

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	2 OCTOBER 2014	REPORT NO:	CFO/101/14
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEB APPLETON	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON, COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSALS FOR UPTON AND WEST KIRBY STATIONS		

APPENDICES:	<p>APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT OF SITE OPTIONS</p> <p>APPENDIX B: PLAN SHOWING LOCATION OF SITE FOR NEW FIRE STATION IN GREASBY</p> <p>APPENDIX C: 10 MINUTE ISOCHRONES FROM WIRRAL STATIONS</p> <p>APPENDIX D: 10 MINUTE ISOCHRONES FROM THE PROPOSED GREASBY STATION</p> <p>APPENDIX E: RISK MAP OF MERSEYSIDE</p> <p>APPENDIX F: CONSULTATION PLAN</p> <p>APPENDIX G: REVENUE COSTS</p> <p>APPENDIX H: CAPITAL COSTS – EXEMPT BY VIRTUE OF PARA 3 OF PART 1 OF SCH 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972</p> <p>APPENDIX I: EIA</p> <p>APPENDIX J: 10 MINUTE ISOCRONES FOR WIRRAL MINUS WEST KIRBY</p>
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Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members consider the proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Frankby Road, Greasby as an alternative to an outright closure of West Kirby fire station, subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 3rd October 2014.

Recommendation

2. That Members approve a proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Frankby Road, Greasby as an alternative to an outright closure of West Kirby fire station.,. This is subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 3rd October 2014.
3. Following the conclusion of the consultation a further report will be submitted to Authority detailing the outcomes and any operational implications. At that point Members will determine which proposal to implement.

Introduction and Background

4. At the meeting on 3rd December 2013 the Authority considered report CFO/136/13 and resolved that:

“in order to meet the budget cuts faced by the Authority as a result of Government announcements which will impact on the financial plan for 2014- 16, approval be given in principle, subject to public consultation;

- a) *The options presented for the merger of two stations on Wirral (West Kirby to merge with Upton at within Greasby), two stations in St Helens (Eccleston to merge with St Helens at a site in the St Helens town centre ward) and two stations in Knowsley (the merger of Huyton and Whiston at Prescott which already has Authority approval). These mergers, if approved, will deliver a reduction of 66 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts, reduce the Authority asset base down from 26 stations to 23 and deliver additional savings from a reduction in premises overheads.*
- b) *The incremental move from wholetime crewing to day crewing to wholetime retained crewing of at least one appliance in Liverpool and/or Sefton, resulting in the closure of one or more station. This change in crewing and station closure, if approved, will deliver a saving of 22 WTE posts and deliver additional savings from a reduction in premises overheads*

Members resolved to give delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in consultation with the Chair and Party Spokespersons to;

Identify the most suitable merger sites from which to operate whilst ensuring response standards are maintained

Identify potential partners for joint working

Undertake the necessary preparatory work around the procurement of appropriate sites in order to expedite the mergers option in the event that Authority approval is confirmed after the public consultation process is concluded

Submit a bid for resources to support any scheme as appropriate to any available funding sources

Members approve the associated consultation process

Reports be brought back on each of the individual mergers as soon as practicable.”

5. At the Budget Meeting on 27th February 2014 the Authority considered report CFO/020/14 and noted that all who had attended the stakeholder/public engagement events relating to station mergers and other operational response options, came away fully informed and understood the position that the Authority is faced with. Attendees also felt that the station merger option was the “*least worst*” to adopt in the current circumstances. At this meeting the Authority resolved to:

... consider the outcomes of the stakeholder/public engagement as they make any decisions on proposals relating to their financial plans including station mergers and the other operational response options taking account of the position advanced within paragraph 17 of this report.”

6. Paragraph 17 of the same report stated, inter alia, “The outcomes from the engagement that has taken place indicate that there is general understanding amongst stakeholders of the Authority’s position regarding the challenges it faces and the options it is considering and an agreement that to do nothing is not an option. When discussed, the option for mergers was presented by the public as their preferred choice, a sentiment largely echoed by politicians”.
7. Consequently it is apparent that, following the consultation process undertaken to date, station mergers are the option that should now be pursued. This report deals with the merger of Upton and West Kirby stations at Greasby.
8. At the meeting on 3rd September 2013 the Authority considered report CFO/102/13 “A Strategic Overview of Estates – Identification of Key Priorities”. Whilst the report, and associated recommendations, covered the whole portfolio of building assets, the following parts of the Authority resolution are relevant to this report:-

Members resolved that:

The Authority identify strategic mergers that allow operational response to be maintained, whilst improving community and firefighter facilities and reducing costs.

...two key geographic options where strategic mergers should be considered following consultation are (Wirral and) St. Helens and Knowsley. Members have already approved in principle the working up of a feasibility study for the mergers of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at Prescot. There are a number of merger options to be considered across

St. Helens and Knowsley, including Huyton/Whiston, St. Helens/Eccleston or Whiston/Eccleston.

The Chief Fire Officer report back with detailed proposals on how to take the above recommendations forward.

For all stations, the aim should be to encourage partners to create community hubs and to share costs, reduce wasted space and provide better facilities. Reserves should be used for invest to save schemes which deliver long term revenue streams from partners.

Proposal 1 - Merger

9. Officers have spent considerable time assessing a number of different site options within the locality supported by Wirral MBC. However nearly all have been unacceptable because:-
 - They are not in an optimum response location
 - There are Planning issues
 - Owners were unwilling to sell the land
 - The plot layout was unsuitable
10. Appendix A provides a brief summary of sites considered and discounted.
11. Only one viable site has been identified which is located on Frankby Road in the centre of Greasby (see Appendix B). This site is currently in the ownership of Wirral MBC and contains a library, children's centre and a community hall. The community hall has been transferred into the management of a community trust.
12. Negotiations with Wirral MBC have progressed positively and it is believed that it would be possible to clear the site and rebuild a shared community facility incorporating the fire station, library and flexible community space for the groups operating out of the community hall. It is considered that this would allow the development of better quality, more efficient and flexible building spaces that would provide improved facilities for all the stakeholders in the project. Formal discussions will take place with representatives from the community hall during the consultation period.
13. Work is ongoing to develop some indicative floor plans which it is hoped will be available at the meeting but certainly available for assisting the full public consultation.
14. Wirral MBC has indicated that whilst a full planning process is necessary such a joint development would not be at odds with any policies for the local area development.
15. Negotiations are ongoing with Wirral MBC to acquire this land by way of a development lease. Agreement in principle to this lease has been obtained from Officers at the Council but no further action will be taken until the

outcome of the public consultation exercise is known and reported back to the Authority.

16. As the Chief Fire Officer has made clear in his reports and presentations to District Councils, the merger of two stations into one new station will not improve operational performance. The plan attached at Appendix C shows the 10 minute isochrones (the distance an appliance can cover in ten minutes from its station ground) from the existing Upton and West Kirby stations. The plan attached at Appendix D shows the response isochrone from the proposed Greasby station. As Members will note, there is a marginal reduction in overall coverage from the new location.
17. Both Appendices show the overall operational cover in the area, including by neighbouring stations. Members will note that the vast majority of the area is still covered by the new Greasby station and surrounding stations (Heswall, Wallasey and Birkenhead). It must be noted that that this appertains only to the Wirral District and does not include coverage from any stations in Liverpool or Cheshire.
18. Also attached as Appendix E is the Risk Map of Merseyside. Members will note from comparing Appendices C and D that those areas not covered by the revised 10 minute isochrones from Greasby are low risk. The Chief Fire Officer will implement additional preventative measures in those areas to ensure that any increased risk is mitigated.
19. The new station will have one appliance staffed on a whole time basis and a second staffed on a whole time retained basis (recall to duty within 30 minutes).
20. Converting an appliance to a wholetime retained duty system will have an impact on the way in which the District Community Safety Plan is delivered. However, residents and other stakeholders within the station area can be reassured that the overall Service Risk Based Strategies for delivering Preparedness activity such as Site Specific Risk Inspections and Prevention, Protection and Road Safety activity (which include Home Fire Safety Checks) are flexible enough to deal with changes to the way the appliance is staffed. As a result, steps will be taken to ensure that services continue to target premises, people and places that present the greatest risk to communities and firefighters.
21. As instructed, the Chief Fire Officer has sought to identify potential partners to share the new building and therefore the costs. There is some possibility that North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) may also be interested in sharing the site.
22. If members approve the recommendation to proceed with the merger, a 12 week public consultation process will take place in Upton, West Kirby and Greasby. This consultation will also incorporate staff, representative bodies and station users. A copy of the proposed consultation plan is attached as Appendix F. The consultation plan is similar to that used in Knowsley and is considered a thorough approach to ensure compliance with legislation and good practice. As part of the consultation a newsletter will be produced which will be distributed in

the area around the existing stations and the proposed merger location to explain what is proposed and encouraging people to participate in the consultation process. As detailed in the Knowsley consultation outcomes report, which is also part of the agenda for this meeting, attendance at public meetings in Knowsley was disappointing, but it is still considered important to allow any interested person to participate, so public meetings remain part of the plan for this consultation

23. The Chief Fire Officer will report back to the Authority in early 2015 on the outcome of the consultation process to allow any final decision to be made on the proposed merger.
24. Officers are engaged in a procurement process through the North West Construction Hub to appoint a main contractor to design and build any of the first phase of new stations. If, as a result of considering the outcome of the consultation process, the Authority agrees to proceed with the new Greasby station, it is anticipated the contractor will immediately start work to design the new building and submit the appropriate planning applications to allow a start on site in 2015.
25. It is anticipated that the build process should take about 12 months from start to finish.

Alternative to merger if strong public opposition to proposal

26. To date in the consultations that have taken place mergers have been the preferred “least worst” option for the local community. However if the specific consultation on the merger was strongly opposed by the local community the alternative option to deliver the required savings to ensure a balanced budget would be the outright closure of West Kirby fire station while maintaining the station at Upton.
27. The isochrone map at Appendix J shows that the remaining Wirral stations can achieve the 10 minute attendance standard in the majority of the West Kirby station area.
28. If this proposal was preferred following consultation, the appliance at West Kirby would be converted to Wholetime Retained and relocated to Upton at the most operationally appropriate time to provide cover as detailed in paragraph 17. If the merger proposal was preferred then the appliance at West Kirby would convert to wholetime retained crewing status and be relocated to the new station at Greasby once operational.

Equality and Diversity Implications

29. The Equality Impact Assessment for the overall approach to station mergers and closure is being approached in stages, with the current version attached at Appendix I. in relation to Wirral, stages one and two have been completed and the EIA will be developed further during once the outcomes of consultation are known, as has been the case with Knowsley.

Staff Implications

30. A staff saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts in merging Upton and West Kirby stations is anticipated. This equates to some £864,000 inclusive of employer's National Insurance and pension contributions. This saving is required to deliver one quarter of the operational savings of £3.4m assumed in the current financial plan. These savings are included in the table of revenue expenditure attached as Appendix F to this report. Firefighter posts are being lost by using natural turnover rates – reserves are being used to avoid compulsory redundancy amongst this part of the workforce. Staff will have the opportunity to earn extra money by taking secondary retained contracts.
31. If Members agree the proposal today and following considering the outcomes of public consultation the Chief Fire Officer will move to the new staffing arrangement of one wholetime appliance at Upton and one wholetime retained appliance at West Kirby immediately thereafter. At the point at which the new station became operational both appliances would be moved to Greasby.
32. Formal consultation with Representative Bodies has commenced and will continue throughout the process. In particular, representatives from each station are to be appointed to work on the project team to ensure that the new Greasby station is suitable for a modern Fire & Rescue Service. This mirrors the process undertaken on the recent PFI Project with the aim of achieving a similar standard to that provided on the new PFI stations.

Legal Implications

33. Any lease of the land will be subject to title investigation and satisfactory lease terms being agreed and approved by Wirral MBC and the Authority. The lease and development agreement terms will not be agreed so as to be contractually binding until public consultation has been sought and the Authority has considered the outcomes of this consultation.
34. Wirral MBC and potential lessees and partners are aware that all negotiations with regards to the site are subject to public consultation and Authority consideration of the outcomes of this consultation.
35. The procurement process for a main building contractor referred to at paragraph 24 is at an early stage and expressions of interest are being sought from potential contractors on the basis that the precise number of station builds and the location of any such stations are to be determined.
36. A twelve week public consultation process will be fully reported to and considered by the Authority prior to a decision being made on either outcome. No binding agreements or commitments in relation to land or services in respect of either proposal outlined in this report will be made on behalf of the Authority until such time as the Authority has considered the public consultation.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

37. The estimated operating costs of the current Upton and West Kirby stations currently total £2m. The forecast running costs of a new Greasby station are £1.1m, a saving of £0.9m. This forecast is based upon the operating costs of the new PFI stations. Details are included in Appendix F
38. Negotiations are ongoing with Wirral MBC about the exact structuring of the finances, the lease agreements necessary and other arrangements around land disposals. Members will be advised of the agreed costs and development structure when the Chief Fire Officer reports back on the outcomes of consultation in January 2015.
39. The estimated build costs of the proposed new station are included in Appendix H, together with an estimate of the potential income from the sale of the buildings and land at Upton and West Kirby.
40. Overall the forecast capital cost of a new fire station net of capital receipts is £3.450 million. This is based upon receiving no grant towards the project and does not include the costs and contributions of any partners. . Members will recall that the Authority has bid into the Transformation and Efficiency fund to support the mergers programme – it bid for £4.5m in total of which £1.5m was for this project. The outcome of the bid is expected from CLG towards the end of the year. It is currently anticipated that any net cost will be met from reserves so as to avoid borrowing. A full development plan will be worked up with Wirral and other partners during the consultation period and reported back with the consultation results.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

41. The table below details the reduction in incidents in both station grounds over a 10 year period providing reassurance that the risk in both areas is reducing significantly.

Station	2004/05	2013/14	Difference	% Difference
Upton	1128	592	-536	-47.5%
West Kirby	290	220	-70	-24.1%
Total	1418	812	-606	-42.7%

42. A Risk Register will be created for the Station Mergers project and this will be regularly monitored by the Strategic Management Group. Probably the most significant risk is that delays to the project, particularly building the new stations, will lead to there being insufficient firefighting resources to staff the available appliances. This was highlighted in report CFO/038/14 to Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27th March.
43. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.

44. Any new building will be built to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as the absolute minimum.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

45. Whilst, as stated above, the proposed station merger will not improve operational cover in the Wirral, it is the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances.
46. A new fire station will however provide an improved working environment for firefighters, including enhanced training facilities. It will also provide much improved community facilities compared to those available at the current Upton and West Kirby stations, which in turn will lead to greater interaction between firefighters and community groups and hence assist in creating safer communities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
