

Press Release

Contact: Chris Fribbins (Chair)
Phone: 07887 610625

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
4 PM, 03 June 2011

VILLAGE CONCERNS FOR VILLAGE FIRE STATION COVER

Following local concerns a public meeting was held in the Cliffe Memorial Hall on Wednesday 1st June 2011 attended by well over 100 villagers. Local residents were dismayed at the lack of cover for the fire station and the huge increase in times when the local fire engine was not available to respond to calls and lay unused. Local cover has been provided by remote fire stations as far away as Swanscombe. Despite the station being identified as necessary as part of the current Kent-wide Risk Assessment, there was now much more reliance on fire engines from further away.

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Chris Fribbins (Chair, Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Parish Council) and joined on the top table by Mark Reckless MP (Rochester and Strood), Local Medway Rural Ward Councillors Cllr Tom Mason (also Vice Chair of the Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority and currently acting Chair) & Cllr Peter Rodberg and Mark Simmons (Fire Brigade Union). Ann

Millington (Chief Executive, Kent Fire and Rescue Service) declined her invitation as there is currently a new Risk Assessment being done for Kent. She has promised to share the results with the parish council at a later date. KCFRS also produced a reply to some of the local concerns which were challenged by the audience. Missing was the impact on our local station and the individuals involved and actual figures for our fire station in recent years.

The meeting heard how the local retained firefighters had been issued with new part-time contracts and the majority of them were unable to accept the terms as it meant giving time commitments for over 6 months in the future and was not possible with their primary jobs. This has left the fire station with as little as 6 fire fighters and two of those are currently on long term sick. With the reduced availability there is limited cover and increased use of scheduled down-time for the station.

Cllr. Mason has been given an assurance by KFRS that the station is not planned for closure, but local residents wanted more than just the building. The station had been manned effectively for many years by local village residents on a retained basis and hours of cover had been extremely high in the past, which had been recognised by KFRS. Recently however there had been less use of the local station and the change in contracts appears to threaten the existence of an effective operational local station. Mark Simmons (FBU) reported that

similar arrangements were being made across Kent and also nationally, but he also indicated that other firefighters at Kent stations had been offered more flexible contracts which they had accepted.

Chris Fribbins said "These volunteers have all been trained to the high level required for fire fighters and are ready to continue that service with a more flexible contract. It must be more cost effective to use trained firefighters rather than having to recruit and train new ones. They also provide a cost effective and dedicated cover for the fire service. There appears to be either a serious break down in communication or an actual plan to close the fire station by stealth. Our firefighters have earned and deserve fair treatment, consistent with other areas in Kent."

Mark Reckless MP and Mark Simmons (FBU) agreed to look into how this reorganisation had been handled and seek a way for the firefighters to be engaged on a more flexible basis with KFRS. The parish council will be keeping local residents informed about the issue and look forward to meeting with Ann Millington in July or August. Meanwhile urgent action is demanded to provide Cliffe and Cliffe Woods with the local emergency cover that they need.

The Cliffe Fire Station was built in 1904 by the parish council with additional contributions from the local community. It has always played an important part in the local community. Local firefighters (and their families) have given many years dedicated service to the Fire Brigade. See further attachments for information.

-End-