

**DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL**  
**COMHAIRLE POBAIL, BAILE ATHA CLIATH 15**  
CLONSILLA HALL, CLONSILLA ROAD, CLONSILLA, DUBLIN 15

**Fire Services Strategic Review Team**

FARRELL GRANT SPARKS,  
Molyneux House,  
Bride Street,  
Dublin 8.

20.7.2001

**Re: Strategic Review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland**

Dear Sirs,

We wish to have the following submission taken into consideration in regard to the above mentioned review.

**2.4.1**

**To review the current arrangements (including the legislative frameworks) for fire safety and delivery of fire services in Ireland**

We are concerned that there is an inadequate/ infrequent review process regarding the regular and ongoing assessment of fire services in Ireland.

A typical example is the Coolmine station. The existing level of fire service cover in Blanchardstown has been in place since the station opened in the early eighties.i.e. One pump unit and one ambulance unit. Since then the residential housing, commercial and industrial complexes in the area have exploded. The population of this area will reach between 120,000 – 130,000 (by 2005/7) once the higher density housing policy takes full effect.

The nature of the possible fire threat has also dramatically changed. The Fire Service no longer has just two storey residential units to deal with, but high-rise apartments/office blocks, industrial units utilising a wide variety of raw and combustible materials/ chemicals etc. We have the busiest and largest retail-shopping complex in Ireland, plus the possibility of Stadium Ireland being built at Abbotstown. We also have a number of hotels existing / planned for in the area. We also will have two rail lines transiting the area and a heavily utilised road network to cater for.

Cover for Coolmine is provided by Finglas and Phibsboro stations. However, due to the significant levels of traffic congestion in the immediate and surrounding road network, these units will experience an increased level of delay in responding to a call out, particularly during peak commuting hours. **Delays cost lives.**

As a community we have for the past 3-4 years regularly raised the need to examine the level of cover provided at Coolmine.

To date nothing has been done about the issue despite the obvious need to increase cover at the station to cater for the level of potential threat that exists out here.

This raises the question of who should be responsible for the regular review of the cover and type/range of responsibilities of the Fire Brigade.

We believe that the County Council has to request additional cover and if that is the case, then the delay in requesting cover for this area is lamentable and irresponsible when one objectively examines the increased level of fire threat that has occurred in Dublin 15 over the past 20years.

Accordingly, we request that the study recommend Coolmine Fire station be upgraded to cater for the level of existing /future needs of a large sized community (the size of Cork when the projected development targets are reached). The upgrade of the station should be such as to enable it to deal adequately with major residential/commercial and industrial emergencies.

### **Place of education and prevention programmes**

From what we know of the management of the Fire Services it would appear that its primary function is to deal with fires, ambulance and rescue duties. Fire Officers also have a role to play in Fire safety with regard to commercial/industrial premises.

Little public knowledge exists re the fire services role in fire safety/prevention and enforcement duties.

To the public it appears that the Fire services role in enforcement is largely ineffective.

From recollection the enforcement role has never been properly staffed and prosecutions for breaches of fire regulations difficult (and little publicised when successful- hence the deterrence effect is largely lost).

Fire prevention and education policy is not widely known or publicised.

There is a minimalist approach to the use of the fire service in educating the public with regard to fire safety/prevention issues.

In the past our Residents Association has asked a fire officer to give us a lecture on fire prevention/safety and found them very informative.

The public respect firemen and the most benefit is to be gained by uniformed officers giving such lectures etc.

We recommend that greater emphasis be placed on enforcement of regulations and the education of the public re fire safety issues.

To carry out such a policy manning levels will need to be revisited.

Specific education programmes should be designed for relevant groups

- Young children
- Teenagers
- Home owners / residents
- Employers/employees

### **Section 2.4.1**

Set up a specialist unit to undertake regular reviews of the changing needs of fire service cover within Ireland. Currently, functional authorities are not regularly reviewing the level of fire cover within their area.

Factors, other than primary duty of care and prudence are postponing such studies. This is particularly true of the newly developing areas in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Proactive and regular use of statistical tools and information from the CSO and local authorities should be used to assist in the identification of areas that need to have their fire services increased/reduced.

### **Section 2.4.2**

Our understanding is that the Fire Service is responsible for the initial response to an emergency. However, a variety of bodies are called in shortly afterwards to respond to a major incident / disaster.

In our opinion the current arrangements are weak.

The last major flooding in the GDA saw a hotchpotch approach.

Slow responses were evident in the immediate hours following the downpour.

No roads closed due to flooding signs were available in Fingal, no warning beacons etc.

There did not appear to be contingency plans in place for such a major and very predictable event.

Resources were thin on the ground to respond when the event did take place.

It is accepted that there will be a more regular occurrence of extreme weather related events/disasters. As a country we should plan and prepare for that.

In the USA where such events occur with regularity, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for planning and making sure that resources are available and positioned to deal with the **possibility** of such events (such is the role of contingency planning). They also act as co-ordinators in dealing with such disasters. As such they build up a reservoir of experience and expertise in dealing with emergency situations.

The Fire Service has the necessary experts and experience to undertake a similar function here and to carry out a centralised planning / readiness / resourcing function. If they do not, then train them to acquire the necessary experience.

The local authorities and civil defence are part time operators in such a role and it is difficult for them to emulate fully trained professionals in emergency response situations. Training and discipline is key to success and survival in many emergency situations. Command and control function should be given to Fire service personnel who will co-ordinate response etc.

Hence it is suggested that primary reliance be placed on the fire services for immediate fire and emergency/rescue responses. However, we would suggest that there are two notable exceptions – Mountain rescue and RNLI. Leave arrangements as are.

The Air Sea Rescue helicopters should be at the disposal of the Fire Service to perform an Air Ambulance role. We are one of the few wealthier countries in the EU that do not have such a dedicated service.

The Fire Service role should be expanded to plan/ cater for such contingencies- both natural and man made emergency and disasters. The continued failure to have proper resources and plans in place can have far-reaching economic and social effects and consideration should be taken of these in any study of the area.

### **Section 2.4.3**

The aforementioned role referred to above could incorporate a research function to undertake a study of best practises in the areas referred to.

If such a role is not undertaken then a policy and research unit needs to be established.

### **Section 2.4.4**

Set up a web site – make it interesting and informative. Direct primarily at homeowners, children and industry.

Ensure it includes a 'contact us' facility for feedback. Make sure it is regularly updated and that it also provides links to regulatory requirements etc.

Provide section on Home safety, not just fire, fire drill/evacuation advice etc.

Take out more regular slots on TV and newspapers to inform public on fire safety.

### **Section 2.4.6**

It is disconcerting to note that at a recent Coroners Inquest in Dublin that the Fire Services had to admit that their rescue crew could not go into the water to save a man. From our understanding it was primarily that because the crew had no cold water immersion suits and by the sound of it could only try to get to the man by way of a ladder (which the victim, suffering from exposure, was supposed to grab onto and presumably climb). No rope techniques appeared to have been used/ attempted. No fire personnel went down to the water by way of a tied off rope etc. This incident suggests that the rescue squad needs more intensive training and much better and appropriate equipment.

## **Section 2.4.7**

Currently the fire services for the GDA have a significant number of single appliance stations, which it is doubted can effectively handle a major incident. Would it be more effective to locate multi appliance stations in key locations?

Such stations are the commonly adapted standard abroad. This leads to better use of resources, easier to effect adequate cover, training, and reduced fixed and operational costs.

The situation that exists with regard to ambulance training and cover is not acceptable.

It is understood that fire service personnel who operate as ambulance crew are not generally trained to para -medic standard. The few that are, are not permitted to fulfil that role due to an embargo by the IMO. If that is the case then that must be changed in the public interest.

The 'Golden hour' is a concept in trauma medicine that states that the quality of care received in the first hour after a medical emergency can make a substantial difference to survival rates and the longer-term impact of such emergencies. The better the care received the better the outcome.

In other words if an ambulance crew can deliver primary medical treatment at the scene or on route to hospital, then the patients prognosis is likely to be more positive.

Currently ambulance crews are not permitted to deliver life saving drugs to patients and we believe are restricted in the use of resuscitation equipment.

This is a far cry from international best practice. Suggest the following.

All ambulance / rescue crews to be trained up to para medic standard.

Ambulance /rescue crews to be permitted to deliver primary care medication in accordance with their training.

Ambulance / rescue crews to carry full resuscitation and monitoring equipment in their vehicles. Also, such crews to carry appropriate medication/drugs (clot busting drug, asthma medication, adrenaline (anaphylactic shock etc.)

All crews to have radio links with trauma units in relevant hospitals. Such links to be capable of sending output from monitoring equipment to hospital.

Crews to be allowed to exercise discretion as to the hospital the take casualty to. Head injuries to Beaumont, burns to St James etc. Currently the crews cannot exercise that discretion- which frequently can affect the outcome for the patient in relation to receiving the most appropriate care from the appropriate specialists.

Put the customer first. i.e. the public .Stop playing to professional rivalries and remove obstacles from ensuring that the patient is foremost in all our minds.

It must also be remembered that increased mortality, longer recovery times and permanently reduced quality of life all have an economic impact. Has any of that ever been subject to scrutiny.

This also begs the question of why we do not have dedicated trauma teams in hospitals rather than the far less efficient A&E approach. Such models do save lives etc.

## **Section 2.4.11**

One cannot flourish in a vacuum. There is a lot to be learned from and to impart to ones fellow colleagues in foreign fire services. Any business/profession must adapt a lifelong and continuous learning process.

Networking with different fire services has a lot to offer in terms of experience and advice/approaches. Arrange exchanges / secondments for fire fighters, paramedics and management grades with known quality fire service providers.

## **Section 2.4.12**

- **.1** Speed and appropriateness of response is essential in minimising the impact of fire on both lives and property.

Once despatched to a fire, it is essential that crews know what they are dealing with and how they are going to extricate victims/tackle a blaze. To do this they need knowledge of the layout of a building and the contents/materials therein that they are dealing with.

Currently, fire crews do not have information/plans of building layout or its contents etc when they are called to a fire (other than a residential house).

Yet in contrast if a crew is called to deal with a ships fire they have access on arrival at the scene to what is called the Ships Envelope. This contains information the ships manifest and the plans/layout of the ship- vital information to dealing successfully with an incident.

In Ireland we do not have a similar standard for industrial/commercial or large residential complexes. Why Not?

It is common abroad for the fire services to have online access to such basic information.

The continued absence of such information in dealing with a fire is unnecessarily increasing the risk to fire service personnel and the general public.

We need the following

- Build Database on plans / layouts and contents(including chemicals and other raw materials)

of industrial and commercial complexes and large scale residential units.

- Database on chemicals and other combustible materials. Build using existing international knowledge on subject.
- Fire Service vehicles to be fitted with Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to enable quick response to incidents (particularly useful in newly developing areas in GDA). Though Local Authority must update fire services as soon as commencement order granted on new developments. This will enable GPS to be kept current. Negates impact if that is not done.
- All appliances /section cars to have a LAP Top device installed to enable data bases described above be queried by on site personnel.
- Re examine the location of existing stations and determine if the newly developing areas are sufficiently covered, are new stations required, should existing stations be relocated etc

### **2.4.12.2**

Training and education should be continuous throughout a fire fighters service.

Is there an appropriate professional educational course available to fire service personnel at Certificate, Diploma and Degree level.

Consider recruiting specialist staff for research and policy areas to add a blend to the team and to bring a fresh perspective to policymaking etc

Develop a Fire Service Intranet service, which should be used as a reservoir of information, relevant links etc which can be used as both a formal and informal channel of learning and updating ones skills base.

Can also be used for other administrative, operational and management information.

### **2.4.12.3**

Appliance fleet - Is it renewed regularly or is it keep it running until it breaks

Preferably renewed on a reasonably regular basis.

#### **2.4.12.4**

All stations should have the ability to fight a wide range of fire types. Full Air Tight HAZ CHEM Suits to be located in every station. It must be remembered that chemicals are routinely transported throughout the country and an accident with involving chemicals could happen at any location in the country.

Respiration equipment needs to be up to the highest international standards – it is believed that current equipment may not be all that is desired.

All Fire Service stations to carry cutting equipment and lifting devices / bags to enable them to deal with emergency situations requiring such gear.

All Ambulances and Rescue vehicles to carry a burns treatment kit (fire/heat, steam, electrical or chemical related). To be included in such kits one of the approved new **Gel** applications, which have many advantages in minimising tissue damage, caused by burns.

Helmets worn should be replaced with the lighter and more effective type worn by foreign services.

Uniforms should be designed to give a modern and professional image and at the same time provide a high degree of comfort and utility.

#### **2.4.12.6**

Traditionally, the fire service has been seen as difficult to get into. Persons with trades were seen as having a distinct advantage over a non-skilled individual. Recruiting staff within a narrow range of personality types and education/life experiences is not healthy for the development of any organisation.

Can this be looked at and still maintain a high degree of professionalism and teamwork in the service.

Thank you for extending the deadline for receipt of this submission and we look forward to having a much-increased presence from the Fire Service in Coolmine in the not too distant future.

Yours Faithfully

Charlie Kurtz

## Second Submission

On behalf of DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL we wish to make the following observations on the strategic review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland. Our Submission, as requested, follows the format set out in sections [2.3](#) and [2.4](#) of the terms of reference of the review

### ***“2.3 Objectives of the Review***

*The following are the objectives of this review:*

*To consider the arrangements to ensure that people, property and infrastructure of this state are protected from fire and other emergency situations, by the provision of quality fire safety and emergency fire services, having regard to available resources;*

The Dublin 15 area is currently served by a Fire Station, located in Coolmine Industrial Estate. This station was established when there was less than 20,000 people resident in the area, little industry and prior to the construction of the Blanchardstown Town Centre. The Fire Station at Coolmine currently has one operational Fire Tender, one ambulance and some Civil Defence units. This Fire Station is currently staffed 24 hrs / day with a (4 x) 8 person shift.

The Greater Blanchardstown area was planned as a “New Town” on the periphery of the Dublin Metropolitan area. The Greater Blanchardstown area currently has the same population as Limerick City (~70,000), with an original projected population of 100,000 people. This population is expected to exceed 120,000 by 2010, given the current rate of construction and the increased residential densities in the current Dept. of Environment guidelines.

To the north of the N3 national primary route (north Blanchardstown) there exists a considerable amount of Industrial zoned lands, this area is equivalent to an industrial area 7 times the size of Sandymount Industrial Estate. This land is where several major industries are located, with IBM, 3 Com, Malincroft, Helsin Chemicals, to name a few. Current developments are the Blanchardstown Institute of Technology (operational & under construction), the new Bristol Myer Squib pharmaceutical plant (under construction), and the proposed Sports Campus Ireland (including a 80,000 seat Stadium).

The commercial and cultural life of Dublin 15 is centred on the Blanchardstown Town Centre, which contains a major retail centre, theatre, cinemas, Leisureplex, restaurants, etc.

This growth in residential, commercial and industrial developments has put the existing road network under considerable stress, there is a concern that this will increase the response time from Fire Tenders based outside the Dublin 15 area.

It appears that the Coolmine based Fire Service is under resourced to deal with expanded residential, commercial and industrial fire risks in the Dublin 15 area. We request that you benchmark the Dublin 15 Fire Service with comparable areas like Limerick, Cork and Waterford.

## **2.4 Minimum Requirements of the Review**

*2.4.1 To review the current arrangements (including the legislative frameworks) for fire safety and delivery of fire services in Ireland;*

As stated above, we are concerned at the under provision of Fire Service appliances in the Dublin 15 area.

*2.4.2 To review the involvement of fire services in major emergency management;*

The major emergency's likely to occur in the Dublin 15 area are:

Major crash & pile up on the M50, N2 or N3.

A fire or explosion in a chemical / pharmaceutical factory

A fire in a petrol station.

We request that you review the capability of the one Fire Tender in Coolmine to cope with the above emergencies until help arrives from adjacent Fire Stations. We understand that the Coolmine station is not equipped with the specialist equipment to deal with automobile accidents.

*2.4.5 To make recommendations on future roles of both fire safety and emergency fire services in Ireland, taking account of existing services and legislative requirements, and the need to maintain and develop co-ordinated and sustainable systems;*

We understand that there are legislative restrictions preventing the Fire Service actually using their Paramedic training to give immediate assistance to the victims of emergencies. These restrictions should be addressed, and obstacles to emergency Paramedic assistance removed.

We look forward to your consideration of our submission, and are available to clarify any details, if required.

Yours faithfully

Irene Martin