

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Director of Legal & Governance, Graham Britten
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Louise Harrison
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

To: Members of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

30 September 2025

Dear Councillor

**MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND
PUBLIC**

Please note the content of Page
2 of this Agenda Pack

To contact our Communication
Team, please email
cteam@bucksfire.gov.uk

Your attendance is requested at an **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING** of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY** to be held at **THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, THE GATEWAY OFFICES, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY, BUCKS, HP19 8FF** on **8 OCTOBER 2025 at 3PM** or at the rising of the Ordinary Meeting of the **FIRE AUTHORITY** **whichever is the sooner** when the business set out overleaf will be transacted.

Yours faithfully

Graham Britten
Director of Legal and Governance

Health and Safety:

There will be limited facilities for members of the public to observe the meeting in person.
A recording of the meeting will be available after the meeting.

Chairman: Councillor Monger

Councillors: Adoh, Bailey, Banks, Carroll, Exon, Gomm, Hall, M Hussain OBE, N
Hussain, Lancaster, McLean, Priestley, Rouse, Sherwell, Stuchbury and
Wilson.



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To observe the meeting as a member of the Press and Public

The Authority supports the principles of openness and transparency. To enable members of the press and public to see or hear the meeting this meeting will be recorded. Please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

The Authority also allows the use of social networking websites and blogging to communicate with people about what is happening, as it happens.

Adjournment and Rights to Speak – Public

The Authority may adjourn a Meeting to hear a member of the public on a particular agenda item. The proposal to adjourn must be moved by a Member, seconded and agreed by a majority of the Members present and voting.

A request to speak on a specified agenda item should be submitted by email to gbritten@bucksfire.gov.uk by 4pm on the Monday prior to the meeting. Please state if you would like the Director of Legal and Governance to read out the statement on your behalf, or if you would like to be sent a 'teams' meeting invitation to join the meeting at the specified agenda item.

If the meeting is then adjourned, prior to inviting a member of the public to speak, the Chairman should advise that they:

- (a) speak for no more than four minutes,
- (b) should only speak once unless the Chairman agrees otherwise.

The Chairman should resume the Meeting as soon as possible, with the agreement of the other Members present. Adjournments do not form part of the Meeting.

Rights to Speak - Members

A Member of the constituent Councils who is not a Member of the Authority may attend Meetings of the Authority or its Committees to make a statement on behalf of the Member's constituents in the case of any item under discussion which directly affects the Member's division, with the prior consent of the Chairman of the Meeting which will not be unreasonably withheld. The Member's statement will not last longer than four minutes. Such attendance will be facilitated if requests are made to enquiries@bucksfire.gov.uk at least two clear working days before the meeting. Statements can be read out on behalf of the Member by the Director of Legal and Governance, or the Member may request a 'team's meeting invitation to join the meeting at the specified agenda item.

Petitions

Any Member of the constituent Councils, a District Council, or Parish Council, falling within the Fire Authority area may Petition the Fire Authority.

The substance of a petition presented at a Meeting of the Authority shall be summarised, in not more than four minutes, by the Member of the Council who presents it (as above). If the petition does not refer to a matter before the Authority, it shall be referred without debate to the appropriate Committee.

Questions

Members of the Authority, or its constituent councils, District, or Parish Councils may submit written questions prior to the Meeting to allow their full and proper consideration. Such questions shall be received by the Monitoring Officer to the Authority, *in writing*, at least two clear working days before the day of the Meeting of the Authority or the Committee.

COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY - TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To appoint the Authority's Standing Committees and Lead Members.
2. To determine the following issues after considering recommendations from the Executive Committee, or in the case of 2(a) below, only, after considering recommendations from the Overview and Audit Committee:
 - (a) variations to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
 - (b) the medium-term financial plans including:
 - (i) the Revenue Budget;
 - (ii) the Capital Programme;
 - (iii) the level of borrowing under the Local Government Act 2003 in accordance with the Prudential Code produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; and
 - (c) a Precept and all decisions legally required to set a balanced budget each financial year;
 - (d) the Prudential Indicators in accordance with the Prudential Code;
 - (e) the Treasury Strategy;
 - (f) the Scheme of Members' Allowances;
 - (g) the Integrated Risk Management Plan and Action Plan;
 - (h) the Annual Report.
 - (i) The Capital Strategy.
3. To determine the Code of Conduct for Members on recommendation from the Overview and Audit Committee.
4. To determine all other matters reserved by law or otherwise, whether delegated to a committee or not.
5. To determine the terms of appointment or dismissal of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, and deputy to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, or equivalent.
6. To approve the Authority's statutory pay policy statement.

AGENDA

Item No:

1. Apologies

2. Disclosure of Interests

Members to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in any matter being considered which are not entered onto the Authority's Register, and officers to disclose any interests they may have in any contract to be considered.

3. Chairman's Announcements

To receive the Chairman's announcements (if any).

4. Petitions

To receive petitions under Standing Order SOA6.

5. Questions

To receive questions in accordance with Standing Order SOA7.

6. On-Call Improvement Programme Update (October 2025)

To consider item 6 (**Pages 7 to 26**)

7. Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Fire Authority will be held on Wednesday 10 December 2025 at 2 pm at The Oculus, The Gateway Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8FF

If you have any enquiries about this agenda, please contact: Katie Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) – Tel: 01296 744633 email: knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY

ROLE DESCRIPTION

LEAD MEMBERS

1. To take a lead role in providing support and constructive challenge to senior officers in the development of strategies and plans and contributing towards the strategic direction of the Authority, within the Authority's overall policy objectives.
2. To act as a 'sounding board' for senior officers on issues within the portfolio, and be supportive in dealing with any problems at a strategic level.
3. To review, in conjunction with senior officers, the service within the portfolio.
4. To keep abreast of related developments and policies at national, regional and local level.
5. To take the lead in reporting to the Authority, one of its committees, or panels on issues within the portfolio.
6. To attend the Overview and Audit Committee, at its request, in connection with any issues associated with the portfolio which is the subject of scrutiny.
7. To act as a spokesperson for the Authority on issues within the portfolio.
8. To represent the Authority on bodies, at events and at conferences related to the portfolio, as appointed by the Executive Committee and to feedback to the Authority any issues of relevance / importance.

(Approved 8 June 2007)

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Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Extraordinary Fire Authority 8 October 2025

Report title: On-Call Improvement Programme Update (October 2025)

Lead Member: Cllr Llew Monger (Fire Authority Chair)

Report sponsor: Louise Harrison - Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

Author and contact: Simon Tuffley – Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Action: Noting

Recommendations: That the On-Call Improvement Programme Update Report (October 2025) be noted.

Executive summary:

This report provides an update on the progress of the On-Call Improvement Programme, a key strategic workstream within the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025–2030.

The programme is intended to address long-standing challenges in the availability, sustainability, and operational effectiveness of the on-call firefighter model across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes bringing about long-term improvements to the way the Service manages risk and uses its resources.

The update outlines significant developments made to date, including contract management, specialist vehicle reviews, workforce planning, and enhanced recruitment efforts.

The report also details the preparatory work undertaken ahead of the Fire Authority's decision in November 2025 regarding a formal public consultation on the future shape of the on-call service.

This includes stakeholder engagement with Members, staff, and representative bodies (and focus groups supported by independent facilitation from Opinion Research Services (ORS)), to help shape the final proposals that will be submitted for approval in November.

Financial implications: None arising directly from this update report.

Risk management: None arising directly from this update report.

Legal implications: None arising directly from this update report.

Privacy and security implications: None arising directly from this update.

Duty to collaborate: All neighbouring fire and rescue authorities and Thames Valley blue light partners will be included as part of the public consultation process should approval be given in November by the Authority.

Health and safety implications: None arising directly from this update report.

Environmental implications: None arising directly from this update report.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications: None arising directly from this update report.

Consultation and communication:

A consultation and communication plan has been prepared as part of the project planning and in readiness for any approval given by the Authority for formal public consultation.

The period between the closure of the consultation (if approved) and the proposed date for approval by the Authority in March is to allow for the subsequent analysis of responses, in accordance with the [Gunning Principles](#) which set out the legal tests that define what constitutes a legitimate consultation. These include, amongst other things, that: “3 there is adequate time for consideration and response” and “4 ‘conscientious consideration’ must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account”.

Background papers:

Community Risk Management Plan 2025-2030

[Fire Authority Meeting - 11 December 2024 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service](#) Item 13:

2025-26 Annual Delivery Plan

[FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING - 12 FEBRUARY 2025 - Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service](#) Item 12:

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Fire Authority Report – On-Call Improvement Plan Update (October 2025)	Not Protectively Marked



**Buckinghamshire
Fire & Rescue Service**

Fire Authority Report:

CRMP - Year 1 Delivery Plan

On-Call Improvement Programme Update

October 2025

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 - 1.13 Recruitment Personas and Targeted Campaigns
 - 1.14 Improved Access to Funding for Acquisition Training
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- 1.3 Diversification of the Role (Co-Responding)

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Part 4: Summary and Look Forward

Foreword

The On-Call Improvement Programme represents a pivotal moment in our journey to modernise and strengthen the fire and rescue service across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. As Chief Fire Officer, I am proud to present this update, which outlines the significant progress made during the first year of delivery under our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025–2030.

This report reflects the dedication of our officers, staff, and stakeholders in tackling long-standing challenges within the on-call model. It highlights our commitment to evidence-based decision-making, inclusive engagement, and strategic investment in the future of our workforce for the long-term benefit of the communities we serve.

From contract reform and specialist vehicle reviews to the proposed development of a new training centre at Wescott Venture Park, the programme is laying the foundations for a more resilient, flexible, and community-focused service.

We recognise the importance of transparency and collaboration in shaping the future of our Service. The upcoming public consultation subject to approval of the Fire Authority will be a vital opportunity to hear directly from our communities, and I encourage all stakeholders to engage with the process.

Together, we can build a modern and agile fire and rescue service that is not only fit for today's challenges but prepared for tomorrow's demands.



Louise Harrison

Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

Part 1: Serving our Communities Now and into the Future

1.1 Historical Context and Previous Improvement Programmes

The challenges surrounding On-Call firefighter availability have been a persistent and nationally recognised issue for over a decade. Since 2010, the Fire Authority has made several strategic attempts to address declining availability and recruitment challenges, with varying degrees of success.

1.11 Initial Recognition and Dedicated On-Call Officer Appointment

In response to growing concerns about On-Call availability and sustainability, the Authority appointed a dedicated On-Call Officer in 2010. This role was intended to provide focused leadership and coordination across recruitment, retention, and operational readiness. Despite the commitment and effort invested over a three-year period, the initiative did not yield the desired improvements. Structural and societal changes continued to erode the viability of the traditional On-Call model.

1.12 Development of Operational Resourcing (DoOR) Programme (2016-2019)

The Authority subsequently launched the Development of Operational Resourcing (DoOR) programme, which aimed to modernise and optimise operational staffing models. A key strand of this programme was improving On-Call availability through better planning, flexible employment contracts and tiered availability.

However, despite the programme's broader successes in many areas, the On-Call component struggled to gain traction. Availability remained inconsistent, and recruitment pipelines failed to meet operational needs.

1.13 Recruitment Personas and Targeted Campaigns

In 2022, the service adopted a more marketing-led approach, developing recruitment personas to better understand and target potential On-Call firefighter demographics. This initiative was informed by behavioural insights and aimed to tailor messaging to specific community segments. While innovative in concept, the campaign did not translate into significant recruitment gains. Conversion rates from interest to application remained low, and retention challenges persisted.

1.14 Improved Access to Funding for Acquisition Training

During the 2024/25 financial year, officers identified key opportunities to allocate additional funding towards On-Call acquisition training programs. This strategic investment was aimed at enhancing the Service's capability to recruit and train more On-Call staff, addressing both current and future workforce needs. In support of this, the Service is adopting a more flexible approach to funding training initiatives, recognising the importance of adaptability in meeting local demands. Central to this

vision is the proposed development of a dedicated training venue at the Wescott Venture Park, which, subject to planning approval, will provide a sustainable and purpose-built facility to support the growth and effectiveness of On-Call firefighter training.

1.2 HMICFRS Inspection Findings

Over the last two full inspections, HMICFRS highlighted that BFRS needed to improve both its understanding of community risk, and how it resources the Service.

2018/19 HMICFRS Inspection Report¹ (Published December 2019) Judgements:

- Effectiveness: Requires Improvement
- Efficiency: Requires Improvement
- People: Good

HMICFRS 18/19 Inspection *'its 18 On-Call fire engines were only available 13.6 percent of the time. This reflects the difficulty the service has in recruiting On-Call firefighters. This is experienced nationally.'*

2022/23 HMICFRS Inspection Report (Published October 2023) Judgements Out of 11 graded areas:

- 1 Adequate
- 9 Requires Improvement
- 1 Inadequate

HMICFRS 21/22 Inspection *'We are not satisfied that the service has a plan to maintain the long-term viability of its additional 18 resilience fire engines. It is unclear why the service needs so many additional fire engines when its daily demand pattern is consistently met with 12 available fire engines. The service continues to see a reduction in its On-Call staff and has no plans to address this trend.'*

Officers are resolute in continuing to progress the Service to be recognised as an Outstanding service, serving the communities of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes to the best of its ability.

The Service has made good progress in addressing the recommendations and Areas for Improvement from its two previous inspections.

The On-Call improvement programme is being designed and delivered to ensure BFRS continues to drive this improvement to ensure it becomes a highly resilient fire and rescue service; fully equipped to deal with routine daily demand, and the occasional higher impact, low frequency incidents.

¹ <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/frs-assessment-2018-19-buckinghamshire/>

1.3 Diversification of the Role (Co-Responding)

Separate to the specific current improvement programme, the Service also recognises the value of diversifying the role of On-Call firefighters, particularly through co-responding medical support. Previous initiatives have demonstrated the success and impact of On-Call firefighters undertaking co-responding duties, providing vital early medical intervention in partnership with ambulance services.

Previous progress to develop a collaborative agreement with South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS), lays the groundwork and clinical governance arrangements of co-responding activity and wider Immediate Emergency Care, which is already undertaken by all our firefighters.

It is important to note that co-responding is led by the requirements of our health partners, and any future proposals will be shaped by their operational needs and strategic priorities. However, the service remains committed to building on previous successes and exploring opportunities where On-Call firefighters can enhance the response and resilience capabilities of the health system.

This remains a future opportunity, and the service welcomes the positive national-level discussions around the evolving role of firefighters. Expanding the scope of On-Call duties in a way that adds value to the community and supports wider public health outcomes is a key part of building a modern, responsive, and community-focused fire and rescue service.

Part 2: Full-Size (Type B) Pump Optimisation Workstream

2.1 Current Position

This part of the On-Call Improvement Programme is progressing well and is now approaching a key milestone of Fire Authority Approval, for a 10-week public consultation period.

The project team is currently preparing the public consultation pack, including the draft consultation questions, which will be presented to the Fire Authority in November 2025 for approval.

To support this work, Opinion Research Services (ORS) have been commissioned to assist in preparing the consultation materials and are leading the public focus group sessions. ORS are recognised industry experts in public consultation and engagement, and their involvement provides vital independence and assurance to the process.

ORS advised to continue to use the previous pool of people from the CRMP development public focus groups (pre-consultation and during consultation) with the rationale being that this is good practice as these people have already showed interest

and a willingness to engage and they also have some knowledge and understanding of the fire and rescue service.

Based on feedback from early engagement with our staff, representative bodies, Fire Authority Members, and from the recent public focus groups, it is anticipated that the consultation question relating to on-call improvement (Shaping our Future Service) will focus on a single, clear question, opposed to a range of options. This is to ensure clarity and candour for the public to respond to and is in response to feedback received from these early engagement sessions.

2.2 Progress Since CRMP Approval

Following the Fire Authority's approval of the CRMP in December 2024, the On-Call Improvement Programme has progressed through several structured phases:

The Annual Plan was approved by the Authority on 12 February 2025, confirming deliverables with CRMP priorities and setting the strategic intent for delivering year 1 objectives of the On-Call workstream.

2025-2026 Annual Plan (Strategic Objective 3: Response & Resilience)

Deliver Year 1 of our On-Call development programme through contract reviews, introduction of resilience contracts, systems refresh and resource rationalisation, supported with targeted recruitment to help build a more competent, motivated, and resilient On-Call workforce.

2025-2030 CRMP (Objective 3 Responding Quickly and Effectively to Emergencies)

Optimise the structure and function of operational resources to meet preparedness requirements, managing asset types, numbers and locations to mitigate identified risks.

2.21 The Business Case

The internal Project Mandate and Project Initiation Document (PID) outlined below, were finalised and signed off by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in Summer 2025, establishing governance, scope, and resource allocation.

The project team has developed a series of evidence-based early proposals aimed at stimulating the discussion around improving the sustainability and effectiveness of the On-call model, that considers current and future risk and demand, demographic trends, the availability and recruitment challenges of On-Call staff, and the need to ensure the most appropriate use of public money.

This programme aims to explore options for organising our On-Call firefighters and appliances more effectively, to deliver the best possible emergency response for our communities, while also ensuring long-term sustainability and value for money.

It forms part of a long-term commitment to improve reliability and resilience across the communities we serve.

While day-to-day work continues to support our On-Call availability, this part of the programme takes a broader, strategic view. It will consider how we structure, locate, and support our On-Call resources to ensure they are staffed reliably, deployed efficiently, and aligned with community risk and demand. This work directly supports:

As outlined in the Community Risk Management Plan 2025-2030 (pg. 58):

We are committed to using data to understand the most effective use of On-Call resources to provide resilience, manage risks and uphold our new response standard. This includes evaluating the types of pumps and vehicles we have and exploring opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Throughout the CRMP's duration, we will assess the required number of On-Call pumps to align with our new response standard and address identified risks within the CRMP.

This direction was supported by public feedback, with 'Pooling On-Call resources to improve appliance availability across larger areas.' emerging as the most preferred improvement proposed by BFRS.

BFRS holds 30 type B pumps (traditional fire engines) available through full-time or On-Call staffing models. The service is exploring options to consolidate these resources and restructure the On-Call system to better meet both day-to-day operational needs and broader resilience requirements.

The On-Call model is a staffing approach used for day-to-day service, which is considered first-line and second-line response. It aims to provide cost-effective fire cover locally, particularly in rural and smaller communities.

Resilience refers to third line and forth-line response, the capacity to maintain operations during major or extraordinary incidents such as large fires, multiple call outs or prolonged demand. In other words, On-Call teams support both day-to-day cover and surge capacity when the Service is under pressure.

However, in practice On-Call pumps are frequently unavailable and often cannot provide a credible level of response due to staffing challenges, including staffing numbers and gaps in qualifications.

As noted in the HMICFRS report 2023², 'Through its ongoing review work, it has also recognised that its on-call fire engines have very limited use. This is due to its continued struggle to recruit on-call firefighters.'

² <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/frs-assessment/frs-2023-25/buckinghamshire-2023-2025>

The current cost of On-Call staff is circa £1.2 million a year. This figure covers training and pumps but excludes additional costs such as On-Call station maintenance.

Even if BFRS could make 18 On-Call pumps consistently viable, data tells us this would have limited impact on the overall response standard and would remain unaffordable under the current establishment model. It would also not offer value for money in relation to risk and demand.

In the past five years, the only time all Type B pumps were required was during a two-day period in July 2022. For the five years before that event, and the three years since, there were no instances when full concurrent deployment was needed.

By streamlining the On-Call fleet there is an opportunity for reinvestment of funds into the Service. Fewer standard Type B pumps would mean reduced demand on maintenance and procurement.

Importantly, mutual aid and National Resilience arrangements continue to form part of our response arrangements. This project does not alter the current 'Over the Border' (OTB) agreement routinely made with neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services. Any recommendations taken forward for public consultation will be developed with awareness of neighbouring Services' resourcing models.

Ultimately, this programme aims to confirm the best options for developing the On-Call system that delivers the best value for money, while continuing to provide an excellent and modern fire and rescue service for the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Project Objectives

- Continue to invest in services and enhance specialist capabilities to support response and resilience.
- Continue to meet response standard as set out in the CRMP.
- Continue to provide resilience to simultaneous incidents, large and protracted incidents and spate conditions.
- Ensure the service provides good value for money.

Critical Success Criteria

- Confirmation that response times and coverage remain the same or improve.
- The opportunity to re-invest any savings achieved by the programme
- Reduction in non-viable appliances, lowering costs associated with maintenance and unrealised On-Call expenditure
- Continue to maintain public safety and public satisfaction with the Service

- Improved On-Call availability to provide greater resilience across the Service

2.3 Member Engagement

Throughout Quarter Two of this year, the project team undertook engagement sessions with all Authority Members. These meetings were flexible to accommodate the schedules of all Members and have been instrumental in shaping the proposals and ensuring they reflect both strategic priorities and local context.

A key milestone was the informal Workshop held with the new Lead Members in July, which was the most recent in a series of workshops that have been held with Lead Members over recent years, which continue to serve as a valuable sounding board for early ideas and constructive feedback that has helped influence the direction of the proposals.

2.4 Staff and Stakeholder Engagement

A series of early staff engagement sessions were launched and continue to run. Feedback from operational personnel has been vital in refining the practicality and development of the proposals.

Representative Bodies have been engaged throughout the process and attend all project meetings, ensuring transparency and maintaining constructive positive relationships.

Public Focus Groups, facilitated by ORS, have provided valuable insight into community expectations, particularly around preferred approaches for engaging with the public.

2.5 MP Engagement

A letter was sent to all Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes MPs on 26 September 2025 outlining the challenges associated with the On-Call service and setting out the topline proposals being considered for public consultation.

The letter also invited all MPs to attend a personal briefing with the CFO ahead of the November Authority meeting. This proactive step seeks to gain further valuable insight ahead of the November Authority meeting and recognises the sensitivities surrounding the local pragmatic actions being proposed to address a long-term, systemic and national issue within the fire and rescue service.

2.51 Confirmation of Current Proposals for the Public Record (October 2025)

There are currently (as far as officers are aware) two MP-led local campaigns which were published on 26 September 2025 as an aside to early engagement activity undertaken by officers.

The MP campaigns were launched without officer knowledge and focus on two specific options which came into the public domain. These campaigns subsequently led to a number of public and media enquiries whether or not these early proposals are the final options being taken forward.

For clarification, the two initial options being discussed were the founding basis for early engagement with our employees, representative bodies, Fire Authority Members and the public focus groups. These options are being utilised to stimulate dialogue and gather feedback and are being further developed because of those sessions. This was clarified in an internet article published on the Service's website on 26 September 2025 intended to address concerns that could arise from the content of press release jointly issued by local MPs earlier that day.

For assurance, the On-Call Improvement Programme had already identified the political sensitivity of the Programme as a risk to the effective delivery of the CRMP workstreams, and efforts continue to ensure the consultation proposals being developed remain an impartial Fire Authority-led initiative, grounded in evidence, stakeholder engagement, and strategic alignment with the CRMP.

2.6 Looking After Our People

Throughout this period of strategic change, we remain fully committed to supporting our people; both those who may be directly affected by the proposals and those tasked with delivering the CRMP and associated improvement programmes.

We recognise that any change to the On-Call model may bring uncertainty for some staff and the communities we serve. Clear, honest, and timely communication will continue to be a priority. Support mechanisms are in place for all staff, including one-to-one conversations, access to wellbeing services, and opportunities to contribute actively to the consultation throughout the process.

Officers who are leading and delivering the On-Call Improvement Programme are working under significant pressure to convey sensitive and authentic stakeholder engagement. The CFO will continue to ensure that officers are supported with the right resources, time, and space to carry out this work effectively, and is committed to maintaining a culture of respect, inclusion, and psychological safety.

Change will be managed in a way that is transparent, empathetic, and aligned with our values and behaviours, bringing together a people-centred transformation approach, reflected at every stage.

Our key communication principles set out in our Annual Plan are:

Transparent Inclusivity: Communicate openly and inclusively, ensuring everyone feels valued and informed.

People-Centred Approachability: Communicate in a relatable and empathetic way, creating a connection with the audience.

Elevated Professionalism: Communicate clearly, concisely, and with authority, balancing professionalism and approachability

2.7 Next Steps

Throughout October and into November 2025, officers will continue to work with ORS to finalise the consultation pack and draft consultation question(s), incorporating feedback from staff, representative bodies, Authority Members, and public focus groups. Valuable feedback arising from any of the MP briefings will also be carefully considered for the final proposal.

The intention is that on 12 November 2025 the consultation materials will be presented to the Fire Authority for approval. If approved, we will launch the formal public consultation in November, which will run for a period of 10 weeks. This will include a range of engagement channels to ensure accessibility and inclusivity across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Following the consultation period, a collation and analysis phase will take place throughout January 2026. ORS will produce a Consultation Feedback Report, summarising public, staff, and other stakeholder responses.

A final recommendation will be presented to the Fire Authority in March 2026. This will be informed by the consultation feedback and shaped by the evidence gathered throughout the project. The recommendation will be accompanied by a consultation feedback report, ensuring transparency and accountability in the final decision-making.

Part 3: Modernising and Improving On-Call delivery

3.1 Current Position

This part of the improvement programme is focused on addressing long-standing issues with availability, sustainability, and operational effectiveness of the On-Call model, which has seen declining reliability over the past two decades.

This business-as-usual element is currently focused on engaging with existing On-Call staff to ensure that contracted hours are realistic, achievable, and reflective of individual availability. This approach supports a more sustainable model and acknowledges the pressures faced by staff balancing multiple commitments.

Building on previous work, the programme is embedding the concept of tiered availability and pooling of personnel across multiple sites, allowing for greater flexibility in crewing and improved operational resilience. This model enables staff to contribute across a wider footprint, enhancing coverage and reducing reliance on single-station availability.

Officers are actively working to enhance the employee experience beyond the traditional On-Call offering, with the goal of improving attraction, retention, and long-term engagement of our valued staff. This includes exploring more flexible contracts, tailored training pathways, and improved support mechanisms to ensure the On-Call role remains viable and rewarding in today's workforce landscape.

3.2 Contract Management

A key aspect of modernising On-Call delivery has been the robust management, review and amendment of employment contracts, in close collaboration with staff. This work has focused on aligning contracted hours with realistic and achievable availability, ensuring that expectations are clear and that staff are fairly compensated for their commitment.

By improving the accuracy of availability planning, the service is becoming better able to forecast resource coverage, identify gaps, and deploy assets more effectively. This also supports a more transparent and equitable approach to pay, helping to build trust and improve the overall employee experience.

Throughout this year, there have been examples of On-Call firefighters both reducing and increasing their contracted hours, reflecting a more flexible and responsive employment model. These adjustments have helped to manage operational expectations while supporting individual circumstances, contributing to improved retention and workforce satisfaction.

This evolving approach to contract management is a vital enabler of the wider On-Call Improvement Programme, supporting both service resilience and staff retention.

3.3 Specialist Vehicle Capability Review

As part of the Annual Plan objective, a dedicated review of specialist vehicle capability is underway, directly linked to the On-Call Improvement Programme. The aim is to improve the availability and strategic deployment of specialist assets across the service.

This work involves collaborating with On-Call staff to develop practical proposals. By aligning specialist vehicle locations with areas of stronger availability and interest, the service can create alternative crewing opportunities and enhance overall resilience.

Several operational changes have already been implemented and are proving effective:

- The relocation of the Operational Support Unit to Olney has led to improved appliance availability and introduced a new employment proposition for staff in that area.
- The centralisation of the current Water Carrier provision at Princes Risborough has had some success, and continues to be worked on

Further opportunities are being explored, including the strategic placement of Rural Firefighting Vehicles (off-road capable appliances) in more rural locations, where they can be reliably crewed and provide enhanced operational capability. This not only improves response effectiveness in hard-to-reach areas but also supports recruitment and retention by offering meaningful roles tailored to local risk and geography.

This review is a key enabler in building a more flexible, responsive, and sustainable On-Call model, ensuring specialist assets are positioned where they can deliver the greatest impact

3.4 Specialist Employment Contracts

In support of the specialist capability workstream, work is underway to explore contract amendments that move beyond the traditional firefighter role map. These new contract models aim to focus on specific capabilities, such as operating specialist or rural firefighting vehicles, rather than requiring staff to fulfil the full scope of the traditional role.

This approach seeks to:

- Attract a more diverse workforce, including individuals who may not meet all the physical or time-based demands of the traditional role but still bring valuable skills and commitment.
- Support existing firefighters who, due to injury, health, or other circumstances, may no longer be able to carry out every aspect of their previous role but can continue to contribute meaningfully to the service and their communities.

By offering flexible, capability-focused contracts, the service is creating new pathways into the On-Call model and reinforcing its commitment to inclusion, adaptability, and long-term sustainability.

3.5 Recruitment

Traditional recruitment methods have yielded limited success in recent years. This is due to the annual leaver rate exceeding the new starters in five of the last nine years. One of the reasons for such a high leaver rate will be On-Call firefighters following a career path to becoming a wholetime firefighter. Nonetheless, there is now an acute focus on stepping up On-Call recruitment and training, with a new centralised training facility and modernised recruitment approach being key future enablers.

Year	New Starters	Leavers
2017	17	32
2018	20	22
2019	16	22
2020	21	18
2021	22	14
2022	13	17
2023	10	18
2024	25	10
2025	*7	5

Figure 1: On-Call recruitment statistics (starters and leavers over last nine years)

**2025 recruitment process currently live*

Officers are currently trialling new approaches, including targeted campaigns, community-based engagement, and digital outreach. The aim is to attract a broader and more diverse pool of candidates, particularly in areas with persistent availability challenges. Once complete, a full evaluation of the current recruitment campaign will be conducted to embed continual improvement in this area.

3.6 Workforce Planning

Effective workforce planning is essential to improving the reliability and sustainability of the On-Call model. Over the past year, the People Services team has led work to develop a more detailed and dynamic understanding of On-Call workforce capacity across the service.

This improved visibility now enables the service to closely monitor On-Call workforce data on a monthly basis, with updates and analysis presented through the CRMP Performance Monitoring Meetings, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer. This governance structure ensures that workforce planning is directly linked to strategic oversight and operational decision-making.

Importantly, this monitoring has already identified an acute need to increase On-Call training capacity, following the emerging success of the latest recruitment campaign, which has attracted over 29 applicants to date. In response, the service is actively identifying in-year underspends to be redirected toward accelerating On-Call training provision, particularly for initial skills acquisition. This proactive step will help ensure

that new recruits can be onboarded effectively and safely, supporting both service resilience and long-term workforce sustainability.

3.7 Training and Competence

Ensuring On-Call firefighters maintain the necessary skills and competencies is a critical component of the improvement programme. The service has implemented robust monitoring of training attendance and maintenance of competence, which has highlighted the ongoing challenges in this area.

Most On-Call firefighters have only two hours per week available for training, which places significant limitations on the breadth and depth of skills they can realistically acquire and maintain. This has opened an important conversation about the scope of competence expected from On-Call staff, and how this aligns with the time they have available.

While this area of work is still under review, there is a clear focus on ensuring that safety-critical elements of the role are prioritised and maintained to the highest standard. The service is also exploring modular and flexible training approaches, such as those proposed for the new Westcott training centre, to better support On-Call staff in balancing their development with other commitments.

In parallel, a separate ongoing project is underway to introduce a new system for maintaining competence and skills, with completion expected by January 2026. This system will support more structured tracking, reporting, and planning of training needs, helping to move this critical element of the programme forward and ensuring long-term confidence in On-Call capability.

3.8 Capital Investment

As part of the On-Call Improvement Programme, targeted capital investment is being used to modernise infrastructure, improve training capability, and support a more inclusive and resilient workforce.

Work has already been completed to remove drill towers at Brill and Princes Risborough, both of which were beyond economic repair. Subject to planning approval, a new drill tower is planned for Princes Risborough, incorporating enhanced training facilities to support On-Call development and signal continued investment in the model.

In addition, the proposed training centre at Westcott, also subject to planning, will enable modular training programmes tailored to On-Call staff. These programmes would be designed to fit around primary employment and personal commitments, making training more accessible and flexible. This is considered a gamechanger in supporting recruitment, retention, and long-term sustainability of the On-Call.

A review of facilities across all sites has been completed to ensure that stations are accessible, inclusive, and capable of attracting a diverse workforce. This includes scheduling improvements to welfare spaces, changing facilities, and station layouts to better reflect modern expectations and workforce needs.

Work has also been undertaken to improve contaminants management, with upgrades to decontamination areas and procedures to support firefighter health and safety. These improvements align with national best practice and reflect the service's commitment to protecting its people.

Routine roof repairs and other essential maintenance continue across the estate to ensure operational readiness and safety. However, it is important to note that capital investment remains a significant challenge due to limited funding. The service continues to prioritise investment where it can have the greatest impact, but the scale of need exceeds current financial capacity.

3.9 System Development

The On-Call Improvement Programme includes a focus on enhancing digital systems to better support workforce management, availability planning, and operational deployment.

The project team is currently in the process of identifying system requirements to further improve the functionality of the roster management system for On-Call staff. The aim is to enable staff to more easily manage their employment contracts, particularly across tiered availability and multiple sites, including both routine and specialist capabilities.

This development will support more accurate forecasting of availability, improve crewing flexibility, and help align staffing with operational needs. It also complements wider efforts to modernise contract management and improve the employee experience.

Part 4: Summary and Look Forward

The On-Call Improvement Programme is progressing in line with the strategic direction set out in the CRMP 2025–2030. The collaborative and transparent approach taken across Members, staff, employee representatives, MPs, and the public has ensured that the emerging proposals are both evidence-based and grounded in stakeholder insight. The involvement of ORS adds further credibility and independence to the process.

The November Authority meeting will mark a key milestone as the project seeks to move into the formal consultation phase.

The consultation presents an exciting opportunity to hear directly from the public and gather views that will help shape the future of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The overarching intention of the proposals will continue to be the improvement of availability and appropriate response of operational resources.

The CRMP is clear that currently, the On-Call system is significantly unreliable, with very limited availability across the service. This has been a persistent issue of decline over the last two decades, despite numerous and varied attempts to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of On-Call firefighters within the traditional On-Call framework, which continues to face national challenges.

The proposals will seek to address this long-standing, systemic issue by enhancing the availability of fire assets, including standard fire engines, rural capabilities and specialist vehicles, thereby improving the overall resilience and response capability, and public safety across all of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.