

Dear Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

## EXETER STRATEGIC BOARD

Communications & Engagement  
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service  
Service Headquarters  
The Knowle  
Clyst St George  
Exeter  
EX3 0NW

**Please ask for:** Howard Bassett  
**Direct Dial:** 01392 265107  
**Email:** [howard.bassett@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:howard.bassett@exeter.gov.uk)  
**Our ref:**  
**Your ref:**  
**Date:** 20 September 2019

[safertogetherprogramme@dsfire.gov.uk](mailto:safertogetherprogramme@dsfire.gov.uk)

## DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY CONSULTATION

The Exeter Strategic Board, in considering the current options for change consultation initiated by the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (DSFRA), believes, that the options do not provide suitable and sufficient assessment or information to be able to justify the changes proposed:

- Consultation data used to justify the changes is insufficient as it focuses on 'preventable' deaths, while failing to consider injuries, or building, environmental and economic damage arising from fires and the other emergency incidents firefighters attend.
- The data is further flawed because it allocates numbers of incidents only to the fire station initially responding to a call, whereas fires and other emergencies may require multiple appliances from different areas, and/or repeated crew attendances.
- The data makes an unproven and unacceptable assumption that if proposed changes were made, all appliance assets would suddenly be available 100% of the time (compared to the current figure of 80% availability). This will simply not be the case unless a more reliable on-call firefighter system is implemented in advance of any changes, and in the absence of this, risk would likely increase even further.
- Serious life threatening and life changing injuries caused by incidents such as car accidents dealt with by the fire services were also not recorded and should be. The consultation does not give any positive information about how closures in areas would be improved for example by the provision of a new fire station that would give better cover than two stations being proposed for closure.

The Exeter Strategic Board was concerned that no information had been provided on how much of the savings realised by the proposed changes would be re-invested in the front-line service, or how the on-call system would be improved so availability could be increased from the current 80% to the projected 100%.

Exeter Strategic Board is calling on the Government to amend its attitude to local authority financing, and empower them to deliver the services and investment that citizens are entitled to expect, but nevertheless notes that the DSFRA currently holds record levels (over £38m) of reserves built up during the last ten years of Government-imposed cuts. Exeter Strategic Board also notes comments from senior fire officers:-

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/closing-fire-stations-proposals-not-3027694.amp>)

That these proposals were not forced on the Service by Government austerity cuts (notwithstanding these have been severe, amounting to a cut of almost 50% of Central Government funding since 2010).

Exeter Strategic Board is deeply concerned that reduced capacity and resilience from permanently losing fire appliance cover at Budleigh Salterton, Crediton, Exmouth and Topsham would mean the loss of adequate response for the needs of an increasing population and development in the Exeter area (e.g. 20,000 new homes to be built by 2040).

For all the above reasons, Exeter Strategic Board calls upon the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority (DSFRA) to reject in full all of the options proposed, and for any future proposals for change to include more comprehensive, detailed, specific and meaningful information as an integral part of the consultation process.

The Exeter Strategic Board was also disappointed in the lack of attendance from the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority and refusal to engage with a major stakeholder. The decision has resulted in the Exeter Strategic Board, being unable to examine the detail of any of their proposals. The Exeter Strategic Board notes but cannot support the overall cover loss within Exeter.

The Options proposed do not provide sufficient detail for the improvements claimed, particularly information on how the on-call system would be improved, how extra prevention and protection will be achieved, or how much would actually be re-invested into the service. It fails to recognise the excellent work Firefighters already do to prevent injuries, building damage and environmental damage, and to respond to all types of incidents.

The Exeter Strategic Board feels that the data given in the consultation is flawed and has an unachievable expectation, in that there is an assumption made that after the cuts, all assets will be available at all times, giving the false impression that the risk of fire deaths will reduce if the proposals are agreed, whereas statistically it is likely that the risk would increase. The revised attendance times make no reference to properties that may be disadvantaged by the proposed changes.

It should also be noted that if the proposals were to be adopted, around 1/3 of the residents of Devon and Somerset would see a slower response from the Fire and Rescue service. As such the Exeter Strategic Board calls upon DSFRS authority members to reject in full the options proposed.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Philip Bialyk**  
**Chair of Exeter Strategic Board and Leader of Exeter City Council**