



A Collaborative Response to COVID-19

Thames Valley Collaboration Group

Introduction

The response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is of course continuing throughout the Thames Valley. It has been chaired and organised, from the start, by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This group helps to maintain the resilience of public health partners during this national emergency and has direct links in to Government departments. This response has involved collaboration on a formal and informal basis between multiple partners and organisations across Oxfordshire; Royal Berkshire; Buckinghamshire; Milton Keynes; Hampshire and nationally.

The Thames Valley Collaboration Group was established three years ago. The Steering Group provides the political and non-executive leadership of the Ambulance, Fire and Rescue and Police services across the Thames Valley. It is committed to supporting and driving collaborative initiatives across the emergency services. Every day, frontline staff work closely together at emergency incidents. All the services of the Thames Valley regularly work in partnership for the good of the communities. Extensive collaboration is already underway for example by sharing premises and procurement opportunities.

In 2017, the Policing and Crime Act placed a statutory duty on fire and rescue authorities, police forces and ambulance trusts to:

- Keep collaboration opportunities under review
- Notify other emergency services of proposed collaborations that could be in the interests of their mutual efficiency or effectiveness and
- Give effect to a proposed collaboration, where the proposed parties agree that it would be in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness and that it does not have an adverse effect on public safety.

This collaboration has proved invaluable during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document describes **some** of the examples of how relationships developed between Thames Valley Police (TVP), Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS), Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (BFRS), Oxfordshire Rescue Service (OFRS), and South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) through the Thames Valley Collaboration Group have helped to facilitate initiatives and provide efficiencies in resources. This has enabled the emergency services to support the LRF more effectively, which in turn has provided better service to communities across the Thames Valley and beyond.

Emergency Personal Protective Equipment

More than six million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) have so far been delivered to frontline workers by the Thames Valley LRF.

The Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum Logistics Cell co-ordinated and managed the distribution of the emergency supplies to key services, including care homes and primary care services throughout the pandemic. The cell consisted of all public sector organisations that make up the Thames Valley LRF, including local authorities, NHS and health agencies, emergency services with advisory support from the military.

TVP were tasked with managing the National Policing PPE distribution from a site in Oxfordshire. They were able to share information, skills and equipment with the LRF Logistics Cell which was also based there.



Superintendent Emma Baillie from TVP chaired the Tactical Co-ordination Group. TVP staff were deployed to manage the distribution to other police forces across the UK, to work on the LRF PPE distribution and to provide security for the site. Pre-existing relationships with the fire and rescue services and SCAS, developed during previous responses to Major Incidents and exercises, assisted the operation.

Superintendent Emma Baillie (TVP):

“We are very used to adapting and delivering in a crisis. We knuckle down and get on with it. We needed to find leaders to lead and manage the cells. The FRS were quick to come forward and volunteer. It definitely helps having pre-existing working relationships with the other emergency services. We know how to work with each other and understand each other’s perspective. “

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service’s Area Manager Collaboration and Policy, Jim Powell, chaired the Logistics Cell. He used contacts made through the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Coordination Group and the Thames Valley Collaboration Group to manage the process. In the six months from April to September, 6,295,517 items of PPE were delivered to LRF partners across the Thames Valley.

Area Manager Collaboration and Policy, Jim Powell (RBFRS):

“In essence we were able to quickly establish ways of working, drawing on existing relationships, shared understanding of differing organisations’ needs, an acceptance that collaborative ways of working delivers results and a collective “can do” attitude. “

His Thames Valley partners in the Joint Control Service, Mike Adcock (Area Manager, Response and Resilience, OFRS) and Dave Norris (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience, BFRS) worked closely with him. Mike Adcock became Vice-Chair, while Dave Norris provided personnel to count and sort the stock which was delivered to the PPE store.

For the first two months, a team from RBFRS were dedicated to the task, supported by OFRS and BFRS, and gradually this role has been taken over by TVP personnel, overseen by a lead officer from RBFRS.

The Logistics Cell administration team, collated, processed and recorded a daily data return of stock in and out; issued collection notes; worked out consumption rates; prepared for meetings; maintained a risk register and updated the framework document. The effectiveness of PPE distribution to key workers relied on regular, meaningful communication with the local authorities and health agencies. One member of the team, Vicky Lynch, is the Thames Valley Collaboration Programme Officer, who already had relationships with a number of key partners through the group.

Pre-existing connections, with well-established communication lines across the procurement teams of all the Thames Valley organisations, allowed information about supply lines to be shared across all partners in the LRF. Contingency plans to obtain supplies of PPE from local contractors in case of problems with national supply lines were also drawn up within this collaboration process.

All the agencies across the Thames Valley LRF have worked together to be able to supply the critical protective equipment to those who have needed it, but there can be no doubt that relationships developed through the Thames Valley Joint Coordination Group and the Thames Valley Collaboration Group were integral to the process.

Fire and Rescue Services support South Central Ambulance Service

55 firefighters from OFRS, BFRS and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service have been trained to support SCAS with their response to emergency calls. 43 of those attended incidents in a frontline role. 12 others completed their training in readiness, but have so far not been deployed.

This followed a request from SCAS for support to enable them to increase the response capacity of ambulances across the south-central region, during a period of extreme demand. It was achieved by joint agency working, temporarily moving away from the traditional ‘double clinician’ crewed ambulance, to a ‘one ambulance clinician, one firefighter driver’ crew.



Volunteers from the fire services, who already had Immediate Emergency Care training and experience in driving fire appliances, were given additional training in emergency response driving capability during a 3-day Blue Light Driving course, which was delivered by SCAS. They also received training to familiarise themselves with ambulance equipment and layout.

The firefighters were then assigned to a SCAS “base station” and completed their first shift as part of a three-person crew. Once all the aspects of the training had been completed, they were assigned shifts.

The first trained firefighters began work at SCAS in April and concluded on the 24th May 2020.

Rod Dacombe, Watch Manager at Abingdon-on-Thames Fire Station, seconded to Didcot Ambulance Station:

“At Abingdon Fire Station, everyone who was qualified put themselves forward. We all felt it was a national crisis. Something we could usefully do.....I found the principles of driving an ambulance, very similar to those of driving a fire appliance. Standards of driving at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service are very high, and we aim to be the best driver on the road, not necessarily the fastest, but nothing prepares you for the first time you have a patient in the back. I knew it was very important to be “smooth and steady” so that the paramedic who was in the back, working on the patient, could treat them effectively.”

All firefighters were trained to respond under the supervision of a SCAS clinician, who took the lead on all medical decisions and actions. They were provided with all the necessary PPE.

Pre-existing relationships forged through the Thames Valley Collaboration Group complemented the development of the Joint Deployment Plan, the legal and contractual agreement for firefighters to support SCAS.

The arrangement was aligned to the Tripartite Agreement between the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), and the Fire and Rescue Services National Employers. This enabled firefighters to volunteer to carry out additional activities during the COVID-19 response phase beyond the normal scope of the role.

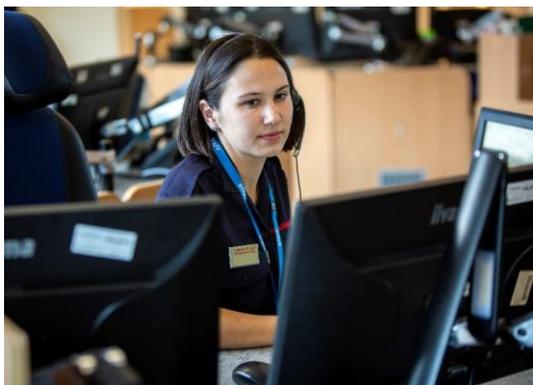
Lasting relationships between SCAS and the fire and rescue services have already been developed and there will be joint training scenarios in the future.

Rod Dacombe, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

“One of the greatest benefits of the secondment was the informal conversations we had in moments of down-time. It really helped the mutual understanding of our roles. I now approach multi-agency incidents differently. I understand what the paramedics want to achieve and how they will go about doing it. I also understand that different services can find different solutions to the same challenge and that can be enormously helpful. “

Thames Valley Fire Control Service - COVID-19 Control Measures

At the start of the pandemic, the three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services worked closely to ensure that Thames Valley Fire Control Service staff and premises was as secure as possible to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and support the staff health, safety and wellbeing when in the workplace.



The existing relationship between the three Senior Responsible Officers, which has been developed during five years of collaboration through the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Coordination Group was invaluable. The Thames Valley Collaboration Group operational alignment project also ensured the resilience of a small, but critical staff group.

Milton Keynes Blue Light Hub and Crowthorne Community Fire Station

We have continued to deliver projects to support even closer collaboration, despite the pandemic.



BFRS moved into the new Blue Light Hub in Milton Keynes on 30 June 2020, despite COVID-19. TVP, SCAS and NHS Blood and Transplant will join them in the new building later this year.

The hub's design promotes engagement between the three services. It includes flexible working spaces for all services, informal breakout spaces to promote collaboration, training rooms and facilities, and a restaurant for staff to meet informally.

Crowthorne Community Fire Station

Royal Berkshire's second tri-service community fire station at Crowthorne was also completed during the pandemic and went fully operational in early May.



It provides a shared location for RBFRS, TVP and SCAS.

Despite many challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, the contractors worked within Government construction industry guidelines to safely complete the project to deliver the project on time and budget.

Thames Valley Collaborative Effecting Entry

The three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services, in partnership with TVP and SCAS, have continued to collaborate during the COVID-19 pandemic to effect entry to private property for a medical response.

This has enabled firefighters to help clinicians from SCAS to gain access to properties where people are in need of medical assistance and are locked inside their homes, unable to let them in. This initiative was started three years ago, as part of the Thames Valley Collaboration Group operational alignment project.

Using firefighters instead of officers from TVP to effect entry, enables a faster medical response, which leads to faster medical intervention and a higher survival rate. This not only provides better care for the patients initially, but can lead to a more rapid recovery, a reduction in the length of any potential hospital stay, and reduces the cost to the NHS. It also reduces damage to the properties, because of the use of equipment that is always carried on fire engines.

The number of hours saved by TVP is estimated at more than 200 hours per year, which generated significant savings in police time. For SCAS crews, there is a reduction in time spent waiting for entry to properties, and therefore with quicker intervention, this in turn leads to faster re-deployment.

Thames Valley Collaboration Group – the immediate future

The Thames Valley Collaboration Programme is a programme of work which evidences how the political leadership are ensuring compliance with our statutory duty under the Act. It also allows us to demonstrate how we are maximising opportunities to drive efficiency and effectiveness, in the interest of public safety.

Priority activity currently includes four distinct projects:

- Operational Alignment
- Specialist Fire Protection Services
- Fire Investigation
- Procurement

The challenges of responding to COVID- 19 have been unprecedented. We have all had to find new ways of working and some useful lessons have been learned. As these examples have shown, collaboration during the pandemic has been invaluable.

In the future, the Thames Valley Collaboration Group will continue to deliver our collaborative commitments. We will address the challenges of COVID-19 by working directly together, and as part of the LRF. In this way we will ensure that we provide a more efficient and effective service to our communities.