

Rec: 25/05/16

BERNARD JENKIN MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016

Ms Lucy Ballard  
Clerk  
Harwich Town Council  
The Guildhall  
Church Street  
Harwich  
Essex CO12 3DS

Our ref: tf/HarwichTownCouncil

*Dear Lucy*

Thank you for your letter of 20<sup>th</sup> May and I am grateful for your sending to me the Town Council's comments on the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's consultation into the future of fire service provision. The Fire Service has given this issue very careful and deep consideration (as have I) and have drawn their conclusions after considering the facts.

Over the past decade, the number of incidents attended by the fire service in Essex has been on in steady decline and has fallen by over 50%. In the past five years, there has been a reduction in fire-specific call-outs by 32%. This decline is likely to continue, as more homes and businesses have smoke alarms, and safety procedures at higher-risk businesses are constantly improved.

Further, the highest demand in Essex for fire engines at one time in the past five years was 36. The number of engines available has floated between 60 and 70. This costly over-provision itself jeopardises the future of a viable service. Unless the unnecessary cost of this is addressed, we will not be able to ensure an effective service continues to be provided across Essex, because money would be used for the wrong priorities, and this includes Harwich and Dovercourt.

One way of maintaining our two fire engines in Dovercourt at less cost is to move from "day-crewed" firefighters (ie. full-time fire fighters during the day) to "on-call" firefighters around the clock. This works very well where it has long been the practice.

As an MP for other parts of Essex, my constituency already has "on-call" firefighters at all other stations (West Mersea, Wivenhoe, Manningtree, Brightlingsea and Weeley). How is it possible to argue that what is safe for those other communities is somehow not safe for Harwich and Dovercourt? Nobody responsible can take that view. Maintaining full-time firefighters would not offer any appreciable improvement in safety to residents, nor would it be sustainable in the long-term. The Fire Service have made clear their proposed changes have all been fully safety assessed, in the light of the much reduced demand for emergency call-outs.

**WORKING FOR HARWICH & NORTH ESSEX**

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People in responsible positions should take care not to raise false fears by suggesting lives will be put at risk, when there is simply no evidence to back up these fears. Further, I am sorry to have to say that the Town Council is not representing the best interests of Harwich and Dovercourt by insisting that it will not accept "anything less than full-time crews" when we already have "on call" at night, and without bothering to explain how this will be paid for, on the basis of scare stories. The Essex County Fire and Rescue Service have not included a whole-time or day-crewed service in their consultation for these reasons.

However, I will always relay any concerns my constituents have regarding these proposals to the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, and ensure responses are received addressing these concerns. I will therefore convey the views of the Town Council to them, and ask them to make sure you have the fullest possible response, and I would urge you to reassure residents that their safety has been fully considered, rather than to encourage fears for which there is no basis in fact.



**Bernard Jenkin MP**