

# States of Jersey Fire & Rescue Service Association

Rouge Bouillon | St. Helier  
Jersey | JE2 3ZA



Ms. K. De Carteret  
Scrutiny Office  
Morier House  
St. Helier  
JE1 1DD

17 November 2022

Dear Katherine,

## **Scrutiny Review of Government Plan 2023-2026**

Thank you for the invitation on behalf of Deputy Curtis to provide comment on elements identified for review in the Government Plan 2023-2026, please find below the remarks of the Fire & Rescue Service Association (FRSA).

### **Ambulance, Fire and Rescue Headquarters – p.55, 58, 92 and 94 of P.97/2022**

The FRSA are familiar with intention to build a new Fire and Rescue headquarters, it has been a topic that has existed within the Service for approximately 30 years but appears now that, with the drive to release the Ambulance site for housing, it may be closer to realisation.

In recent years there has been a focus in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) for increased collaboration among the emergency services, in particular the Ambulance and Fire and Rescue Services. The intention of the former Director General to merge both Services was of great concern to the FRSA and the States Assembly chose to adopt P.24/2019 with the cessation of that particular restructuring to JHA, although the objective of greater collaboration was maintained. While close working has and always will occur across the emergency services, concerns are still held over integration with the Ambulance Service in a new shared headquarters, as opportunity to limit the Services' independence and increase reliance on firefighters to support the Ambulance Service in addition to- and also outside-of their own roles.

The common argument put forward for a joint station is that a considerable amount of "synergies" exist between the Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services; while the Fire Service has a Memorandum of Understanding to assist the Ambulance Service in first- and co-responder roles – which is being employed on an increasing basis – firefighters are not and cannot be considered a replacement for paramedics. The premise for the originally intended merging of Services appeared to be motivated by a want for increased collaboration – or increased use of firefighters in lieu of more paramedics – by movement of the Ambulance Service from Health & Community Services (HCS) to JHA, keeping all 'blue lights' in one basket. It therefore shouldn't be surprising to suggest that there has and always will likely be far more synergies existing between HCS and the Ambulance Service, including the Our Hospital project.

During the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel hearing of 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021, along with the admission that combining the services was "a bit ambitious" the then Minister for Home Affairs was asked whether there were any plans to re-integrate the Ambulance Service back into HCS rather than JHA, replying that "...it might change, there's a different Government in six months' time, but I'm pretty sure that they work very well together and we'd appreciate working from the same ministry". It would seem there had been some consideration being given to reverting the Ambulance Service to HCS and this position or any intention may need to be better understood when looking forward to building a joint headquarters.

While a joint station could no doubt realise some savings in areas such as facilities, administration and some aspects of training, it is also important to consider resilience measures, something which the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted all too well within the emergency services – resilience of these services is expected and deserved by the public as there is no immediate cross-border support. Examples of joint stations exist elsewhere in the UK but are also supported by further stations across their jurisdictions and are not subject to the same constraints as Jersey, the fulltime fire station and ambulance station are the only ones.

With both Services are earmarked for long overdue investment and growth over the duration of this Government Plan and with this in mind, it is likely that further consideration may be needed with a view to understanding the outlook of the Services including the JHA departmental structure, the future of Western Fire Station, the Jersey Care Model, and the site selection for new St. Helier schools. The decision to build a joint station was taken prior to expected growth in the services so a review of the longer term future for each would appear wise.

Furthermore, the Fire and Rescue Service has determined that any of the identified alternative sites away from its current Rouge Bouillon location will, by nature of increased attendance times, put the high-risk populations of St. Helier at greater risk than they already are currently. Dependent on the site review outcome, any increase of the Rouge Bouillon school site into the current Fire & Rescue Service footprint will likely make locating a joint station on the remaining space more challenging. That said, Government have to balance the needs of the emergency services, the risks to the public and their pledge of Putting Children First, very carefully.

#### **Fire and Rescue Service – p.65 and 66 of R.146/2022**

For several years the FRSA has been particularly concerned by efficiency and rebalancing measures of previous Government Plans and savings initiatives. Staff costs equate to almost 90% of the Service budget, leaving the remaining non-staff allocation to provide predominantly for fleet & equipment, personal protective equipment and training. These non-staff costs are critical to the effective functioning of an emergency response and also to the statutory fire prevention and protection elements of the Service. To continue in this vein will only leave Jersey with a reduced and less effective frontline emergency service.

Therefore, the proposals included in this Government Plan to support the Service's need for increased investment and resources is a significant step in the right direction to protect both the public and firefighters from the wide range of risks the Island faces. We are encouraged by the Plan and the Minister's forthright approach to ensuring frontline services are appropriately funded.

The Fire and Rescue sector has undergone considerable and rapid advances in professional standards and such investment will provide capacity for the Service to focus on professional competence in-line with the UK's National Operational Guidance framework and the Fire Standards Board. This will ensure that lessons learned from incidents involving firefighter deaths and recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, the National Fire Chiefs Council and HMICFRS ensure that the Service strives toward a more professional approach to identifying, assessing, and responding to risk.

Trusting these comments are of use to your Scrutiny Panel review, the FRSA are committed to representing the views of our members and voicing their concerns when it is clear that their own and the public's safety are at risk and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Le Cocq', written in a cursive style.

Tim Le Cocq  
President, States of Jersey Fire & Rescue Service Association (FRSA)