



The Sustainable Communities Act proposal form

Using this form

This form should be used to submit proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act to the LGA for short listing. Please complete all sections and then **email a copy to selector@lga.gov.uk**. These must be received by **July 31st 2009**, and you will receive confirmation that the form has been received.

Section 1: Proposal Summary

Proposing Authority

1.1 Lead Authority name

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

1.2 Is this proposal submitted by this authority alone, or is it a joint proposal with other local authorities? (If joint please list authorities)

The Authority is the Sole Proposer

1.3 Who is the lead contact (s) in the authority for this proposal? Please provide email address and telephone number - *The LGA will direct any enquiries to this contact.*

Harjit Hunjan

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Supporting Organisations

1.4 Please provide details below of supporting organisations to your proposal

Maidenhead and District Chamber of Commerce
Windsor District Chamber of Commerce
RBWM Community Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership)
Federation Small Businesses

Summary of your proposal

1.5 Please enter your summary below (*word limit 1000 words*)

This proposal seeks to transfer the financial and operational responsibility for the local fire and rescue services into the control of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) Unitary Authority from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS), so that the local community has direct influence over the priorities affecting front line fire service delivery.

This community recognises that certain vital services are essential to the sustainability of the social and economic wellbeing of our unique Royal Borough, which has a strong economy dependent upon attracting historical and cultural tourism.

The fire and rescue service has been identified as a vital service. Protecting the environment, attractions and people within the Royal Borough is clearly of significant importance to our community. A recent survey provided an extremely strong view that local people wish to have local control, through local representatives, to ensure this service is focused on meeting local needs. 65% of respondents said they would like the Local Authority to manage the Fire and Rescue Service.

This is in keeping with the aims of devolving power to local communities, allowing priorities over economic wellbeing to be determined locally and supporting greater transparency over the use of local taxation. It is understood that action may be required by the Secretary of State to facilitate this by action to vary or revoke the Fire Services Act 1947 and the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 so that the Royal Borough is established as a Fire Authority Scheme.

The proposal meets the key criteria that local management of the fire and rescue service is practical, sustainable and affordable. A transition phase will ensure continuity of service, through agreements for mutual aid at incidents and continued access to essential support structures.

A proposed substantial reduction of local overnight fire and rescue has alarmed our community and there is strong local opposition. This is evidenced by a survey undertaken by BMG where an overwhelming 65% responded that they would prefer the Local Authority to manage the service. When specifically asked about protecting the overnight service this rose to 73%. An indication of the strength of feelings is that when presented with a range of options, 66% of respondents preferred the service to be managed by the Local Authority while only 12% chose RBFRS.

There is a wider context of a public perception that the priorities of regional public service providers, such as Thames Valley Police, the PCT and RBFRS are increasingly distant, with weak democratic accountability to the residents of the RBWM. These structures are not co-terminus with the Royal Borough, and there are issues with applying local influence on the public bodies beyond the control of the Local Authority.

The reduction of services is of considerable concern and a matter of local confidence. There is a significant perception of a lack of understanding of the risks to RBWM's reputation, both historic and to the local economy, should a major incident happen here.

1. There are over 7.5m tourists a year to the area with around 750,000 staying overnight. Windsor Castle is one of the UK's major attractions with 1m visitors, as is Legoland with over 1.8m visitors. Over 900,000 visitors arrive by coach each year.

2. Regional Authorities are not always conscious of factors known to the local population that have a bearing upon the services they need to provide. For example, although Windsor has a smaller population than Maidenhead, it has almost 40% more retail space and more people working there due to the many visitors. Another example is that RBWM has 7,000 registered businesses - twice that of Reading.

3. We have 941 listed buildings, 17 scheduled ancient monuments and 9 historic parks and gardens. Local people are further concerned about protecting life and property in boarding schools, multi-occupancy houses, guest houses and during major annual events held locally.

4. Tourism employs over 7,000 people and generates over £499m in the local economy each year.

5. The 1992 fire at Windsor castle is cited as one of 3 major incidents on the RBFRS website, where major damage occurred to some of the most historic parts of the building, the largest inhabited castle in the world.

6. The proposal to reduce local fire services is the equivalent of a 19% reduction in spending on front line fire service in the RBWM. However the 2008/09 Accounts for RBFRS declare an underspend on corporate revenue budgets by £1.1m. The balance of priority between public-facing front line services and corporate back-office are not subject to the level of democratic scrutiny that our local population would feel appropriate.

7. RBFRS suggest they can respond to events from stations outside the Royal Borough, in particular Slough. This does not provide our community with confidence, as there are no guaranteed response times and local residents are keenly aware of the risks associated with relying upon the M4, M25, A404(M) and A308(M) as clear routes. Slough is also the busiest station in Berkshire.

8. Our locality provides threats of flooding along the River Thames; 12,000 properties are deemed high risk. Air traffic, tourism and terror incidents are among added concerns due to the proximity of Heathrow, the safety of Windsor Castle and the two Army Barracks.

A successful outcome of this proposal would be to demonstrate the key principles of listening to and putting communities in control. It would protect permanent local employment of £500,000 per annum; increase local accountability and involvement in setting priorities for the fire and rescue service; and provide our community with confidence that significant risks to the economic, social and historic wellbeing of the Royal Borough were within their determination.

(936 words)

Section 2: About your proposal

Impact on sustainability (*word limit 2000 words*)

2.1 Please explain how your proposal promotes sustainability as defined locally (for example in your Sustainable Communities Strategy or LAA)

We consider the transfer of direct control of the fire and rescue service to the Local Authority to be an excellent example of the process and intentions underpinning the Sustainable Communities Act and at the heart of the public service reform agenda, as it will transfer power to front-line professionals and to our residents who wish to play a greater role in shaping the service. This will promote greater local democracy, participation and increased local responsibility.

The Royal Borough is acting as Community Advocate based on overwhelming public opinion demonstrated through 2 petitions with thousands of signatures, an early day motion in Parliament, Press campaigns by 2 local Newspapers and a survey that provides a mandate that 65% of our residents would prefer the fire and rescue service to be managed directly by their local representatives. All of which demonstrates that this is seen as a matter vital to local sustainability.

Lack of local community influence over centralised, concentrated centres of power is no clearer than in this case. There is significant disenchantment with distant decision making over issues that are clearly of major concern to our local citizens. The White Paper outlined the intention to address increased local accountability with the Police and the Health Service. The Fire and Rescue Service is equally significant in this respect.

Establishing the Royal Borough as a Fire Authority would shift power, influence and responsibility into the hands of our local citizens so that they are active and involved; and have control and ownership over decisions. Local people would have greater say in determining where and how their local resources are spent.

The Royal Borough has a strategic commitment to provide high performing, responsive, services focused and based on a clear understanding of the needs of our residents. We have undertaken a reasonable review of costs and produced an outline feasibility study to ensure the local management of the fire and rescue service is practical and sustainable. This has been based upon financial data provided by RBFRS and expert opinion from a widely experienced ex-Chief Fire Officer. The transfer of 4 Fire Stations with a total annual expenditure (direct and corporate) of £5.7m would be subject to a formal process of due diligence and transition planning to ensure that continuity of front line service delivery is safeguarded.

386 words

2.2 Over which geographic area will your proposal impact? (e.g. neighbourhood, town, city, sub-region)?

The Local Authority Area of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, nearby communities and East Berkshire

2.3 Who would benefit from your proposal?

The residents and businesses in the Royal Borough who are overwhelmingly disenchanted with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority. The town of Windsor and the nearby communities (some within other Authority areas) by the maintenance of through night cover. The 7.5m tourists and 750,000 who stay overnight through maintaining the current speed and level of response to protect the places they wish to visit.

There would be greater community involvement, increased local focus and innovation in setting the priorities of a directly delivered fire and rescue service.

2.4 What steps will you take to mitigate any adverse affects on sustainability from your proposal (if relevant)?

Local Fire Stations are the points of service delivery but they do not operate in isolation and at all times an Operational F&RS must be maintained before, during and after the transfer. A complex background infrastructure will need to be accommodated within the RBWM F&RS Operating model or “bought into” through Service Level Agreements. The RBWM F&RS is envisaged to be a smaller scale version of a County Fire Authority. A process of due diligence will be undertaken to establish amongst other things, full costs and grant income; the asset values and investment profile for new equipment. Transfers of this nature have occurred when Fire Authorities have changed their boundaries.

2.5 What project, activities and changes would take place in your area if your proposal was successful?

The accountability chain within RBWM F&RS would be considerably shorter and the ability to drive forward local initiatives consequently enhanced. A small, compact professional brigade has the advantage of developing and delivering locally with a customised approach and speed that the larger organisation find increasingly difficult.

For example, a crucial challenge for all Fire Services is the turnover and recruitment of retained fire staff. The focus and networking of our local senior fire officers with locally employed people should ensure a more sustainable level of retained fire officers.

It is anticipated that local involvement will be increased through

1. Locally customised Community Fire Safety Projects
2. Creating a Citizens Fire panel
3. Regular local Fire Safety Campaigns (with Press Releases, Open days, Practical Fire safety demonstrations)
4. Economical Fire Safety Training for Businesses in the area
5. Establishing a Sprinkler Campaign Group to offer advice and assistance to construction groups, housing groups etc

The local focus will offer opportunities to explore new ways of supporting our local community that recognise, for example, the growing trends of ageing and living alone, such as working with the Health Service on “first response”, where fire officers are trained on CPR and respond when they are geographically closer to the incident than paramedics.

2.6 Does your proposal involve transfers of responsibilities between public bodies in the area? If so what are these? What budgetary implications might be involved?

The transfer of responsibility would be from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Unitary Authority. In the absence of useful information in the Local Spending Reports we will carry out a process of due diligence, which we are confident will support our assessment of the benefits of this proposal. With the Royal Borough directly running most of the service it is expected that the ongoing budgetary implications would be broadly cost neutral, providing equitable access to grant funding for the Royal Borough is assured.

2.7 Please identify which, if any, of the issues authorities are required to have regard to, are relevant to this proposal and include any data and information which you feel would be helpful in the assessment process.

a) the provision of local services

Local citizens have overwhelmingly indicated that they wish to have local control and accountability for the provision of the Fire & Rescue Service. The proposal will maintain and improve the provision of services locally leading to a greater engagement with and focus upon the delivery of local needs.

b) the extent to which the volume and value of goods and services that are- i) offered for sale, ii) procured by public bodies, and are produced within 30 miles (or any lesser distance as may be specified by a local authority in respect of its area) of their place of sale of the boundary of the public body.

Consumables will be procured locally

c) the rate of increase in the growth and marketing of organic forms of food production and the local economy

n/a

d) measures to promote reasonable access by all local people to a supply of food is adequate in terms of both amount and nutritional value

n/a

e) the number of local jobs

This proposal will seek to maintain and enhance current levels of fire service provision for the benefit of all communities and residents. The proposal will sustain local employment in F&RS in the order of £500,000 pa by maintaining the through night cover.

f) measures to conserve energy and increase the quantity of energy supplies which are produced from sustainable sources within a 30 mile radius of the region in which they are consumed

A locally based fire service will ensure greater levels of energy conservation and associated reductions of energy consumption and transfers.

g) measure taken to reduce the level of road traffic including, but not restricted to, local public transport provision, measures to promote walking and cycling and measures to decrease the amount of product miles

A locally based fire service could save thousands of miles of road mileage compared to a response only from out of Borough, supporting the Borough's Sustainable Travel Plan.

h) the increase in social inclusion, including an increase in involvement in local democracy

Local public opinion is clearly the origin of this proposal. It will have a direct effect of involving people in local democracy, as the service would operate under local democratic accountability and control, and increase resident's belief in their ability to influence decisions locally (NI4).

i) measures to increase mutual aid and other community projects

A locally based fire service will have a direct link into the Community Partnership and supporting ambition groups, and will work with the community to reduce the number of recorded fires and casualties amongst vulnerable adults. The local service will continue with the mutual aid arrangements in place with other Fire Services.

j) measures designed to decrease emissions of greenhouse gases

A locally based fire service could save thousands of miles of road mileage compared to a response only from out of Borough, saving up to 10 tons of CO₂, supporting the Borough's Carbon Management Strategy.

k) measures designed to increase community health and wellbeing

A locally based fire service will have an enhanced proactive role in the prevention of fires and associated casualties, amongst residents and businesses. It is envisaged it will have a greater community presence, meaning residents and vulnerable adults will be more aware of fire safety, while the "first response" approach will improve life chances for those at risk. A locally based service would have improved response times, which is known to be a key factor in preventing deaths from fires.

l) planning policies which would assist with the purposes of this Act, including new arrangements for the provision of affordable housing

n/a

m) measures to increase the use of local waste materials for the benefit of the community

n/a

Existing Barriers

(Please do not write more than 1000 words for 2.8 and 2.9)

2.8 What are the existing barriers to implementing your proposal?

Fire and rescue services are provided at the Berkshire level, and there is a trend away from local service provision, with increasing centralisation reducing local accountability and trust in the service. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has made substantial efforts to engage with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to ensure an appropriate service level locally, but currently decisions are made remotely with limited democratic accountability.

Local Fire Stations are the points of service delivery but they do not operate in isolation and at all times an Operational F&RS must be maintained before, during and after the transfer. A complex background infrastructure will need to be accommodated within the RBWM F&RS Operating model or "bought into" through Service Level Agreements. The RBWM F&RS is envisaged to be a smaller scale version of a County Fire Authority. A process of due diligence will have to be undertaken to establish amongst other things, full costs and grant income; the asset values and investment profile for new equipment.

2.9 What actions are needed by Government to make your proposal possible?

To grant the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead the powers required by transferring responsibility for maintaining and delivering all fire services to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) Unitary Authority from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS), together with all associated capital and revenue budgets and grant funding. Secretary of State to facilitate this by action to vary or revoke the Fire Services Act 1947 and the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 so that the Royal Borough is established as a Fire Authority Scheme.

Part 3: Local Authority Endorsement

This section should be completed by the proposing local authority. (Under the terms of the act this means a county council in England, a district council (including metropolitan, non metropolitan and unitary authorities), a London borough council, the Common Council of the City of London or the Council of the isles of Scilly)

3.1 Have consultation requirements been met? (500 words max)

Please confirm that your authority has met the statutory requirements for consultation on this proposal, via one or more panels of local representatives and persons from under-represented groups constituted in accordance with the Act and statutory guidance as set out in [Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities](#).

You may wish to describe who has been involved in discussions and development of the proposal (e.g. council, local community organisations and residents groups, parish or town councils, local partnership bodies, local or national organisations, political parties, church and faith organisations, local businesses or chambers of commerce and others).

If you have not done so already please give brief details of relevant panel meetings

Please note if you are submitting a joint application please provide details of consultation and local support across all areas.

The statutory requirements for consultation have been met.

Consultation has included a survey of residents by BMG with our Citizens Panel, account of previous surveys and local opinion, meeting representatives of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) and taking expert advice.

The proposal has been presented to a Cross Party Panel established specifically to meet the requirements of the Act, and to a formal panel of local representatives on 15 July 2009. Stakeholders and under-represented groups were able to present in favour and against the proposition. Members of the Community Partnership were invited, including:

Windsor and Maidenhead Community Foundation (umbrella for faith based and BME organisations in RBWM)

Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action

Maidenhead and District Chambers of Commerce

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS)

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

3.2 What are the views from this consultation? You may wish to provide evidence of local support for your proposal? This might include petitions or letters of support from the public, local councillors, Members of Parliament, businesses, public bodies and agencies? Please describe this evidence below. *(The local authority submitting the proposal is likely to wish to review such material and to summarise its content. Onward submission to the Selector of all original documentation will not normally be required).*

A survey of residents across the Royal Borough, undertaken by BMG, gave an overwhelming 65% responding that they would prefer the Local Authority to manage the fire service. An indication of the strength of feelings is that when presented with a range of options, 66% of respondents preferred the service to be managed by the Local Authority while only 12% chose RBFRS.

Concern about decisions being made by remote organisations (RBFRS) affecting the resources at a local level has led to around four thousand residents signing 2 petitions, Adam Afriyie MP tabling an early day motion in Parliament and Press campaigns by 2 local Newspapers to maintain an appropriate level of cover in Windsor.

The proposal has support from businesses, the voluntary and community sector and faith groups, and is formally supported by:

**Maidenhead and District Chamber of Commerce
Windsor District Chamber of Commerce
RBWM Community Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership)
Federation Small Businesses**

Proposals may include a change/transfer of functions from one person to another. If this is relevant to your proposal please confirm that the duties under clause 2, subsection 3 of the act (consulting with organisations affected by a change in location of a function) have been carried out.

3.3 Please give brief details of consultation with any affected organisations

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) has been consulted at all stages of the development of this proposal. A number of meetings between officers have taken place, there has been discussion over the nature of the data available for the fire service at a local level, and documentation has been exchanged.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) has attended public meetings relevant to this proposal, including:

Cross party panel – Wednesday 17 June

Cross party panel - Monday 6 July

Community Panel of Representatives – Wednesday 15 July

Arrangements are in place to consult with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), who are aware of this proposal and are invited to the Community Panel of Representatives – Wednesday 15 July

3.4 Confirmation of council support

The process for formal endorsement is a matter for local discretion; however we anticipate that authorities will wish to gain political endorsement and clearance for the proposal through the relevant processes at local level. Please give details of how formal approval has been attained.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has formally approved this proposal and is acting as the sole sponsor. The proposal has been scrutinised and endorsed by a Cross party panel, chaired by the Leader of the Council, with delegated authority.

3.5 General comments

This is an opportunity for the local authority to express any additional comments or views on the proposal: This may include: (1500 words max)

- the council's view of levels of local support for the proposal
- any local opposition or objections that the Selector should be aware of
- relevance of the proposal to the area's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement
- outcome of any local authority discussions with agencies or public bodies affected
- potential regional/national significance of the proposal, if replicated elsewhere
- any major resource implications for the council or its local partner
- any other factors influencing viability and achievability of the proposal

Part 4: Assessment by the Selector

SCA proposals will be assessed by the LGA as Selector. This will include consideration, short listing and negotiation with the Secretary of State via the LGA Selector panel made up of councillors from the four parties represented on the LGA

The LGA Selector Panel is committed to undertaking the role in a transparent manner; as such reasons for decisions on proposals will be made available.

There will be no appeals process in relation to decisions of the Selector Panel.

4.1 Do you confirm your agreement to abide by the outcome of the Selector's assessment and decision-making processes?

Yes

4.2 Would your council, accompanied by the originators of the proposal, wish to make a short verbal presentation to the Selector Panel, should this opportunity be available?

Yes

Thank you for completing this form.

Please email it to selector@lga.gov.uk by 31 July 2009.