

## **Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee – Wholetime Operational Firefighter Benchmarking**

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### **Background:**

At the corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee, benchmarking information was shared which showed Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) to have one of the lowest proportions of Wholetime firefighters based on the Rural/Urban classifications of Fire and Rescue Services as defined by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

<b>% Wholetime firefighters of total firefighters</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021 until end of Q2</b>
Gloucestershire	49.3%	46.7%	48.9%	46.6%	47.3%
Significantly Rural Comparator Group	59.9%	60.2%	60.0%	61.8%	
Quartile	●	●	●	●	
Of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's (GFRS) 21 stations, the majority are staffed entirely by on-call firefighters. Of the remaining five stations, two are staffed by full-time firefighters and three have a mixture of both full and on-call firefighters. The immediate response is designed to cover areas where higher call rates are experienced due to population and building numbers. GFRS are in the bottom quartile with a lower percentage than it's comparators.					

### **Introduction:**

Benchmarking has a number of benefits, including how well GFRS performs compared to other Fire and Rescue Services, it can identify areas for improvement or performance gaps and it helps to set performance expectations. That said, prior to any benchmarking, there is a requirement to ensure the following; would benchmarking enhance the performance of GFRS, is it the right thing to do for GFRS, would GFRS see the same results, is the comparison equal?

It should be noted, that the comparison presented at the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee was not to show poor performance, just a statement of fact, and as such, was not a performance benchmark.

### **Comparison Groups:**

In the Police, as part of their data comparators, they use 'Most Similar Groups' (MSGs). MSGs are groups of police force areas that have been found to be the most similar to each other based on an analysis of demographic, social and economic characteristics which relate to crime. HMICFRS states that:

*MSGs are designed to help make a fairer comparison between police forces than the England and Wales average can sometimes offer. Although caution should still be used in making black and white comparisons between forces, even in the same MSG.*

Previously, in Fire, there used to be 'Family Groups' that were based on the similar parameters of the Police's MSGs, however these became obsolete due to Services combining, budgets changing and the groups not being reviewed. Family groups are currently under review by the NFCC and consultation process is due to start within Q3 of this year.

The comparator group used for the overall wholetime percentage was based on the DEFRA classification which is used by the Home Office to compare data sets, such as, response times. The classification is based on the following parameters:

- Predominantly rural: 50% or more of their area is 'rural'
- Significantly rural: less than 74% of their area is 'urban' and 26% or more of their area is 'rural'
- Predominantly urban: 74% or more of their area is 'urban'

This comparison therefore does not take into consideration social and economic characteristics, demographic or risk analysis.

The other factor that changes this comparison is that currently 40-wholetime firefighters provide on-call cover. If we were to make an assumption that this figure provided 20 full time equivalent posts, then this would reduce comparison figure to 49% wholetime and 51% on-call.

### **Resourcing to Risk:**

As part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (2018), every Service has a requirement to produce a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) that identifies how a service will resource risk (this includes demand). As part of previous CRMP's, the Service has carried out predictive analysis and modelling to identify the current resourcing requirements based on the risks identified at that time. The Service also has a comprehensive degradation plan, built on analysis, to mitigate against situations that sit outside of the scope of the CRMP, which impact on resource availability e.g. Covid-19.

To ensure that the Service has a greater understanding of its risks, an in-depth [Community Risk Profile](#) of Gloucestershire has been produced. In addition to this, as part of the latest CRMP for 2022-2026, the Service has committed to completing a predictive analysis and modelling project that will cover the Service existing fire cover, specialist appliances and emergency medical response arrangements using the risks identified in the Community Risk Profile report. This is to ensure that the Service has the required number of resources, with the right people and equipment, at the right times and in the right locations.

### **Summary:**

In determining the resourcing/staffing requirements of any Fire and Rescue Service, there should be an in-depth analysis, which would not be based on any single performance or benchmarking metric taken in isolation. The research, analysis and the findings from the predictive analysis and modelling project will help to ensure that the Service has a greater understanding of its resourcing and personnel requirements

for the future. The attached data tables give a small insight to how further analysis is required to establish the factors around resourcing to risk. These include firefighters per population, incidents per population, incidents per comparison group and the comparison between wholetime and on-call numbers. All of these are useful metrics; however, they should be used in conjunction with one another to form richer insights.