

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE		
Title	Response to Committee's recommendations	
Key Decision	No	Item No. 5b
Ward	All	
Contributors	Keeley Smith, Borough Commander of Lewisham, London Fire Brigade	
Class	Part 1	Date: 25 January 2016

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 Following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2013, the following recommendation was made to the LFB:

*In 2014/15 and in 2015/16 (to date) the six minute target for getting a first appliance to an incident has not been met in the Bellingham, Downham and Grove Park wards of Lewisham. The LFB should focus its attention on understanding and addressing the reasons behind this failure. This should include considering any impact caused by the removal of Forest Hill's second appliance and the closure of Downham Fire Station; and considering what mitigating action might be taken to improve attendance times in these areas.*

- 1.2 This report is in response to that recommendation.

## 2. Report

- 2.1 Within the London Safety Plan 5, there was a series of proposed cost savings in order for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to save £34.1M which resulted in the closing of 10 fire stations, one of which was Downham fire station. This was implemented on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014.
- 2.2 Additionally, Forest Hill's pump has been removed from station since August 2013 along with 12 other pumping appliances across London for contingency fire cover in the event of strike action.
- 2.3 At the July meeting it was highlighted that the target for getting a first appliance to an incident within an average of six minutes has not been met in the Bellingham, Downham and Grove Park wards of Lewisham in 2014/15 and in 2015/16 (data to July 2015) and to consider the impact caused by the removal of Forest Hill's second appliance and the closure of Downham Fire Station. Additionally to consider what mitigating action might be taken to improve attendance times in these areas.
- 2.4 For reasons I will explain below, the fact the LFB does not meet its attendance times in some wards, is not a failure.
- 2.5 I set out below the most up to date figures for attendance times in Lewisham wards. Care is needed when using ward data as some wards have very few incidents, so performance can be skewed by a few longer attendance times.

## First appliance

Ward	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Bellingham	05:54	06:21	06:26	06:20
Blackheath	04:43	04:32	04:53	04:47
Brockley	05:28	05:45	05:31	05:43
Catford South	05:33	05:23	05:53	05:40
Crofton Park	03:40	04:32	04:26	04:28
Downham	05:25	05:33	07:08	06:37
Evelyn	04:10	04:18	04:49	05:02
Forest Hill	05:11	05:30	05:33	05:43
Grove Park	04:48	05:27	06:13	06:24
Ladywell	04:46	05:15	04:56	05:06
Lee Green	03:51	04:10	04:37	04:27
Lewisham Central	03:58	04:05	04:13	04:10
New Cross	04:59	04:58	05:06	05:05
Perry Vale	04:02	04:19	04:19	04:49
Rushey Green	04:36	04:41	05:00	04:44
Sydenham	05:51	06:11	06:00	06:07
Telegraph Hill	05:05	04:32	05:03	05:17
Whitefoot	05:10	05:38	07:22	07:25
	<b>04:45</b>	<b>04:58</b>	<b>05:18</b>	<b>05:19</b>

## Second appliance

Ward	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Bellingham	07:29	07:17	07:43	08:28
Blackheath	06:29	06:16	06:20	07:03
Brockley	06:47	06:40	06:37	06:46
Catford South	07:22	06:52	06:43	06:53
Crofton Park	04:55	06:29	07:30	06:39
Downham	07:14	07:39	08:08	07:40
Evelyn	06:44	06:52	07:02	07:01
Forest Hill	06:24	07:09	08:49	09:09
Grove Park	06:27	06:42	07:25	07:38
Ladywell	06:48	06:38	06:28	06:59
Lee Green	06:57	06:11	06:55	07:25
Lewisham Central	05:51	06:08	06:36	06:35
New Cross	06:18	06:18	06:13	06:09
Perry Vale	04:50	06:48	07:38	08:20
Rushey Green	05:41	06:39	06:42	06:54
Sydenham	06:41	07:48	07:34	07:49
Telegraph Hill	07:49	06:25	05:52	05:50
Whitefoot	07:54	08:09	08:14	08:24
	<b>06:23</b>	<b>06:46</b>	<b>07:04</b>	<b>07:11</b>

2.6 Also included within the data are those attendance times for 2012/13 which was prior to the closing of Downham fire station and the removal of Forest Hill's second

pumping appliance for contingency purposes. This therefore provides a good comparison for performance in subsequent years.

- 2.7 It is important to be clear that the Authority has a London-wide attendance standard to get a first fire engine to an emergency incident within an average of 6 minutes, and a second (where needed) within an average of 8 minutes. The Authority seeks to meet these average attendance times at borough level, but the commitment is to meet the attendance standard London-wide.
- 2.8 The Authority has been transparent in publishing attendance time performance for wards, but the Authority has made no commitment to meet the attendance standard at ward level, and there will be many wards in London where it is not possible to achieve the attendance standard. The Fire Commissioner, in presenting the Authority's statement of assurance for 2013/14, made this clear (LFEPA report FEP2385) and he stated that the Brigade has always planned emergency cover on a London-wide basis. He said that in order to achieve the attendance standards within every ward in London, it is estimated that more than 100 additional fire engines would be required and 84 new fire stations. The cost in extra staffing alone would be some £90 million, with the cost of new fire stations and fire engines on top of this.
- 2.9 Although there are a few wards where we do not meet our average attendance time target, we do meet this for the Lewisham borough overall.
- 2.10 It is important to realise that safety in the event of fire, does not solely rely on fire engines responding to emergency incidents, but relies on an integrated approach with the LFB's response work, alongside its prevention and protection work. Our prevention work is about targeting vulnerable people, those most at risk from fire, and trying to prevent fires happening in the first place. Education is the key by informing residents how to prevent fires occurring and by fitting smoke alarms and regularly testing them so that if a fire occurs, the occupant is given warning and can either evacuate or raise the alarm sooner.
- 2.11 The Brigade has continued to meet its London-wide average attendance time target of six minutes for a first fire engine and eight minutes for a second, whilst the 13 fire engines have been out of service. If the 13 engines were returned to service, it is believed that this would improve average London wide attendance times by around four seconds for the first engine and by around 18 seconds for the second fire engine.
- 2.12 With regards to the removal of the 13 fire appliances, there is a Mayoral directive imposed to prevent these being returned to station due to further savings required of £8.1m to balance the LFEPA budget for 2016/2017.
- 2.13 The Fire Brigade's Union announced in December 2015 that it had suspended their strike action over a dispute with the Government on pensions (until Summer 2017) therefore allowing the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to stand down the contingency arrangement for strike action thus saving £1.7m in 2016/17. However this still leaves a budget gap for LFEPA of £6.4m.
- 2.14 There is currently a public consultation for two options to achieve these savings:-

**Option A** recommends putting the 13 fire engines back into service but making savings by establishing alternate crewing at stations with some special appliances. Alternate crewing means that in stations where there is a fire engine and a special appliance, such as an aerial ladder platform, there would be one crew for both

appliances. This is the preferred option by the majority of members of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

**Option B** recommends the permanent removal of the 13 fire engines and reinvesting some of the savings into increasing the number of staff available to crew Fire Rescue Units (FRUs). Fire rescue units are specialist rescue vehicles. All FRUs are equipped with heavy lifting and cutting tools for use in a range of rescue scenarios and crews are trained in extended duration breathing apparatus. This is the recommended option by the London Fire Commissioner.

- 2.15 Both options would ensure that no fire stations close and no firefighters would be made compulsorily redundant.
- 2.16 Until the conclusion of the public consultation, and the fire authority consider the matter further in the light of consultation, it is uncertain which option will be selected. I along with every other London Fire Brigade Borough Commander has sent out details of these options to our partners for further dissemination so encourage as many responses to the consultation, as possible.
- 2.17 Whether Forest Hill's second appliance is returned is dependent on the findings of this public consultation, and further decisions of the fire authority following consultation, and the consultation does not close until 1<sup>st</sup> February 2016.
- 2.18 Finally, recently the London Fire Brigade has changed its mobilizing system to one that is geographic, meaning that using GPS, the nearest fire appliance is now mobilised to incidents where as previously, mobilisation was based upon station's ground. This system was only implemented at the end of the 2015 and therefore it is too early to say how this will impact on the attendance times for Lewisham Borough.

Keeley Smith  
Borough Commander of Lewisham Borough  
London Fire Brigade