

Facts first | Dispelling misconceptions and providing clarity

Introduction

We are committed to providing a resilient, effective and safe emergency service for our firefighters and the residents of Oxfordshire. The purpose of the fire and rescue cover model is to improve response times to emergencies across the county by adapting our model to manage the challenges with on-call availability during the day in some areas. If we do not make changes, things are likely to get worse. Our fire engine availability will continue to decline, and response times will suffer as demand grows and the county changes.

This document aims to clarify the rationale behind our proposals and provide evidence-based responses to common misconceptions. Our goal is to hold informed discussion and healthy debates among colleagues, trade unions, members of the public and other stakeholders.



Why are we doing this?

- Our proposals are designed to improve emergency response times across Oxfordshire
- On-call firefighter staffing levels during the day has fallen over the past decade, making the traditional model harder to sustain.
- As Oxfordshire grows and changes, we need to make sure our resources are in the right place at the right time to keep people safe.
- Our modelling shows improved response times and our main proposal will allow more capacity for our fire crews to deliver community safety, helping protect communities as Oxfordshire grows.

What we've heard: Cuts to frontline resources

Fact: Reallocating our resources in line with risk

Our proposals are not driven by financial savings. They will not reduce our budget; instead, they are intended to reallocate resources and finances to improve our overall average response times.

Using language such as “cuts” fails to recognise the improvements our proposals are forecast to deliver for communities in Oxfordshire.

With reducing on-call staffing levels during the day and a county that is growing and changing, we need to ensure our fire stations, resources and people are in the right place at the right time to meet Oxfordshire's needs and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of our service.

Whilst regrettably we have proposed closing some on-call fire stations or removing on-call fire engines, the rationale is not to save money but to make better use of it. On-call fire engines with high staffing levels generally represent very good value for money and are therefore invariably worth keeping.

If Eynsham, Henley, Woodstock, and Oxford Rewley Road's on-call fire engines had higher staffing levels, they would not have been proposed for closure.

For the second fire engine at Thame, the situation is slightly different. While its availability is reasonable given that it is a second fire engine, data showed it attended very few incidents during the modelling period. It was also shown to have little impact on response time performance. Therefore, the view is that the money currently used for that engine could be better spent elsewhere.

What we've heard: Rewley Road and Kidlington closures

Fact: Relocation to a new modern fire station towards the north of Oxford

We have proposed combining and relocating the resources Kidlington and Rewley Road (Oxford) provide at a new, modern fire station towards the north of Oxford. This proposal is about relocation, reinvestment and an overall improvement in our response times.

What we've heard: Lack of investment in Fire Stations

Fact: Investing in our fire stations to support the proposals

Our proposals include potentially over £33M of reinvestment in Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's fire stations depending upon which options are taken forward.

What we've heard: Increased response times

Fact: Our proposals are independently forecasted to lead to quicker response times

Because we frequently have fewer fire engines in the daytime when the risks to the public are higher, our response times have gradually been increasing for a number of years. We also have a disparity in fire engine response times between Oxford City and other districts. This means that there is a significant difference in the amount of time that it would take for a fire engine to arrive at an incident depending on where it is located in the county.

Our proposals include moving fire engines and firefighters so that there is more consistency in fire engine response times across the county. Generally, it would mean slightly quicker response times in less populated areas and slightly slower response times in Oxford. However, Oxford is forecasted to still receive the quickest response specifically including those parts of the city with a significant heritage risk. Overall, the independent modelling of our proposals indicate that our response times would be quicker across Oxfordshire.

What we've heard: Firefighters will lose their homes

Fact: A relocation of Kidlington Fire Station would impact a group of firefighters who have provided houses as part of their duty system

Nobody will lose their home. If changes go ahead, we will work with affected firefighters who wish to stay in their current homes on a case-by-case basis, and we will have several years to explore various options with them.

If Kidlington were to move to a new proposed fire station towards the north of Oxford, the fire engine would be crewed differently and move away from a 'day crewing' system, which currently includes providing housing for those firefighters. Under the current system, firefighters are on station during the day and respond from a provided house at night. The majority of the firefighters live in these houses full-time.

We recognise this could have a significant impact on those firefighters and their families, which is why we felt it was important to start talking about possible changes now so that firefighters have as much notice as possible of the intention to change. Decisions on the proposals will not be made until Spring 2026, and with the need to identify and build the new fire station, the very earliest the change could happen is likely to be Spring 2029.

What we've heard: Unsafe changes to shifts

Fact: Implement an effective shift system that ensures consistently available fire engines

The wellbeing of our employees is a priority for us and if we were to implement proposals involving day shifts, we will work with employee representatives to negotiate shift patterns to support that wellbeing. We are not aware of any evidence to suggest that our proposal for 12-hour day shifts would be unsafe.

What we've heard: Reduced firefighter numbers and impact on response times

Fact: The proposal includes increasing our number of wholetime firefighters

Our proposals require a minimum increase of 3 wholetime firefighters. We have also included investment proposals that could increase this number to 60. Whilst our proposals also include a potential reduction in watch establishments, these changes would not impact fire engine response times. Each Watch has more firefighters than it needs to crew the fire station as people need to be able to take training days, sick leave and annual leave. The reduction of firefighter posts due to proposed closure of stations or removal of on-call at Rewley Road are linked to low availability only.

What we've heard: Removal of specialist rescue appliance

Fact: Removal of specialist rescue appliance and a redistribution of those specialist rescue skills onto fire engines.

We are committed to reviewing how we deliver specialist rescue capabilities and maintaining these within the service. We believe that there is an option to redistribute specialist rescue capabilities to make that provision more resilient whilst also offering opportunities for a wider pool of employees to develop these enhanced skills.

If the proposal is taken forward to implementation, further detailed work, along with colleague engagement, would be undertaken to understand what this proposal would mean in practice.

This includes looking at the areas below:

- How these skills could be allocated and maintained
- The training and competency requirements for staff
- Operational implications for response times and resource availability
- Any impact on service delivery and resilience during major incidents
- The provisioning of specialist and personal protective equipment

What we've heard: The staff and FBU should have been consulted with about the proposals before public consultation

Fact: The FBU and employees have been made aware of the service need to implement change since 2023. The consultation details were shared with the FBU before the final political decisions were made on the proposals.

The need for change within the service has been informally recognised since 2023, and both the FBU and employees have been aware of our ongoing intention to review the cover model. We value the FBU as the professional voice of firefighters and ensured they were informed as early as appropriate. We therefore shared formal consultation details with the FBU before the council's cabinet made its final decision on which proposals would go out for public consultation.

We have decided to involve all stakeholders at the same time through the public consultation process. However, given the uncertainty around which proposals the cabinet would support, it was not possible to share proposals more widely with staff without prejudicing the decision-making process.

Our commitment remains clear: to engage openly through consultation with the public, the FBU and colleagues, supported by briefings and two-way platforms that address concerns and explain the evidence behind the proposals. Engagement with the consultation is actively encouraged, with opportunities to ask questions through the provided channels.

As an organisation that values continuous learning, we welcome feedback and use it to improve how we work. Once we know which options will proceed, there will be staff consultation processes in relation to implementation.

What we've heard: The data used for modelling was wrong

Fact: Independent modelling undertaken using accurate and quality assured data

To date, we have not identified any errors in the underlying data used for the modelling. A deliberate decision was made to outsource the modelling to an experienced independent third-party company, Occupational Research in Health (ORH) to ensure transparency. The data underpinning the modelling was taken from three information systems that we use internally (Gartan, Vision and Incident Recording System) and was quality assured by ORH as part of their processes.

What we've heard: Firefighters are being threatened to not speak publicly about our proposals

Fact: We have asked firefighters to engage with us and the public but to ensure that they do not spread misinformation or say anything that may harm the reputation of the council

We respect everyone's right to share views during the consultation. All of our employees are encouraged to provide feedback through official channels, and we have created multiple opportunities for open dialogue with our teams and the FBU.

As a public service, we have a duty to maintain trust and impartiality. This means employees should avoid actions that could compromise the council's ability to deliver fair and unbiased services. It does not mean staff cannot express their opinions; it simply means opinions should be shared in a way that does not undermine professional responsibilities or public confidence. Impartiality is about protecting public trust and ensuring that misinformation is not spread. It is not about silencing employees.

What we've heard: Crews of four firefighters on fire engines is dangerous

Fact: Having four firefighters on a fire engine is common practice in Oxfordshire

Our proposals do not rely on us having to routinely have four firefighters on a fire engine. We could instead, deliver the changes by changing our annual leave policy to ensure that staffing is more consistent across the year rather than having periods of the year when we have more firefighters at a given station than we technically need. This would be a far more efficient staffing model and would be our preference.

However, should our firefighters not want to change the annual leave policy, our proposals can be delivered by routinely having four firefighters on a fire engine.

This is already commonplace within Oxfordshire, and our crews are trained and experienced at operating in this way. Doing this would enable us to have more full-time crews in the day which would provide for more consistently available fire engines at these peak times and improved response times overall. We are aware of other fire and rescue services across the UK operating with four firefighters on a fire engine.

Conclusion

Our consultation proposals are built from data analysis, operational need and delivered in line with our commitment to firefighter and public safety. While change is challenging, it is necessary to ensure long-term resilience and effectiveness of our service.

We're in consultation phase, which means nothing is decided yet. Until the consultation concludes (20 January 2026) and decisions are made by the cabinet, we continue to operate business as usual.

If you have any questions or queries about the consultation, please direct them to fire.consultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk