THE KENT & MEDWAY TOWNS FIRE AUTHORITY

The fire authority are about to consult of proposals for a review of fire cover for the County and how that fire service response will be made to communities.

I am preparing this discussion document as a briefing document as whatever role or position you hold you may wish to make a response.

In fact, I urge people to make a response. In any consultation process there will be rumours and leaks about what the proposals are.

I understand the Fire Service have had to rush out a statement as they inadvertently sent out an email naming some of the stations included for review/closure.

I am sure you recall I retired from the then Kent Fire Brigade in 1999.
At that time, I was Assistant Chief Officer Head of Operations and Fire Safety for all of Kent and its then 66 fire stations including the Channel Tunnel. In 2026 they have 56 and do not have a station on the Channel Tunnel Site.

Closing fire stations can be a very emotive subject but I think it important To say focused on what are the issues facing the Service.

1. **Is this a General Budget pressure issue? In which case the whole budget should be looked at, not just operational response.**
2. **Is there a shortfall in National or Fire Authority budget provision?**
3. **Is there a problem of being unable to recruit on call fire fighters? (this will be explained in the document)**
4. **Is this a plan for the fire service in 2030 onwards and the projected growth in the area of East Kent, but also the County.**

I will try to set out easy explanations of terminology that will start to be used.

Kent Fire has a number of ways fire stations are crewed.

WHOLE TIME SHIFT FIRE STATIONS

These are where fire appliances are crewed 24 hours a day 365 days a year by full time employed fire fighters.
In the Ashford Station this would be one fire appliance, a second is crewed by on call firefighters
Nearby stations whole time crewed are Canterbury and Folkestone.

DAY CREWED STATIONS

These are where fire appliances are crewed on station during the daytime and firefighters respond from their homes nearby the station during night hours.
The nearest example of this is Faversham where one fire appliance is crew as stated above but the second fire appliance is crewed by on call firefighters.

ON CALL STATIONS

These stations are not manned by full time firefighters, they are persons who live and or work nearby and respond when there is a fire call.
Examples in the Ashford District are
Lenham, Charing, Chilham, Wye, Aldington Tenterden and nearby Headcorn, and Cranbrook.
Down towards the Romney Marsh are New Romney, Dymchurch and Lydd

The on call stations were traditional called RETAINED STATIONS. Persons lived and worked in the area. In the event of a fire call a siren would sound and persons would respond from their work and homes and the fire appliance would be on the road in about 5 to 7 minutes.

At night they were summoned by bells fitted in their homes. In later years pocket alerters replaced siren and call bells at home.

Naturally as demands of the modern world took a toll on working ways, many people are now working away from the area and even the high level of training required also took its toll.

In 2026 I acknowledge that lack of recruitment on the on call stations is a pressure point, it was when I served and now it must be higher now.

Further in the document I will try to not turn you into knowledgeable fire officers but try to brief you on the fire service today and the direction of travel of future fire cover.

I was expecting a formal proposal to be put out for consultation however I understand an accidental email was sent out and so on the 8th June 2026 a formal statement has been made by the service, and I understand late June the full consultation process will be undertaken.

UPDATE

Following a meeting of the Kent and Medway Town Fire Authority councillors postponed the 12 week consultation for 6 weeks to give councillors time to fully consider the proposals and importantly look at the budget to see whether cutting fire stations and crews was the first option.

At this time my personal view is this is an untidy mess and the comments about budget pressures are mixed up with the inability to recruit on call fire fighters.

I also believe that the enormity of the decision of shutting fire stations and taking engines from busy towns has started to be realised.

The proposals cover all of Kent

However, in this briefing paper I will focus on Ashford District and the areas that directly provide and support the fire cover in Ashford.

THE KENT FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE STATEMENT of 8th June.
This should have followed the Fire Authority meeting on the 25th June however as you are aware a fault of a email circulation put this into communities on the 8th of June.
I am setting out in the order the reports came

Kent Fire and Rescue Service announces proposals for upcoming public consultation

08 June 2026

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) is set to launch a public consultation to get the views of local people on some important proposals.

Subject to approval by the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (KMFRA), a 12-week consultation will begin on Thursday, 25 June 2026.

KFRS Chief Executive Ann Millington said: “The consultation depends on the fire authority approving our proposals to go forward, which are based on risk intelligence and data analysis. This is about spending money in the right ways to tackle our biggest risks, while competing with financial pressures.

“I understand some people will have concerns about the proposed changes, but I can assure everyone that your fire service is here for you. Your firefighters continue to do a fantastic job, with first class kit and training facilities, and teams across the service are doing brilliant work to prevent fires and other emergencies through education, enforcement, campaigning and community work.

“The number of fires in Kent and Medway has dropped over the years in good part because of our prevention work - tailored home visits, putting up free smoke alarms and helping people who are most at risk of fires. But risks also keep changing, for example, we’re seeing more wildfires, so we need to be changing too, to meet those needs.”

The proposals

The consultation proposals focus on:

- Closing five standalone on-call fire stations.
- Removing attached on-call sections from four wholetime stations.
- Relocating two fire engines at night to create an additional three fire engines during the day – placing them at stations across the county to meet daytime demand which is higher than at night.

Closing five on-call fire stations

On-call stations are different to wholetime stations. At an on-call station, the crew go to their station when called out via a pager to respond to an emergency – living or working nearby and usually working around other employment, they must arrive and be on the fire engine in five minutes.

The on-call fire stations listed below are to be proposed for closure as part of the consultation, following risk and data analysis. KFRS is proposing to close them because they have lower demand and lower risk than other areas of the county - with other nearby fire stations able to cover the area safely.

- Grain
- Wye
- Chilham
- Westerham
- Cliffe

Ann Millington said: “We don’t close fire stations lightly, and we haven’t done so in 14 years. When we did it last, we were able to reinvest our money and use it more effectively. We carefully consider whether the investment in these stations and fire engines can be better spent in other areas. For example, freeing up money to invest in more wholetime firefighters, or putting money into targeted prevention activity that helps to drive down the likelihood of fires occurring in the first place. We will have targeted prevention activity in areas affected by station closures.”

Removing attached on-call sections from four wholetime fire stations

Some wholetime fire stations, which operate 24 hours a day, also have an on-call section. This means the station has two fire engines - one crewed full-time and one crewed by on-call firefighters. On-call firefighters attached to a wholetime station operate in the same way as on-call firefighters at standalone on-call stations.

The attached on-call sections at the stations listed below are due to be proposed for removal, following data and risk analysis.

- Herne Bay
- Deal
- Tunbridge Wells
- Faversham

Ann Millington said: “I’d like to be clear that there are no proposals to close wholetime stations – we’re suggesting removing the attached on-call sections, based on data that indicates reduced need for the second fire engine at those locations. Their low demand, coupled with the fact that the wholetime fire engine provides cover in the area, means they are an over-provision, and the money can be more effectively invested elsewhere.”

Relocating fire engines to better match demand

Fire engines are not sat at stations all day – they are moved around the county all the time to provide appropriate emergency cover based on demand and risk. In the consultation proposals KFRS is asking the public to comment on a more permanent arrangement to provide appropriate cover based on latest data intelligence:

• Dartford fire station currently has two wholetime fire engines available day and night. The proposal is to change this to two fire engines during the day and one at night.
• Thames-Side fire station currently has two wholetime fire engines available during the day and night. The proposal is to change this to two fire engines during the day and one at night.
• This would allow KFRS to reinvest and redeploy firefighters from the above locations to other stations and make an additional three fire engines available during the day in Strood, Ashford, and Folkestone - the enhancements to these stations will then mean they have two fire engines guaranteed during the day and one guaranteed at night.

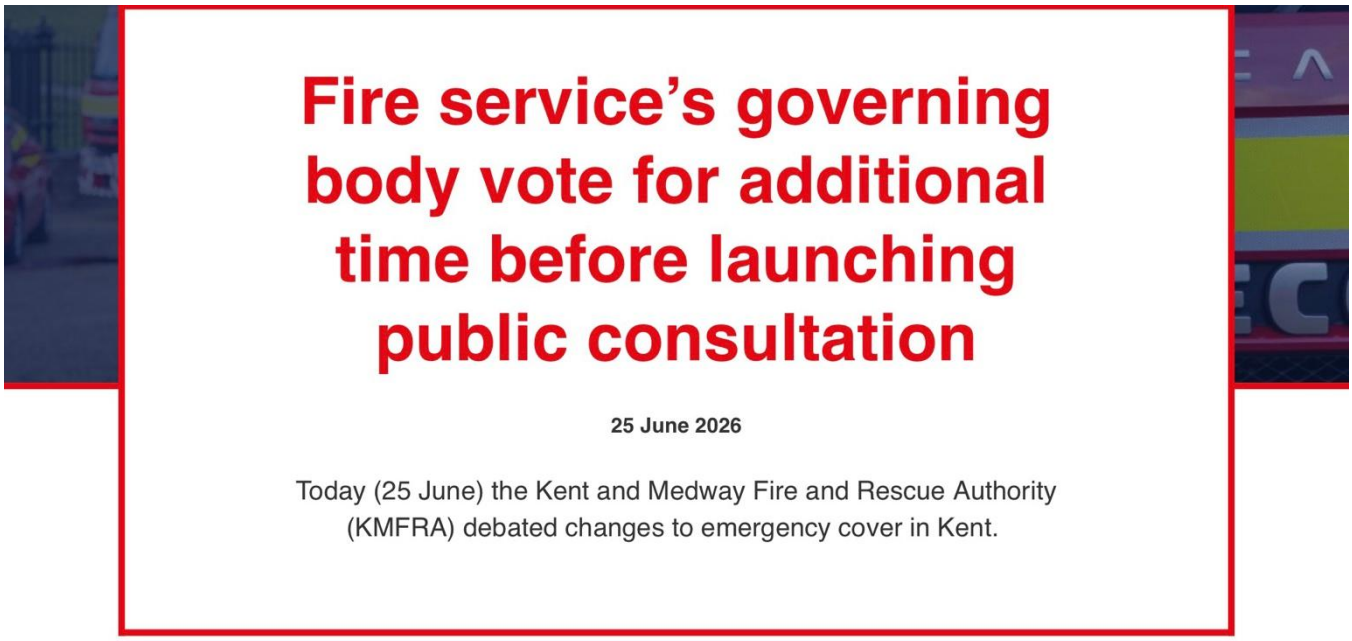
Ann Millington said: “This part of the consultation is about deploying our resources more strategically to make sure we can provide the right protection at the right times, especially during high demand periods in the day. I want to be clear that we are suggesting the relocation of fire engines at night from large stations with multiple fire engines, in areas where neighbouring fire stations are close by - there won’t be any wholetime fire stations without sufficient resources.”

Have your say

Subject to the proposals being approved by KMFRA – the body that governs KFRS – the consultation will begin on Thursday, 25 June 2026, and will run for 12 weeks.

Ann Millington added: “We have worked through the challenges and options with our firefighters and the Fire Brigades Union over the past month. This must be a collaborative effort, and from 25 June, we need the views of the public too to help us make the most informed and smart decisions for the service and our communities - public safety and firefighter welfare is always at the forefront of our thinking.”

Following the “leak”
There was much media and community uproar which then led to the Fire Authority meeting on the 25th.
It was clear there was unease among councillors and after debate they decided to postpone the consultation for
Their statement.



Fire service’s governing body vote for additional time before launching public consultation

25 June 2026

Today (25 June) the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (KMFRA) debated changes to emergency cover in Kent.

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The proposals which see an overall improvement in response times and an increase in day time emergency cover, also include changes to where fire engines are located.

Authority members agreed on a cross-party working group to examine the proposals in more detail.

KFRS Chief Executive Ann Millington said: "There is a significant amount of data for Members of the Authority to consider. Members of the Authority will be able to examine the proposals before them.

"We will be working closely in the next few weeks with a cross-party group to support their analysis."

An extraordinary meeting will then be held for authority members to vote again on whether to go ahead with a public consultation.

I have set out stations so you are aware of the fire cover as it is today.

ASHFORD FIRE STATION



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
Wholetime and On Call

Address
Henwood Industrial Estate, Kingswood, Ashford, Kent, TN24 8YF

Appliance(s)
HRP. WrT, WrC, TL, IRU

View appliance definitions

In layman's terms that is 2 fire engines(one crewed 24hours a day and one on call. The WRC is a water tanker and the TL a 30 metre turntable ladder platform.)
We should seek clarification on how the Water Carrier and Turntable ladder are crewed.

The stations who closely support Ashford are Aldington, Wye, Chilham and Charing and Lenham. ALL ARE ON CALL STATIONS

ALDINGTON



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Little Chequers, Wye, Kent, TN25 5DT

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

WYE



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Little Chequers, Wye, Kent, TN25 5DT

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine. (TARGET FOR CLOSURE)

CHARING



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
School Lane, Charing, Kent, TN27 0JN

Appliance(s)
RP

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

CHILHAM



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Taylors Hill, Chilham, Kent, CT4 8BZ

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine. (TARGET FOR CLOSURE)

LENHAM



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
High Street, Lenham, Kent, ME17 2QB

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

TENTERDEN



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Ashford Road, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 6BT

Appliance(s)
WrL

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

As we move farther away from Ashford

HEADCORN



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Station Road, Headcorn, Kent, TN27 9SA

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

I on call fire engine

CRANBROOK



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
High Street, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 3EN

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine.

These next stations are ones that support Ashford

FAVERSHAM



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
Day Crewing and On Call

Address
Ashford Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8XL

Appliance(s)
RPL, WrT, WMU, ARU, L4V+BASU

View appliance definitions

2 fire engines, one Day Crewed (crewed during the day and on call at night/weekends and 1 on call
The Day crewed are whole time fire fighters.

CANTERBURY



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
Wholetime

Address
Upper Bridge Street, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 2NH

Appliance(s)
HRP, RPL, TL, PM+ISU

View appliance definitions

2 fire engines Whole time crewed 24 hours a day. Check Turntable ladder crewing.

FOLKESTONE



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
Wholetime

Address
Park Farm Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5LT

Appliance(s)
HRP, WrT, GPV, SWRU+IRBt

View appliance definitions

2 fire engines crewed 24 hours a day by wholetime fire fighters.

As we move away Eastwards towards the romney marsh there are the following fire stations.

HYTHE



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Wakefield Road, Hythe, Kent, CT21 6HU

Appliance(s)
WrT, FFU

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

NEW ROMNEY



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Church Road, New Romney, Kent, TN28 8EX

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

LYDD



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
High Street, Lydd, Kent, TN29 9DF

Appliance(s)
RP

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine

DYMCHURCH



Brigade
Kent Fire & Rescue Service

Status
On Call

Address
Mill Road, Dymchurch, Kent, TN29 0NY

Appliance(s)
WrT

View appliance definitions

1 on call fire engine.

I have tried to set out in simple lay persons terms fire service jargon

I will try to give my best possible advice.

I feel this whole matter arrived in a jumble

IS IT A BUDGET ISSUE?

IS IT A PROBLEM WITH ON CALL FIRE FIGHTER RECRUITMENT. ?

The issue has the potential to have lots of campaigns in areas. The leak meant it was impossible to put together a document to try to brief you without the media setting matters running.

Emotions will run high on this issue.

I know the fire service in Kent very well as a retired Head of Operations for Kent.

I served in every rank at Dartford and Gravesend (Thames-side) and Commanded both stations.

I served at Maidstone

In other officer roles I served in South Kent covering Ashford, Maidstone and Tonbridge and all towns in between.

I served at Canterbury and Commanded the whole of East Kent.

I finished my career at Brigade HQ responsible for all operations and fire safety for the County.

My personal view is this is wrong, badly thought through and it looked very untidy arriving at Fire Committee where clearly, they were being asked to decide on proposals they were not comfortable with and needed time to look at matters.

Already MPs of all parties have spoken against. We must also remember the Fire Committee has many councillors who only took office in the last KCC elections.

It may well be the fire authority may have to have more whole-time fire fighters to crew additional appliances at Strood, Ashford and Folkestone.

It may well be they will need to purchase more Water Tankers to boost the 2 in service now,
There will be many emotive issues raised, and statements made. I will do my level best to help you follow this process through. The media will run countless stories. However, I strong urge before we removed and change front line fire cover that every single budget heading is examined in depth first. That everyone is crystal clear on the actions they are taking, and importantly the reasons they are taking them

Yes it is a County wide problem but you will need to focus on the fire cover for your area which may allow you should you so wish to repond.

I hope this helps
Peter

Peter New