



8<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Cllr Galley and Chief Fire Officer Dawn Whittaker

**Re: Planning for a Safer Future Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-2025 Consultation**

I am writing on behalf of Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council to express their strong objection to the proposals being made in your Planning for a Safer Future consultation.

We have serious concerns over the information in the consultation document and the accompanying documentation. The figures relating to callouts are already 2 years out of date and do not include the figures for all callouts just for incidents and therefore do not give the true picture.

The firemen at Heathfield Fire Station have attended a number of large fires over the last year including the Claremont Hotel in Eastbourne, the Ashdown Forest fire in May this year and recently a fire at Isenhurst which we understand was attended by firefighters from Heathfield, Wadhurst, Uckfield and Seaford. At all of these fires there would have been a number of appliances in attendance and at the Ashdown Forest fire 6 appliances and 4 Land Rovers were on site. By proposing to reduce the number of vehicles within East Sussex this would have a serious impact should there be a major fire and fire stations would not be able to provide the cover for those stations attending the fire.

By reducing the number of vehicles and staff at local fire stations it will create further delays in the response time for attending incidents. In Heathfield we are already below the target for the attendance standard and for critical incidents within daytime attendance standard only 85.3% is achieved. Whilst we understand the delays caused by having an on-call system at Heathfield, we will be impacted by changes to other areas such as Uckfield where it is planning to move it to an on-call crew at weekends during the day. If Uckfield needed to cover our station or attend a fire in our area you are further increasing the response time. By reducing the number of fire engines in rural areas they are less likely to be able to cover other stations that are already on a call and won't be able to respond to so many call-outs. We would be especially impacted by the proposals that are being made for Battle, Crowborough and Uckfield fire stations, however any reduction in engines can ultimately affect the whole of East Sussex.

In your document you advise that proposals are centred on public and firefighter safety however we cannot see how this can be the case, when due to the cutbacks you are proposing, that people's lives will be put at a greater risk.

Of the 4 Commitments you made in the document we would like to raise discrepancies over three of these:

- Delivering high performing services – you have admitted in the document that it will take slightly longer to get to an incident, surely this will result in the service not performing as well;
- Have a safe and valued workforce – it is difficult to see how the workforce feel valued with the cuts that are being proposed. You also state that you commit to ensuring that your workforce is provided with the right equipment, surely by reducing the number of vehicles you are reducing the amount of equipment available to them.
- Make effective use of our resources – we can't see how your productivity can be improved when the number of vehicles and staff are being reduced and some stations are being changed to i.e. be on-call at weekends.

In other places in the document you mention about wanting to reduce the risk, the likelihood and the consequence for all those who may be affected by an incident, again we cannot see how this can be done by reducing the number of vehicles and staff. We do however applaud your efforts in wanting to educate people in order to prevent fires occurring.

In the document it acknowledges the increase in population due to an increased number of dwellings, a large number of which will be in the Wealden area, putting more pressure on our firefighters. Wealden is also recognised as having a high number of RTAs which unfortunately will only increase with more housing, again putting more pressure on our firefighters.

It is extremely disappointing that this consultation came out during the Coronavirus pandemic when a number of people are in lockdown and public meetings cannot be held. During this time ESFRS personnel have had extra pressure put on them due to the increased tasks they have needed to perform during the pandemic.

Although the moving of the Call Centre is not part of the consultation it is mentioned by ESFRS in their documentation. Whilst we understand the cost savings in moving the Call Centre so that it is shared with other counties, we are concerned that you then lose the local knowledge which is imperative for locating incidents and could further delay the time in attending an incident.

The Parish Council is disappointed that you don't give a definition of how long you anticipate 'slightly longer' to get to a fire would take. You also mention about a 'negligible impact', again there is no definition of what this would be.

Heathfield Fire Station is a core station and we are in a rural area which creates challenges that firefighters in a city would not come across. Although the population is smaller we are spaced out over a large area and our residents lives are as important as those in a densely populated city. We therefore feel that we shouldn't suffer from cuts that would adversely impact on our residents.

The Parish Council feel that the consultation ignores the impact of the proposals being put forward and the risk of life that is increased to both members of the public and firefighters by these cuts. We ask that you withdraw the cuts that you are proposing to ensure that there won't be any increased delay in attending incidents, or a reduction in available vehicles especially in rural areas.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter to the Clerk at [clerk@hwpc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@hwpc.org.uk)

Yours sincerely

Helen Johnson

Clerk to Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council