

## MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	FULL AUTHORITY		
DATE:	2 <sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER 2014	REPORT NO:	CFO/095/14
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	KIERAN TIMMINS	REPORT AUTHOR:	COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	ANANTHA SUBRAMANAYAM, ESTATES DEVELOPMENT MANAGER DEB APPLETON, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE SARAH BOURNE, DEPUTY CLERK		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSED STATION MERGER OF HUYTON AND WHISTON		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: ANNUAL REVENUE COSTS OF HUYTON, WHISTON & PRESCOT
	APPENDIX B: CAPITAL COSTS OF THE NEW PRESCOT STATION – <i>EXEMPT BY VIRTUE OF PARA 3 OF PART 1 OF SCH 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972</i>

### Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members approve the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at Prescot having considered the outcomes of the public consultation as detailed in report number CFO/094/14.

### Recommendation

2. That Members;
    - a. approve the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a site in Manchester Road, Prescot;
    - b. approve the change in crewing of the Whiston fire appliance from wholetime to wholetime retained
    - c. amend the capital programme to incorporate the £3.1m Prescot fire station scheme;
    - d. give delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police, with a view to sharing the new building; and
    - e. give delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, the Clerk and the Chair to the Authority to agree appropriate lease terms with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and to enter into a lease.
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## **Introduction and Background**

3. At its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014, the Authority considered report CFO/044/14 which proposed the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at Prescott. The Authority resolved that:
  - a) *the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new site on Manchester Road, Prescott, subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014, be approved*
  - b) *a report be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of this consultation. This report will contain any operational implications of the merger including details of Section 13/16 mutual aid arrangements with Cheshire FRS for the coverage of Cronton.*

### Current Situation

4. Report CFO/094/14, elsewhere on today's agenda, provides detailed feedback on the comprehensive 12 week public consultation process undertaken between 7<sup>th</sup> May and 28<sup>th</sup> July 2014. A significant majority of those participating in the consultation process thought that the proposal to close Huyton and Whiston fire stations and build a new fire station at Prescott was reasonable given the circumstances. A small number of concerns were expressed about the Manchester Road site which is addressed below.

### The Site

5. The comments made during consultation with regard to this site focussed on its proximity to the Cables Retail Park and other new developments nearby, the speed humps/traffic calming measures in Manchester Road, disruption to local traffic and the busy Hall Lane/Manchester Road junction.
6. Members will appreciate that it is rarely possible to identify land in an optimum location which is available, at a reasonable price, and which local residents are happy to see a fire station built upon. Consequently site selection is always going to represent a compromise, to a greater or lesser degree. Report CFO/091/12 on the proposal to build a new fire station at Prescott as part of a combined 'Blue Light Hub', considered by the Authority on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012, identified the Manchester Road site as suitable following a review of location options across the Prescott area in consultation with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC). A detailed review of the predicted impact on operational performance had previously been carried out for this site, using the Fire Incident Response Simulator (FIRS) and the location was agreed as suitable by Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) for the proposed 'Blue Light Hub'.
7. It is acknowledged that the nearby Cables Retail Park, and other junctions in the vicinity, can be very busy at times, but so are other areas of Merseyside. Fire appliances have to negotiate traffic congestion and traffic calming measures, throughout Merseyside on a daily basis whilst responding to

emergency incidents and when travelling at normal speed to other activities. As numbers of emergency responses are relatively low (and many occur when the appliance is off station anyway), the Chief Fire Officer does not believe that the Manchester Road site will prove problematic in this regard. Further discussions will be held with highway engineers at Knowsley MBC to identify if alternative solutions to the speed humps in the immediate vicinity of the station can be provided.

8. Since the last report on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014, negotiations have continued with Knowsley MBC over the identified land at this site. Officers have agreed that some 1.6 acres at the top of the site will be required for the new facility (of the overall site of 4.1 acres). Draft Heads of Terms have been proposed by Knowsley MBC for the grant of a building licence and agreement for lease of the site. These Heads of Terms are currently the subject of discussions between the parties which are progressing well.
9. Instructions have been issued jointly by the Authority and Knowsley MBC to a firm of independent valuers to undertake a valuation of the site. The valuation will be incorporated into the lease, subject to any negotiations which may be necessary to reflect any issues that are subsequently found on site. The results of this valuation are expected shortly but early indications are that the value of the land will not exceed £300,000.
10. Title searches have been carried out on the land in question. Preliminary enquiries have also been made to establish the location of any electricity, gas, water or telecommunications apparatus that crosses the site. Initial environmental surveys have indicated that there is an environmental risk with the site and further work to assess/remediate contaminated land will be required. The survey work has indicated that coal mining has taken place on this site in the past and there are several in-filled mine shafts present. Further work needs to be carried out to ensure that any potential hazards are eliminated before any building work takes place and a specialist contractor will be appointed shortly to carry out this work.
11. The Chief Fire Officer is confident that this can be achieved in a straightforward manner as neighbouring properties, including businesses and private housing, together with the road network in the area, have all been built on land with the same issues.
12. An initial meeting has been held with Knowsley highways engineers to discuss traffic implications including access and egress arrangements for the site. Further work is required including a Road Safety Audit.

### Construction

13. Officers are currently in the process of appointing a contractor to carry out any major building works including the new Prescott fire station (subject to approval at today's meeting), as well as any other station merger proposals that the Authority may approve in the future. This appointment process will take place via the North West Construction Hub (NWCH) and will involve a mini-

competition between the six contractors that are on the NWCH High Value Construction Framework for design and build schemes. It is currently anticipated that the process to appoint the contractor will be concluded by the end of October 2014 with a view to seeking formal approval to the appointment from the Authority in November.

14. Subject to approval by the Authority and assuming the contractor is appointed in the time frame anticipated, design works will start straight away, leading to a planning submission and a start on site date in March 2015. The contractor will be responsible for ensuring that any ground conditions are fully investigated and remediated prior to any building work on site. It is anticipated that the build phase of the project would last around 12 months to complete therefore the new station will not be operational until April 2016.
15. As previously indicated, the new Prescott 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). However, the Chief Fire Officer intends to incorporate a third bay into the design of this building for resilience purposes.

#### Partners

16. The Chief Fire Officer has sought to identify potential partners to share the new building and therefore costs. The original proposal for Prescott was that it would be a 'Blue Light Hub' with a significant presence of both Merseyside Police and NWS. However, since that proposal was advanced in 2012, Merseyside Police and NWS have reconsidered their positions.
17. The Police and Crime Commissioner are about to commence a public consultation on the future police Estates strategy. This deals comprehensively with all of the 78 police buildings across all five districts. Until that consultation is complete the police are not in a position to commit to any decision about the options for Prescott but have not ruled out at this stage the option of a joint development on the site. This report is prepared on the assumption that Merseyside Police will not partake in the project.
18. NWS have confirmed that they will not now be co-locating to the new Prescott site.

#### Mutual Aid Arrangements with Cheshire

19. As required, following the Authority meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014, this section of the report covers details of the Section 13/16 mutual aid arrangements with Cheshire FRS for the coverage of Cronton.
20. MFRA has made arrangements under Section 13 and Section 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 with Cheshire FRA to cover the Cronton area of Knowsley. MFRA reciprocate by providing cover to a number of areas of Cheshire including Burton, Burtonwood, Collins Green, Hale, Little Neston, Neston and Parkgate. These Agreements were established and signed on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

21. A Section 13 Agreement is a reinforcement scheme or to provide mutual assistance in the event of an emergency. Both parties agree to provide reinforcements based upon best endeavours and determined by operational availability at the time of request in the event of an emergency. Section 16 is an Agreement for one Fire & Rescue Authority to discharge their functions by others or cede responsibility of their area of operations to another.
22. Under these Agreements both parties have response arrangements of one appliance to provide an initial response for all property fires, road traffic collisions (persons trapped) and any other persons reported/trapped type incidents. The actual resources mobilised to an incident in either Authority area will be subject to a determination based upon the location and critical nature of an incident and upon the availability and response time of that resource.

#### Interim crewing arrangements prior to the build completion

23. As stated in paragraph 14 a new station at Prescott would not be operational until April 2016 at the earliest.
24. The Authority has approved using natural turnover rates from Firefighter retirements to deliver the reduction in Firefighter numbers required to deliver a balanced budget. The Authority has committed to use reserves to avoid compulsory Firefighter redundancies as the rate of retirements is not as fast as is required to balance the financial plan in year 2015/16. The rate of retirements does however exceed the time frame anticipated to deliver all of the proposed mergers through to operational conclusion.
25. The impact on appliance availability has previously been highlighted to Members at the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014 within report CFO/038/14. In simple terms as more Firefighters retire and are not replaced in order to meet the savings target for 2015/16 and the structural changes in terms of the conversion of wholetime appliances to wholetime retained are not made it is no longer possible to continue to crew 28 wholetime appliances.
26. The fire appliance at Huyton is always maintained on wholetime availability as Huyton is a key station. Whiston is not a key station therefore the fire appliance is on occasion unavailable for full shifts due to insufficient staffing caused by high numbers of personnel on other duties (as explained within CFO/038/14). This situation will become more acute over time to the point where the appliance would never be crewed on a wholetime basis.
27. In order to maintain the availability of the Whiston appliance prior to the merger and to avoid the situation whereby the personnel at Whiston were detached out on each shift to make up appliance availability elsewhere it is the intention of the Chief Fire Officer to seek expressions of interest from existing staff to undertake wholetime retained working at Whiston.

28. The Chief Fire Officer has previously sought expressions of interest for wholetime retained working on two occasions. On neither occasion were sufficient expressions of interest received to crew even one appliance. In order to ensure the Whiston appliance is crewed on a wholetime retained basis the Chief Fire Officer will again seek expressions of interest from existing staff but will supplement this approach through external transfers in and direct recruitment. The proposals for external transfers in and recruitment will be the subject of a separate Authority report. If in the short term it is not possible to secure sufficient numbers of personnel to crew the appliance on a wholetime retained basis then it will remain available to be crewed on recall to duty. Members should note that whilst recall to duty is a recognised system within the Grey Book it is entirely voluntary and is therefore not as resilient as wholetime retained.

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### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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29. The Equality and Diversity implications of the public consultation exercise are addressed in report CFO/094/14 and the Equality Impact Assessment has been updated to reflect the consultation outcomes.
30. Equality and Diversity considerations will be taken into account in the design of the layout of the new community fire station.

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### **Staff Implications**

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31. A net saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts is anticipated from the merger of Huyton and Whiston and the conversion of the Whiston appliance from wholetime crewing to wholetime retained. 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 target of £3.4m assumed in the current financial plan. Firefighter posts are being lost by using natural turnover rates – reserves are being used to avoid compulsory Firefighter redundancy. Staff will have the opportunity to earn extra money by taking wholetime retained contracts.
32. Subject to the approval of this proposal by the Authority and at a date to be determined based on the operational requirements of the Service the personnel at Whiston will be posted to surrounding stations and the appliance will convert from wholetime to wholetime retained status.
33. Formal consultation with Representative Bodies has continued throughout the process. If the proposal is approved, staff representatives would be appointed to work on the project team to ensure that any new 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**

34. Any building licence and eventual lease of the land will be subject to title investigation and the outcome of appropriate searches and ground investigation. In addition satisfactory lease terms and an appropriate premium need to be negotiated and agreed between the parties and approved by Knowsley MBC before a building licence or lease can be entered into.
35. Participation in the scheme by Merseyside Police will require the negotiation and agreement of an appropriate agreement for lease.

## **Financial Implications & Value for Money**

36. The estimated combined operating costs of the current Huyton and Whiston stations total £1.993m. The forecast running costs of a new Prescott station are £1.133m, a saving of £0.860m. As previously stated this is based on a reduction in WTE firefighter posts from 48 to 26, and similar premise operating costs of the new PFI stations. This savings has been assumed in the 2014/15 operational staffing saving target. Details are included in Appendix A. Also included are the potential development agreement/lease costs with Knowsley MBC for building on this land.
37. The estimated costs for the remediation to the land and predicted build costs of the new Prescott community fire station are some £3.1m. However, until a contractor is appointed and detailed prices are received, including any works required on the land, this can only be an estimate. Details of the potential capital costs and income are detailed in Appendix B to this report. This income includes capital receipts from the sale of land at the current Huyton and Whiston sites, together with grant already received from DCLG in the sum of £1.77m.
38. Overall the forecast capital cost net of capital receipts and the Government grant is £0.830m. Members have set aside funds in the capital investment reserve to meet any funding shortfall in the capital build cost of the station mergers initiative. Therefore this cost will be met from capital investment reserve and not by any additional borrowing.

## **Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications**

39. A Risk Register is being created for the Station Mergers project and will be regularly monitored by the Strategic Management Group. The most significant risk for the project as a whole is that delays to the project, particularly building the new stations, will lead to there being insufficient Firefighters to staff the available appliances. This issue is covered in more detail elsewhere in this report.
40. The other major risk at this site is the potential impact on the building costs to remediate the land due to the presence of mine shafts or other environmental hazards.

41. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.
42. Any new building will be designed and built to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as the absolute minimum.

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

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43. Whilst the proposed station merger will not improve operational cover in the Knowsley area, it is the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances and is seen as reasonable given the financial challenge faced by the Authority.
44. 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 Huyton and Whiston stations, which in turn will lead to greater interaction between Firefighters and community groups and hence assist in creating safer communities.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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- CFO/091/12** Revised Duty System at Whiston, Authority, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012
- CFO/136/13** Station Mergers, Authority, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013
- CFO/020/14** Outcomes from Station Merger Engagement, Authority, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014
- CFO/044/14** Proposed Station Merger of Huyton and Whiston, Authority, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014
- CFO/094/14** Knowsley Station Mergers Consultation Outcomes, today's agenda

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**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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- BREEAM** Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
- FIRS** Fire Incident Response Simulator
- MBC** Metropolitan Borough Council
- NWAS** North West Ambulance Service
- NWCH** North West Construction Hub
- WTE** Whole-time Equivalent