
Minutes

RSN Rural Fire & Rescue Group Meeting

Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Friday, 1st October 2021
Time: 2:00 pm – 3:00pm

Attendance & Apologies

Attendance:

Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service
Andy Bevon	Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
Neil Griffiths	Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Adrian Jenkins	Pixel Financial Management
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Martin Reohorn	Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

Apologies:

Rob MacDougall	Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
Adam Matthews	Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

Presentation by Adrian Jenkins, Founder & Chief Analyst, Pixel Financial Management

Adrian Jenkins updated those in attendance about the general position regarding Local Government funding and the position he saw in relation to the Fire Service. It was uncertain what hand the Home Office might want to play in terms of a review of the current system. Due to delays caused by Brexit and COVID-19, there was no progress made on the Fair Funding/ Needs and Resources Review. In terms of Local Government generally, the intended implementation of the review is likely to be delayed until 2025 or 2026. Adrian concluded it was worth establishing a rural case in relation to rural Fire & Rescue services.

Main Points from the RSN Rural Fire & Rescue Group Meeting

- Government was leaning towards formulae in other service areas that tended to be far more simplistic with data led varying inputs.
- If any representational activity was to be contemplated Chief Fire Officers needed to be well educated about case as their input and support would be critical.
- It was felt that the urban area deprivation factor has been overemphasised, creating a skewed outcome where rural deprivation has not been considered.
- Some felt that coastal recognition might receive more questioning than previously.

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- There seemed to be a national wish from Fire Chiefs for a more modelled formula with more 'data' points, similarly, as already implemented in other service areas, generating generally fairer results.
- It was felt that whilst it was clear that London had achieved too much recognition in the current formula, achieving the necessary political will would be difficult. Rallying a strong body of rural MPs behind any case would be critical.
- How do you make sure rural fire and rescue services can do everything that others can do without proper recognition of the inevitable additional costs incurred?
- It was impossible for rural authorities to meet standard response times because of the need to rely on off-site retained staff who had to travel to get to the Fire Station, and because of the on average additional distance that had to be covered by responding to call outs. Failure to give proper financial recognition could only serve to exacerbate this problem.
- There needs to be recognition of the on-call firefighter system in rural areas, which is currently struggling to be as effective as it had been. Retained fire fighters now felt underpaid. Higher wages being achieved in other sectors e.g., haulage was beginning to bite.

Conclusions

It was decided that there was merit in considering pursuing this matter with colleagues. Graham Biggs offered to work with Adrian Jenkins to write the first draft of a questionnaire to distribute to all RSN Fire Group Members. The questionnaire would be in two parts. The first part would examine the financial considerations; the second part would outline the social case (including governance issues) that was also considered to be of major importance. The draft questionnaire would be circulated to all attendees at this meeting for comment before distribution to the wider membership.

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