

FBU Response to WSFRS IRMP 2018-2022

Firstly, let me state that West Sussex FBU acknowledge and appreciate all the hard work that has gone into producing this document by personnel of WSFRS both operational and non-operational.

To be clear the Integrated Risk Management Plan must be based on risk and not demand.

The following is a statement in the foreword from Debbie Kennard, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection:

‘provide a highly effective and efficient fire and rescue service that is also value for money’

I would ask the Cabinet Member to explain the ‘also value for money’ aspect of this, as since 2010 WSFRS have seen:

- £7million worth of savings
- 26% reduction in workforce
- 11 fewer fire appliances
- Decline in response standards

West Sussex FBU would argue that we already offer exceptional value for money, in fact the service residents of West Sussex receive has been reduced in pursuit of continued savings as highlighted above.

The value that we bring to the people, economy and communities of the West Sussex area is well identified and proven. The financial costs of fire are no longer published by the Westminster government. The last report published by Government, on the cost of fire in England for 2008, put the total estimate at £8.3bn.

The costs in anticipation include prevention or protective measures such as sprinklers and insurance.

The costs as a consequence of fires, includes damage to properties, loss of business, and the costs of human injury and death.

Response costs are the expenditure on fire and rescue services.

Table 1: Estimates for the total cost of fire (2008)

	Anticipation (£m)	Consequence (£m)	Response (£m)	Total (£m)
England	£3,185	£3,285	£1,807	£8,277



Firefighters play an important role in all these activities. Community fire safety work with vulnerable people helps prevent scores of deaths and injuries, while a rapid response can limit losses to property as well as life.

There are good reasons to believe that at least some of these costs have risen since 2008. The most recent figures published by the Association of British Insurers (ABI) indicate that the insured cost of fires in 2008 was £1.3 billion, a 16% increase on the previous year. Between 2002 and 2008 the cost of the average fire claim for both commercial and domestic fires doubled, to £21,000 and £8,000 respectively. The ABI suggested that if this trend continues, the UK could stand to lose as much as £10 billion as a result of commercial and industrial fires by 2020.

Some fire and rescue services have carried out their own cost-benefit analysis to quantify the value of the contribution of their service to the communities they serve. For example, Greater Manchester fire and rescue service has estimated that for every £1 the service costs to respond to incidents, there is an £18 saving in terms of life and property. This estimate refers only to fires and does not include other areas of work such as responses to road traffic collisions and other types of rescue.

Other estimates have underlined rising costs to households and businesses. The financial and economic impacts of blazes in warehouses without sprinkler systems in England and Wales add up to over £1bn over the last five years, according to a report published by the Centre for Economics and Business Research. These warehouse fires cause a direct financial loss to business of £230m per year, £190m per year in productivity and impacts to the supply chain, approximately 1,000 jobs lost through disruption and business failure and £160m in tax receipts lost to the Treasury over five years.

The fire and rescue service has reduced the costs of fires, deaths and injuries over the last decade. The cost to the economy of a single fire death is estimated to be £1.65 million and the estimated average consequential cost of a domestic fire is £44,000 – never mind the harm done to families and communities by fires. The fire and rescue service saves the economy billions of pounds every year. On this basis alone, the fire and rescue service merits investment, not cuts.

Priority 1 - Reduce the number of emergency incidents and their consequences through the continuous improvement of prevention, protection and response activities.

Since 2015 there has been a gradual increase in incidents both nationally and locally, in fact WSFRS saw a 4.5% increase in calls in 2017/2018 with 9,241 incidents attended.

Debbie Kennard, Cabinet member for Communities and Public Protection states:

‘improve the lives and safety of those who live, work, visit and travel in West



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The Chief Fire Officer, Gavin Watts states:

'pursue the best possible outcomes for those that we serve'

Given WSFRS plan to reduce the standard crewing on fire appliances from 5 to 4, as well as look at riding 3 in some circumstances West Sussex FBU believe both the priority and statements above are unachievable and contradictory.

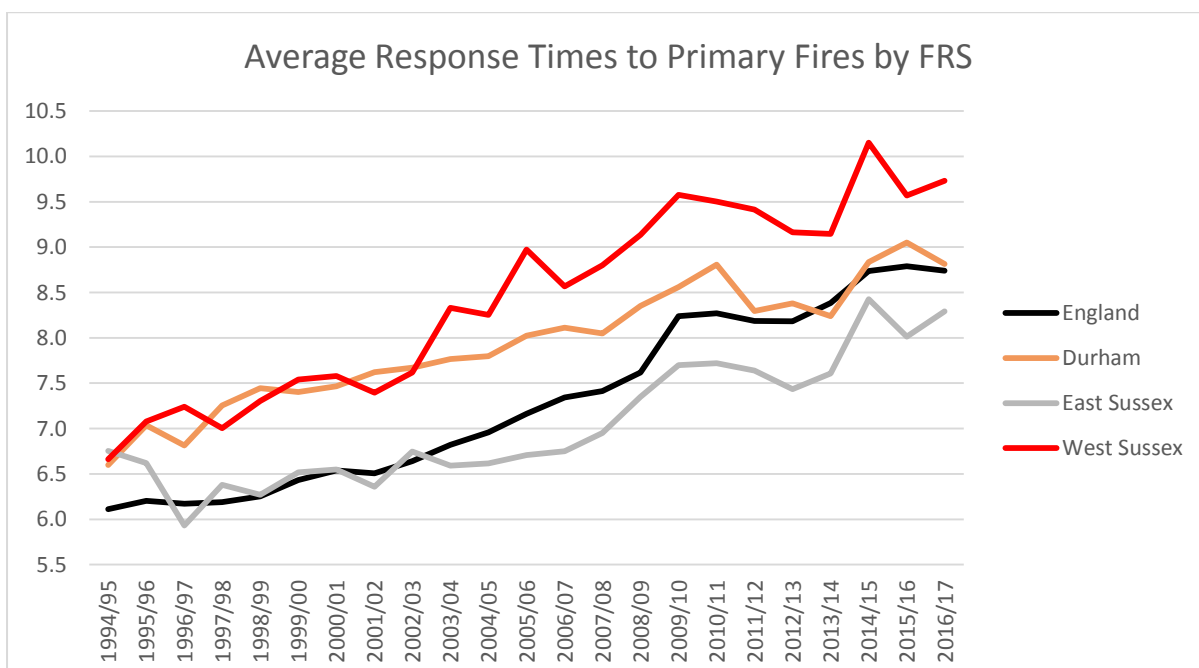
Consequences will not improve when crews are hampered in the weight of response they can provide in the initial stages of an incident, this proposal is likely to lead to worsening outcomes. The safety of those who are in West Sussex will not improve under these proposals.

WSFRS plan to review its response standard. We have already highlighted above that we have seen an increase in response times at a time when our call volume is increasing, any decrease in the response standard will result in worsening consequences which is of serious concern to the FBU. These will cause increased damage to property, life and put firefighters at an even greater risk.

We have seen response times in West Sussex increase over recent years despite assurances by previous Chief Fire Officer' that the changes implemented would lead to improvement as well as a minimum of 30 fire appliances available across the County.

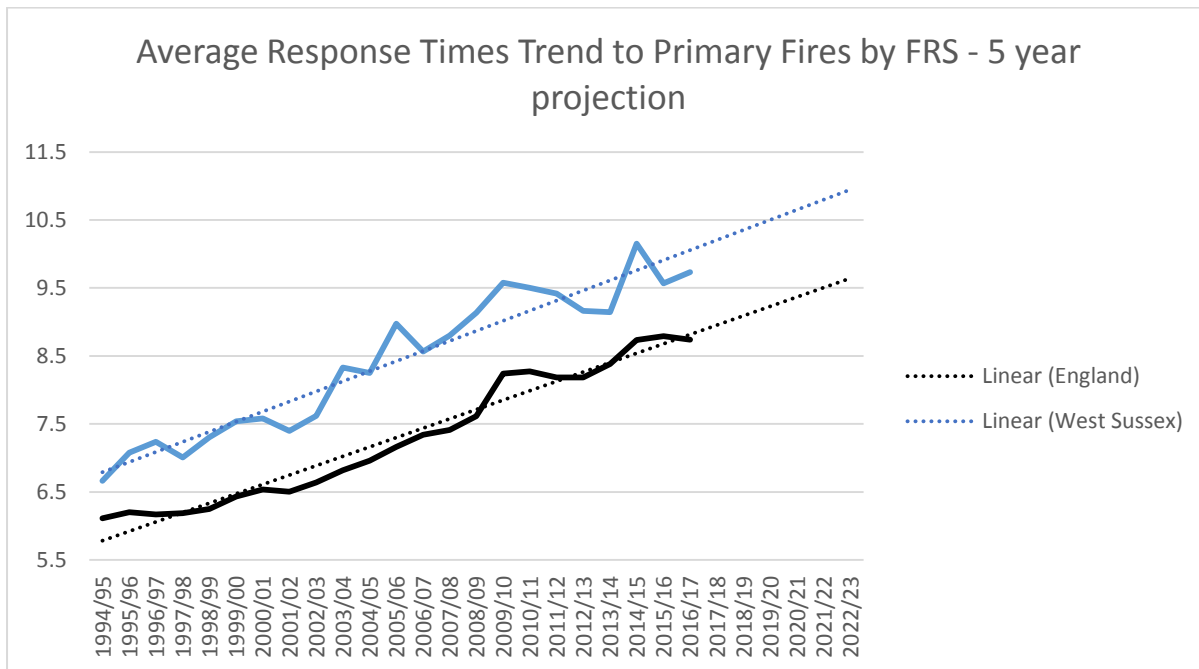
The reality is somewhat different with as few as 10 appliances available at certain times (outlined in the IRMP) and response times increasing. When using home office response time statistics, projections are that this will continue to increase over the coming years as outlined by the linear projections below.

The graphs below illustrate West Sussex performance and the projections over the next 5 years based on Home Office data.





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Additionally, they plan to revise the response to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA's). The FBU are clear that these calls should be treated as fires until confirmed otherwise. On the surface it seems to make no economic sense, as in failing to attend a call of this type will significantly increase economic costs to WSCC and small businesses if it is indeed a fire that firefighters are delayed in responding too.

Seemingly WSFRS plan to reduce the number of emergency incidents and achieve the aforementioned priority, by simply not sending a response at all to certain call types namely automatic fire alarms.

In this single proposal it is clear that to achieve this priority and fulfil the IRMP promises they will not attend certain emergency incidents.

In fact, the Amberley Castle Hotel fire on 28th Feb came through as an AFA had an appliance not been sent immediately to that the outcome would have been significantly worse. Interestingly, the first appliance in attendance had 6 riders on allowing for a quicker, safer and more controlled intervention.

A reduction in the number of times we attend AFA's will result in increased damage to property and potential for increased loss of life both of which are preventable.

In previous IRMP processes we were assured response times would decrease, more appliances would be available and that we would continue reducing our incidents via protection and prevention.

This has not been achieved with WSFRS constantly missing targets, increasing response times and ever decreasing fire safety audits, thus the question must be:

Why will this IRMP be any different? WSFRS seem to be reducing numbers of firefighters on appliances at a time when calls are increasing despite continuous protection and prevention work being carried out. Surely they



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should see incidents begin to decrease before embarking on any further crewing reductions?

Increasing response times, less firefighters on fire appliances, not attending AFA's and reviewing the response standards should be unacceptable to both firefighters and residents of West Sussex. It will lead to worsening outcomes, increased societal cost and less safe systems of work for firefighters not to mention completely contradicts the Fire Authorities number 1 priority.

Priority 2 - As part of West Sussex County Council, work with local communities, districts and boroughs to keep West Sussex safe.

Nationally and locally the social value of the fire and rescue service is immense. Every day firefighters around the UK work with the young and the old, with offenders and the unemployed, as well as businesses of all sizes and with vulnerable households. Fire and rescue services make a direct contribution to a number of other public agencies through their wider work in communities.

Firefighters reduce the costs of:

- Traffic congestion
- Road traffic collisions
- Youth unemployment
- Anti-social behaviour
- School exclusion
- Slips, trips and falls in the home
- Reoffending
- Troubled families.

There is some recognition of these additional benefits delivered by the fire and rescue service, although this has not translated into more funding. Last year the UK fire and rescue service won the Big Society award for its ground-breaking work with young people to educate them about fire prevention and tackling anti-social behaviour. The fire and rescue service's education programs have allowed over 10,000 young people to learn essential safety information and gain wider social skills. Activities ranging from primary school visits, sports coaching and interventions to reduce anti-social behaviour by disaffected young people are recognised to add enormous value to society, helping to reduce the social and economic costs of crime.

Firefighters bring unique value and experience to such work, which is built upon their emergency response role. It is precisely because of the hazards we face and the humanitarian role we play that firefighters can have such a significant impact in other areas of public engagement, with young people and others within the community. There are also numerous possibilities going forward for the fire and rescue service to add value to other social programs.

However the FBU fears that these programs are threatened by continual cuts in firefighter numbers and funding. West Sussex are no exception to this and have



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over recent months reduced our Targeted Education department in size.

The FBU in West Sussex believe that we no longer have the resources to carry out all the work the county council would wish. It must also be stressed that this additional responsibility often has a detrimental effect on the FRS achieving its statutory functions.

Priority 3 - Collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to improve the service to the public.

This priority is of particular interest at a time when we see Police and Crime Commissioners taking control of FRS governance, which some may argue could not be any worse than what West Sussex have faced in recent years as previously outlined.

The FBU are opposed to PCC takeover as they have no genuine democratic mandate or understanding of the role and function of the fire and rescue service.

Police are law enforcers, while fire and rescue is a humanitarian service with a very different remit and culture. Firefighters need to be seen to be neutral within the communities they serve. Links with law enforcers will damage the much-needed trust and reputation firefighters have built up in neighborhoods over decades, trust they depend on to gain access to peoples' homes when needed for fire prevention and rescue work.

However, it is noticeable that combined fire authorities who have full control of their budgets and council tax precept have ridden the austerity measures in place since 2010 far better than County Council led services.

FBU officials believe closer collaboration and work with bordering fire services is key to maintaining the frontline service, which in turn provides a safer more efficient service to West Sussex residents.

It is somewhat confusing though that West Sussex FRS want to both integrate with County Council at the same time as collaborate with other FRS', we see these as opposite ends of the spectrum and would prefer a far greater push to closer collaboration with our neighboring fire and rescue services which we believe will not be achieved without full commitment from Council representatives.

A viable alternative to PCC governance would be the creation of a new Combined Fire Authority with any of our neighboring Fire and Rescue services. Elected members of council and MPs want what is best for their residents, the FBU believe that a move to this model will provide exactly that.

Work with other agencies such as SECAMB is of vital importance and is still being discussed at the national level to try and introduce co-responding as part of the firefighter role map.

West Sussex state they will extend the co-responding pilot across the County, however it must be made clear that FBU officials will not support this work outside of the agreed bargaining system via the NJC (National Joint Council; the agreed



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joint negotiating body consisting of both employer and employee representatives). National Officials are working on this to ensure that appropriate funding and safety measures are in place to support both firefighters and residents alike when this work is introduced.

West Sussex FBU officials support this work and hope for a resolution at the national level in due course but any attempt to circumvent this process would likely lead to increased industrial tension within West Sussex and nationally.

Priority 4 - *Develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.*

Resilience is of massive concern to the FBU for a number of reasons, it is a term often used with the fire service, and it covers many areas. In basic terms it determines how well logistically the service would be able to operate, on different levels, in the face of different scenarios. These range, for example, from planning on how to cope with an outbreak of a pandemic flu, rendering the service extremely short of staff and needing to operate in a totally different way, to having fire appliances and firefighters available to attend a house fire on a Tuesday afternoon.

Firefighters, and indeed the public, can accept that if the first of these were to happen, response to the second at the same time may be delayed – what firefighters and the public should not accept or expect, is that the response to that house fire is delayed simply because of insufficient funds to provide adequate resource, resilience and fire cover.

As stated, resilience is a key concern, in terms of appliance availability for firefighters within WSFRS. The impact of cuts over the last six years, and those potentially to come, have and will result in less firefighters and fire appliances. This has an impact on resilience which is being felt and seen on the ground floor. Due to less firefighters, WSFRS has become under resourced and thus lacks resilience. They now wish WSFRS fire appliances (Water Tender Ladders) to crew with 4 or possibly even 3 firefighters instead of the required standard crewing of 5. As a result crews are often faced with a delay in supporting appliances arriving to resolve incidents safely and in good time. This delay would not be necessary should adequate crews be available at all times.

Since 2010 the service has lost 11 appliances. This isn't the sign of a resilient fire service in fact far from it with on occasion only 10 pumps available across the County. Firefighters, especially in the north of the service have a feeling of vulnerability with having to wait longer for appliances to arrive. This also holds the most significant risk with West Sussex, that of Gatwick Airport.

It has to be recognised that 4 appliances of the 11 mentioned above operated within the north of the County. 2 WT appliances at Horley, 1 WT appliance at Horsham and 1 retained appliance in Crawley. A frequent occurrence within West

Sussex is now to leave Crawley covered by a solitary appliance due to its 2nd appliance needed to provide cover in other locations.

The FBU believes that little to nothing has/is being done to address this resilience issue, in fact the issue will be compounded by riding with fewer firefighters on appliances and ultimately lead to ever worsening outcomes or unsafe working practices being undertaken by firefighters.

In September 2017 the government published the latest edition of the National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies, the unclassified version of the National Risk Assessment. The register covers a range of civil emergencies that threaten serious damage to our welfare, the environment and security. A striking number of these threats are matters dealt with by the fire and rescue service:

- Terrorist attacks
- Coastal and inland flooding
- Storms and gales, low temperatures and heavy snow
- Heatwaves and severe wildfires
- Public disorder (such as the civil disturbances in 2011)
- Pandemic influenza and related outbreaks of disease
- Major industrial and transport accidents

Firefighters plan, prepare and train for these kind of emergencies. Some of the risks posed by these events have increased in recent years. With climate change, many of the risks are likely to increase in the foreseeable future. Other events are highly uncertain and difficult to quantify, with multiple events a real possibility to plan for. All assume that the fire and rescue service is prepared, equipped and staffed to meet every challenge thrown at it.

The government's planning for these risks assumes there are sufficient firefighters available to tackle these emergencies and that the fire and rescue service is resilient in the face of these threats.

The FBU believes, worryingly, that this is no longer the case and the proposals being put forward by WSFRS can only serve to worsen the situation.

Priority 5 - *Provide customer-focused value for money services.*

It is difficult to quantify this statement as it is unclear how this will be measured and what constitutes 'value for money'.

The fire and rescue service is a public sector organisation whose primary function is to save life and property. This should be WSFRS focus and its offering to the residents of West Sussex.



It is the FBU opinion that what West Sussex residents want is a speedy response when they require rapid intervention, which currently is deteriorating and will further diminish with the implementation of this IRMP.

Furthermore, the FRS is a risk led service and this does not always lend itself to constant arbitrary money saving. As although at certain times demand is lower, the intervention required remains the same when an incident occurs thus plans must be in place to ensure adequate fire cover to respond.

Interestingly, WSFRS bought into a new mobilising system a considerable amount of time ago in conjunction with East Sussex FRS. As yet this system is still not live for operational personnel within West Sussex when the original completion date was December 2013.

Undoubtedly, this has had cost implications to both Sussex fire and rescue services. Perhaps this project was embarked on to improve customer focused value for money? I think it is clear that has not occurred, with end in sight to WSFRS transferring to this mobilising system.

The FBU believe it is important to review how money is spent and what funding is received to carry out its statutory duties. However, we would argue that with £7million worth of savings since 2010 we offer exceptional value.

Furthermore, perhaps comparisons against other similar size county council departments in terms of savings made needs to be considered before any further money is taking out of WSFRS.

Conclusion

Outlined above are the FBU thoughts on West Sussex IRMP which we would urge all councillors, residents and employees of West Sussex to consider when responding to the consultation.

As the professional voice of firefighters, FBU officials represent the vast majority of operational personnel employed within West Sussex FRS and nationally, it is clear that these proposals will have the following effects:

- Unsafe systems of work for firefighters
- Weight of attack at an incident being severely reduced; resulting in increased fire spread, damage and injury/fatality.
- Downgrading to the service residents of West Sussex will receive, not to mention places WSFRS firefighters at a greater risk.
- Makes less economic sense; reducing crewing = less efficient response (weight of response) results = worse outcomes = increased societal cost.



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- Possibility of increased industrial tensions.
- Worsening response standards.

Further to all of the above we would ask you to consider these questions:

How the priorities will be achieved when WSFRS are seeking to reduce crewing numbers on fire appliances?

Automatic fire alarms are often linked to businesses allowing for reduced insurance costs, if WSFRS are planning to no longer send fire appliances to such calls what impact will this have on local business which are vital to WSCC?

Further to this if they are serious about improving outcomes for residents, can it be explained how any improvement will be seen if a decision is taken to send no immediate response to such calls?

How will resilience improve when they are reducing firefighters on appliances?

If WSFRS are serious about collaboration do they not feel that further integration will impact on our ability to collaborate or add additional costs due to an added layer of bureaucracy?

Finally, we would ask that you have your say by contacting both your local councilor and MP to highlight the concerns above as well as respond by going to the following link: <https://haveyoursay.westsussex.gov.uk/risk/west-sussex-fire-rescue-service-risk-management-pl/consultation/subpage.2016-06-12.6465234834/>

This will impact both residents of West Sussex and employees of WSFRS; stand up, be heard and support your firefighters but asking the council to reject these proposals and reconsider the content of the IRMP.

If you wish to discuss this further then please contact me as I am happy to discuss this either by telephone or face to face at public meetings. My details are outlined below.

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