

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	30TH JUNE 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/060/15
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	KIERAN TIMMINS	REPORT AUTHOR:	COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSALS FOR ECCLESTON AND ST. HELENS FIRE STATIONS		

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Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members consider the draft proposal to merge Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens and the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire engines as “wholetime retained” (with a 30 minute recall).
 2. Alternatively, Members consider the outright closure of Eccleston fire station.
 3. Both draft proposals are subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 3rd August 2015.
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Recommendation

4. That Members approve a 12 week period of public consultation (to commence with effect from 3rd August 2015) over the proposal to merge Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens and re-designate one of the two wholetime fire engines from these stations as “wholetime retained”, or for the outright closure of Eccleston fire station.
 5. Following the conclusion of the consultation a further report will be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of the consultation and any operational implications.
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Introduction and Background

6. 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.”

7. 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.”

8. Paragraph 17 of the same report stated, “*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*”.
9. Alternative options that were considered during that process are set out in Appendix A together with an explanation of why the Chief Fire Officer does not consider those options as suitable at this time.
10. Consequently it is apparent that, following the consultation processes undertaken to date, station mergers are the option that should now be

pursued. This report deals with the proposed merger of Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a potential new site in St. Helens.

11. 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.

... 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.

Merger Option

12. Officers have spent considerable time assessing a number of different site options within the locality, supported by officers from St. Helens 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
13. Appendix B shows the location of sites considered whilst Appendix C sets out the operational response change methodology used to identify alternative sites.
14. One viable site has been identified which is located on Canal Street in the centre of St. Helens (see Appendix D). This site is currently in the ownership of Pilkington United Kingdom Ltd. and is part of a much larger operational site called Watson Street works. The site is exactly equidistant between the two

existing stations. Following initial discussions, it has been established that part of this site could be made available, if the merger option was to be pursued.

15. If, following consultation, Members decide to pursue the merger option, officers will negotiate with various parties involved, in order to buy or lease an appropriate area within this site.
16. The table below details the reduction in incidents in both station grounds over a 10 year period.

Station Ground	2005/06	2014/15	Difference	% Difference
50 - St Helens	1888	911	-977	-51.75%
52 - Eccleston	841	444	-397	-47.21%
Grand Total	2729	1355	-1374	-50.35%

17. The table below shows the average attendance times to all life risk incidents in the St. Helens and Eccleston station areas. Members will note that attendance in the St. Helens station area has remained largely unchanged over the past five years, whereas Eccleston attendance times have increased over the period. The reason for this is that due to the challenges faced by the Service in staffing all fire engines for the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, the Eccleston fire engine has been off the run more times in 2014/15 than in previous years. In practice this has meant that the station ground was covered by neighbouring fire engines with slightly longer attendance times, thus increasing the average attendance time. St. Helens, as a key station, is always covered either by the St Helens fire engine or through a standby move.

Actual Averages	St Helens	Eccleston
2008/09	00:05:57	00:05:04
2014/15	00:05:51	00:05:40

18. If St. Helens and Eccleston both closed and a new station was built on Canal Street then the mean average run time to life risk incidents on the St Helens station area would be **5 minutes 26 seconds**. The mean average run time to incidents in the Eccleston station area from Canal Street would be **4 minutes 47 seconds, 1 minute 57 seconds** quicker than the alternative outright closure of Eccleston Station. Overall, mean average response times to incidents for the combined station area of St Helens and Eccleston would be **5 minutes 12 seconds**.
19. 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 generally not improve operational performance. However, in this instance, it does. The plan attached at Appendix E shows the 10 minute isochrones (the distance an fire engine can cover in ten minutes) from the existing Eccleston and St.

Helens stations. The plan attached at Appendix F shows the response isochrones should a fire station be located at Canal Street, St. Helens. As Members will note, there is minimal effect on the overall coverage from the new location.

20. Both Appendices show the overall operational cover in the area, including by neighbouring stations at Prescot, Kirkby and Newton le Willows. Members will note that the vast majority of the area would still be covered by a new St. Helens station and surrounding stations.
21. To provide further clarity, Appendices G and H provide the same information as Appendices E and F but with 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 minute isochrones shown.
22. Also attached as Appendix I is the Risk Map of Merseyside. Members will note from comparing Appendices E and F that the minimal area not covered by the 10 minute isochrones from the new St. Helens site are low or medium risk. If following consultation the Authority support this proposal, the Chief Fire Officer will implement additional preventative measures in those areas to ensure that any impact is mitigated.
23. A new station would have one fire engine staffed on a wholetime basis and a second staffed on a whole time retained basis (recall to duty within 30 minutes).
24. Converting an fire engine 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, (which include Home Fire Safety Checks), Protection and Road Safety activity are flexible enough to deal with changes to the way the fire engine 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 our communities and our firefighters.
25. 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. Merseyside Police are unlikely to share the site due to their current custody suite arrangements, however they would be keen to utilise any training facilities at the new station. Further discussions will take place with both emergency services to determine any future requirements and the extent of such requirements.
26. If Members approve the recommendation to proceed with the merger, a 12 week public consultation process will take place in Eccleston and St. Helens. This consultation will also incorporate staff, representative bodies and station users. A copy of the proposed consultation plan is attached as Appendix J. The consultation plan is very similar to that used recently in the Knowsley and Wirral consultations and ensures compliance with legislation and good practice. As part of the consultation a consultation document will be produced which will be

distributed in existing station areas to explain what is proposed and encourage people to participate in the consultation process.

27. The Chief Fire Officer will report back to the Authority later in the year on the outcome of the consultation process to allow any final decision to be made on the proposed merger.
28. As detailed in report CFO/111/14, considered by Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 27th November 2014, officers have conducted a procurement process via the North West Construction Hub to appoint a main contractor (Wates Construction Ltd) to design and build the new stations. If, as a result of considering the outcome of the consultation process, the Authority agrees to proceed with a new St. Helens 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 mid-2016.
29. It is anticipated that the build process should take about 12 months from start to finish.

Alternative to merger

30. Merger is the preferred “least worst” option for the local community with regards to operational response. However, if following consultation, the Authority determined that the merger was not suitable, the alternative option to deliver the required savings to ensure a balanced budget would be the outright closure of Eccleston fire station while maintaining the station at Parr Stocks Road in St. Helens
31. The isochrone map at Appendix K shows that the neighbouring stations can achieve the 10 minute attendance standard in the majority of the Eccleston station area. However, those areas that could not be reached within ten minutes residents and businesses in the areas concerned would be subject to additional preventative measures to mitigate additional risk.
32. The mean average response time to a life risk incident in the Eccleston station area from St Helens station, following the outright closure, would be **6 minutes 44 seconds**.
33. If this proposal was preferred following consultation, the fire engine at Eccleston would be converted to Wholetime Retained and relocated to St. Helens at the most appropriate time from an operational perspective to provide cover. If the merger proposal was preferred then the fire engine at Eccleston would convert to Wholetime Retained crewing status and be relocated to the new station at Canal Street, St. Helens once operational.
34. Members should be aware that due to the necessity to deliver the required savings may be necessary to relocate the Eccleston fire engine before the new station is built – given the timescales involved.

Equality and Diversity Implications

35. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the overall approach to station mergers and closure is being approached in stages, with the current version attached at Appendix N. In relation to St. Helens, 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 and Wirral.

Staff Implications

36. A staff saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts in merging Eccleston and St. Helens 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 L 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.
37. 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 fire engine at St. Helens and one Wholetime Retained fire engine at Eccleston. At the point at which the new station became operational both fire engines would be moved to the new St. Helens site.
38. 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 with the project team to ensure that the new St. Helens 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

39. The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 places a statutory duty on Fire Authorities to:
- Section 7 – respond to fires.
 - Section 8 –respond to Road Traffic Collisions (RTC's).
 - Section 9 –respond to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Conventional Explosive (CBRNE), Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and Serious Transport incidents.
 - Section 11 – (power to) respond to any incident where a person or animal may die, be injured or become ill.
40. Any land purchase or lease will be subject to title investigation and satisfactory terms being agreed between the third party and the Authority.

The purchase or lease terms will not be agreed so as to be contractually binding until public consultation has been concluded and the Authority has considered the outcomes of this consultation.

41. Potential 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.
42. It is considered that in carrying out the extensive twelve week consultation that is proposed, the Authority will be fully complying with legal requirements and best practice guidelines. The outcomes of this 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

43. The estimated operating costs, including staffing, of the current St. Helens and Eccleston stations currently total £2.1m. The forecast running costs of a new St. Helens station are £1.2m, a saving of £0.9m. Details are included in Appendix L.

43. Members are asked to note that the current St. Helens (opened in 1959) and Eccleston (opened in 1970) fire stations are in need of significant refurbishment to bring them up to a reasonable standard for a modern Fire & Rescue Service so the provision of a new building to replace the stations will negate the need for such refurbishment.
44. The estimated build costs of the proposed new station are included in Appendix M, together with an estimate of the potential income from the sale of the buildings and land at Eccleston and St. Helens.
45. Overall the forecast capital cost of a new fire station is £4.8m. This does not include capital receipts from sale of the old sites or the costs and contributions of any partners.
46. Members will recall that the Authority has been successful with its bid into the DCLG Transformation and Efficiency fund to support the mergers programme – this totals £4.5m of which £1.5m was for this project. It is anticipated that any net cost will be met from reserves so as to avoid borrowing. A fully costed development plan will be worked up during the consultation period and reported back with the consultation results.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

47. A Risk Register has been created for the Station Mergers project and this will be regularly monitored by the Strategic Management Group. 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 fire engines. This was highlighted in report CFO/038/14 to Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27th March 2014.
48. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.
49. 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*

50. As stated above, the proposed station merger does improve operational cover in St. Helens and it is the most appropriate option to adopt in the circumstances.
51. A new fire station will also 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 Eccleston and St. Helens 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

BREEAM	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
DCLG	Department for Communities & Local Government
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
NWAS	North West Ambulance Service
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
WTE	Wholetime Equivalent