and reviewing our 4 X 4 provision across the Thames Valley. WTA help to develop a tactical plan, ensure the safety of crews and partners whilst protecting life and infrastructure. 4 X 4 can provide valuable off-road firefighting capabilities to support operational response to grass, woodland, and wildfires. This work is happening at a local, regional, and national level, which we are feeding into.

Horizon scanning:

Despite facing such extreme conditions, the Service, although stretched, was able to respond and meet the immense demands placed upon its workforce and neighbouring FRSs. We recognise that this could not have been achieved without the momentous efforts of all those involved.

It is important to note that although the public received the service it expects, internally, there are numerous areas that will be improved and developed once the recommendations have been agreed, approved, and disseminated to action owners via the OAIP. From the initial early feedback already gathered and from the two LRCs which have been conducted, areas for improvement have been identified. That is not to say we did not achieve the objectives or have the desired outcome, but importantly, following periods where the Service is under extreme pressure lessons can always be learned and improvements made.

Our position at this time is not to jump to conclusions but to continue gather data, then from a position of knowledge which has been informed from the workforce, develop recommendations and actions to drive improvements so that in the future we are better prepared for such eventualities as faced this summer.

In summary, based on the feedback we have gathered so far, it is anticipated that the information we have gleaned, and have still yet to capture, will be pivotal in shaping, but not limited to the following areas:

- Preparedness and Resilience – LRF and responding to major incidents
- Response – current resourcing model and planning assumptions
- Equipment – vehicles, the equipment carried therein and provided to staff
- Procedures – spate conditions and incident type/s
- Welfare – arrangements and provisions

- Specialist Support – Provision of Tactical Advisors
 - Communications – On the incident ground, functional (OSR) and public
 - Health and Safety – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Prevention – Education
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Financial implications:

Overtime for wholetime firefighters and support staff, and turnout and attendance costs for on-call firefighters during the two periods totalled £14k.

Once all the recommendations have been approved from the feedback gathered and annotated on the OAIP, there may be some additional financial costs related to, for example - purchasing additional vehicles, equipment, securing enhanced welfare supplies and potential additional resilience costs. Any additional expenditure of this nature would need to be approved as part of the budget setting process.

Risk management:

Delivery of the OAIP recommendations following a full report attributed to the summer pressures will contribute towards ensuring the Service's operational and organisational activities are continuously improved and developed, and are efficient, effective, and responsive to significant changes in the external or internal environments.

Failure to deliver the OAIP could expose:

- the Service, its personnel, and the public to operational, health, safety, and welfare risks.
- the Service to reputational and / or financial risks.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report. Legal assurance will be obtained in advance of, or during, the implementation of any actions arising from the OAIP or LRC debrief reports.

Privacy and security implications:

The OAIP, LRC reports, or summer pressures report will not raise any privacy or security issues.

A full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out once the debriefing processes have been completed and the final report is produced.

Duty to collaborate:

Although the Authority has committed to a default position of collaboration, not just with FRS's in the Thames Valley, the reports generated are specific to the Service's

operational and organisational activity. However, any opportunity to collaborate will be explored, as will the sharing of any identified operational learning through existing groups, including TVFCS who will also be able to feedback through the OAT summer pressures feedback form.

Health and safety implications:

There are no negative implications on health and safety associated with this report. The recommendations and actions that are created from future report evaluation will continue to promote and enhance the existing health and safety culture within the Service with all associated costs being considered and governed through relevant boards.

Environmental implications:

Delivery of any recommendations or actions from all reports generated will enhance the Service’s ability to identify and manage potential environmental hazards in both the internal and external surroundings.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

There are no negative impacts reference EDI from the publication of this report.

Consultation and communication:

Learning from operational activity or recommendations are routinely published and communicated to all staff, utilising either the Intranet, HEAT* or the Operational Assurance newsletter. This approach is intended to ensure there is a clear understanding and appreciation of the collective responsibility toward continuous improvement in respect to operational performance.

From a monitoring and reporting perspective, the Head of Protection, Assurance and Development leads on the improvement plan recommendations and publication of any LRC report and chair the OAG.

The Head of Operational Training and Assurance has responsibility for delivering the OAIP recommendations and production of LRC reports in conjunction with the OAT.

* HEAT: internal electronic training record management system

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	July and August Heatwave Operational Data	

Appendix 1

Calls taken by TVFCS (only) for incidents in Bucks

Date	Prev five year Avg	2022	Difference
16-Jul	48	180	278%
17-Jul	48	78	64%
18-Jul	64	85	34%
19-Jul	41	220	439%
09-Aug	45	108	138%
10-Aug	40	75	89%
11-Aug	49	108	121%
12-Aug	44	157	258%
13-Aug	50	106	111%
14-Aug	45	96	115%
15-Aug	41	84	105%

Resource mobilisations

Date	Prev five year Avg	2022	Difference
16-Jul	46	168	261%
17-Jul	37	74	99%
18-Jul	55	99	80%
19-Jul	38	181	381%
09-Aug	41	90	118%
10-Aug	36	81	126%
11-Aug	46	68	48%
12-Aug	39	107	176%
13-Aug	41	82	100%
14-Aug	48	75	57%
15-Aug	34	79	135%

Incidents attended within Bucks

Date	Prev five year Avg	2022	Difference
16-Jul	26	32	23%
17-Jul	25	42	71%
18-Jul	26	41	55%
19-Jul	22	36	64%
09-Aug	22	34	55%
10-Aug	20	37	81%
13-Aug	25	33	32%
14-Aug	22	39	81%
15-Aug	18	31	76%

Resource utilisation. Total No of hrs, mins, sec/day

Date	Prev five year Avg	2022	Difference
16-Jul	34:51:59	220:19:45	532%
17-Jul	21:03:42	53:28:22	154%
18-Jul	47:25:13	77:45:06	64%
19-Jul	21:31:56	400:17:11	1759%
09-Aug	24:56:50	107:39:54	332%
10-Aug	22:15:33	48:21:41	117%
13-Aug	16:42:25	131:36:52	688%
14-Aug	45:52:26	50:37:16	10%
15-Aug	21:23:09	79:11:49	270%