



Mark Cullinan  
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Please ask for: County Councillor Frank de Molfetta  
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Your Ref: CE/ES/Ltrs-Gen19  
Our Ref:  
Date: 6 August 2014

Dear Mr Cullinan

I am writing in response to your letter dated 26 June 2014.

It is perhaps helpful if I respond to each point using the numbering as set out in your letter.

- (2) As was clearly set out by ACO Russel at the City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Fire Authority have taken the decision to remove a wholetime fire engine from Lancaster, taking into account risk profile of Lancaster both now and in the future

By way of background, due to financial pressures resulting from a 25% reduction in Government grant, at the time of undertaking the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) was seeking to save £10m by 2016/17. This was split with £5m being taken out of support functions and £5m out of frontline services. It should be noted that this figure has since been updated to take account of the latest Local Government Finance Settlement and other funding forecasts and the savings target has now increased to £13m by 2016/17. This is set against £15m savings which have already been made since 2005 largely through a 25% reduction in Wholetime (WT) firefighter posts. Furthermore it is anticipated that the requirement to make savings will continue beyond this time period with latest estimates showing a 35% Government grant cut by 2018.

Given the scale of savings required, LFRS is simply not able to make the required level of savings, without making changes to its emergency response function. Hence, the Emergency Cover Review 2013 presented a number of 'options for change' which the Fire Authority approved at its meeting on 9 December 2013. The Service is now implementing a three year plan with changes to fire engines in Lancaster programmed to take place in year 3 (April 2016).

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In accordance with Authority policy, a period of twelve weeks was allocated for consultation (29 July to 20 October 2013) in respect of the ECR and proposals for change. During this period, a comprehensive consultation exercise was undertaken involving staff, partners and service users. This included the use of Public Scrutiny Forums facilitated by Opinion Research Services and Open Public Meetings, which in the case of Lancaster, was held on 16 September 2013. Attendance at the public meeting was poor with only 11 attendees, the majority of whom were LFRS staff. Outside of these events the Authority received a number of written responses, 6 in the case of Lancaster, one of which was a letter from Lancaster City Council dated 16 September 2013.

Upon completion of the consultation process all of the written correspondence received, along with feedback from staff and the Public Scrutiny Panels/Open Public Meetings, was carefully considered and presented in full to the Authority's Planning Committee on 21 November 2013. The comments received in relation to Lancaster focused on a number of key themes: large geographical area, Lancaster University, planned future development i.e. expansion of Heysham Port, Heysham to M6 Link and increasing population. Indeed, the letter from the City Council made reference to a number of these themes.

As ACO Russel explained to the City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee all of these points were carefully considered prior to final decisions being made. Equally, there is sometimes an incorrect assumption made that themes such as the above, translate across into increased risk and activity, activity in the context of increased demand on LFRS resources - this is not the case. Our risk profiling tells us that the majority of fires across Lancashire occur in older, more traditional housing stock i.e. houses in multiple occupation in the West End of Morecambe as a point in case, and not necessarily in new homes which are built to modern building regulation standards including the requirement for hard wired smoke detection. The infrastructure in North Lancashire, for example, Heysham Power Station, Heysham Port, Lancaster University and the hospital are well managed sites all demonstrating a strong record health and safety record of actively managing their processes and associated risks.

I acknowledge the fact that changes to the built environment take place, something which can be applied to a greater or lesser extent to other parts of Lancashire. It is for this very reason that our ECR is undertaken every 3 to 4 years to ensure that resources remain matched to Lancashire's risk profile. Whilst we remain cognisant of such changes we do so by adopting a risk based approach. The simple fact remains that Lancaster are attending 36% less operational incidents over the period 2010/13 compared to 2007/10. It is also worth noting that Lancaster's second wholetime (WT) fire engine is the quietest WT fire engine in the County, in terms of the number of operational incidents it attends, when compared to the Service's four other fire stations which have two WT fire engines.

Taking this historical data alongside changes (existing and proposed) to the built environment, the professional opinion was that Lancaster should maintain two fire engines, albeit the configuration, should be one wholetime fire engine and one retained duty system fire engine, as opposed to two wholetime fire

engines. The professional view remains unaltered and to a great extent has to do in light of my comments regarding the financial environment in which LFRS is being required to operate within. Finally, I understood the view of the City Council whilst not supportive of the decision to remove a wholetime fire engine, was that *"the option of keeping the second engine but with retained firefighters would seem a reasonable one, assuming that assurances were given that the wider factors had been taken into account"*. The assurance I give you is that absolutely this has been the case not just in the context of Lancaster but in all locations where there are changes to fire cover.

Regarding the other points:

- 2(i) The Fire Authority, in conjunction with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, remains content with its decision given the imperative to find savings. Plans to remove a WT fire engine and replace it with an RDS fire engine will continue with implementation by April 2016.
- 2(ii) Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service will remain receptive to requests to engage with district councils, but will not as a matter of course report all reviews to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Service will continue to follow the Fire Authority's Consultation Strategy central to which is proportionate reporting / consultation which is communities led.
- 2(iii) As requested, a copy of my letter will be forwarded to Eric Ollerenshaw MP and Brandon Lewis MP (Department for Communities and Local Government).

Yours sincerely



County Councillor Frank de Molfetta  
Chairman  
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

