

Draft Response to Oxfordshire County Council's

Consultation on Proposals to Improve Oxfordshire's Fire & Rescue Service

Witney Town Council is concerned about the potential impacts of these proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, particularly the proposed closures of Eynsham and Woodstock fire stations. The Council considers that these closures would have a direct and adverse impact on emergency response provision in Witney and across West Oxfordshire.

The Town Council is concerned that meaningful engagement with frontline staff did not take place at an early stage of the proposals. It is noted that staff have disputed the data used to justify the changes, and it believes this raises significant concerns regarding the robustness of the evidence base.

Witney Town Council is also concerned that the proposed restructuring would make the recruitment and retention of on-call (retained) firefighters more difficult. This risks weakening the service's resilience at a time when a more supportive and sustainable structure is needed to ensure effective cover.

While the Town Council recognises that the proposals may bring some benefit to Witney through an increase in full-time firefighter provision, this appears to be at the detriment of neighbouring areas. The Council is particularly concerned about night-time cover and the overall availability of fire engines across West Oxfordshire as a whole, which could reduce the service's ability to respond effectively to incidents.

Furthermore, the Town Council highlights that there is significant large-scale residential development planned and underway on the periphery of Witney and across the district, amounting to many thousands of new homes. The Council seeks reassurance that the increased demand this will place on fire and rescue services has been fully taken into account, as long-term service capacity and sustainability are key concerns.

In summary, Witney Town Council urges Oxfordshire County Council to reconsider the proposed changes, engage more fully with staff, and ensure that future provision is based on robust data, supports recruitment and retention, and delivers a resilient, sustainable service for Witney and the wider West Oxfordshire area.