

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	17 TH DECEMBER 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/094/15
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER	REPORT AUTHOR:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	PROPOSED STATION MERGER OF ECCLESTON AND ST.HELENS FIRE STATIONS AT A NEW STATION ON CANAL STREET		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A APPENDIX B	REVENUE COSTS CAPITAL COSTS (EXEMPT)
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Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members, having considered the outcomes of the public consultation as detailed in report number CFO/092/15, approve the merger of Eccleston and St Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, subject to the purchase of the land from Pilkington's and the granting of planning permission.

Recommendation

2. That Members;
 - a) approve the merger of Eccleston and St Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, subject to the purchase of the land from Pilkington's and the granting of planning permission;
 - b) approve the change in crewing of the Eccleston fire appliance from wholetime to wholetime retained, noting that the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) will endeavour to maintain wholetime crewing of the appliance for as long as is practically possible prior to the completion of the new station in Prescot which would provide some additional coverage into the St Helens district
 - c) amend the capital programme to incorporate the Canal Street fire station scheme; and
 - d) give delegated authority to the CFO to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service, with a view to sharing the new building.

Introduction and Background

3. At its meeting on 30th June 2015 the Authority considered report CFO/060/15 which proposed the merger of Eccleston and St Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street. The Authority resolved that:

- a) *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 at these stations as “wholetime retained”, be approved.*
- b) *Following conclusion of the consultation, a further report be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of the consultation and any operational implications.*

4. The proposals that formed the basis of the consultation process were as follows;

The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire engines as “wholetime retained” (with a 30-minute recall) whilst;

Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.

OR:

*The outright closure of Eccleston fire station as the alternative to the merger.
The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as “wholetime retained” (with a 30-minute recall) whilst;*

Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver savings as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.

5. Report CFO/092/15, elsewhere on today’s agenda, provides detailed feedback on the comprehensive 12 week public consultation process undertaken between 3rd August and 25th October. An overall majority of those participating in the consultation process thought that the proposal to close Eccleston and St Helens fire stations and build a new fire station on Canal Street was reasonable given the circumstances.

Observations raised by staff during the consultation process

6. During staff consultation a number points were raised specific to operational matters. These related to how fire cover would be maintained in the St Helens area with specific focus on the attendance time for second appliances and what would happen to the staff currently serving at Eccleston.
7. Members have already approved the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new station on Manchester Road, Prescot. The station at Prescot will be designated as a key station and the wholetime appliance located there will provide coverage in to the existing Eccleston station area prior to and after

the construction of a new station at Canal Street as the nearest or next nearest appliance to the incident. This will ensure that the response times for the first and additional responding appliances are as fast as can be achieved in the circumstances.

8. It is however the intention of the CFO to maintain the availability of the appliance at Eccleston for as long as possible to ensure the best levels of response across the St Helens area prior to the construction of the new fire stations at Prescot (which will provide coverage on to the existing Eccleston station area as explained at paragraph 7) and Canal Street (subject to Members approving the recommendations of this report). It may however not be possible to maintain the availability of the Eccleston appliance up until the point at which Prescot becomes operational. This is covered in further detail at paragraphs 15 – 19 below.
9. Members will note from the previous report that it was made abundantly clear during the consultation process that whilst the Canal Street location delivered a quicker mean average response across the two existing station areas the response times for second and subsequent appliances would increase whatever option was pursued.
10. The personnel currently based at Eccleston will transfer to surrounding stations at the point at which Eccleston closes.

Other options proposed during the public consultation process

11. A number of suggestions were made during the consultation process as responses to the questionnaire. None of the alternative options proposed by respondents to the questionnaire are operationally viable or would make the necessary levels of savings.
12. The one solely operationally focused suggestion was to close Newton in order to provide 2 fire appliances at the existing St Helens fire station on Parr Stocks Road.
13. As Members are aware Newton is a PFI station therefore would be very difficult to close for a number of practical reasons. The Newton fire appliance is crewed on the Low Level of Activity and Risk (LLAR) duty system and has an allocation of 16 (Wholetime Equivalent) WTE Firefighter posts against the 24 WTE at St Helens and Eccleston. Even if the Authority were to close Newton and move the fire appliance from Newton to Parr Stocks Road however this would not deliver any revenue savings at all. It was made clear during the public meetings that the revenue savings are delivered through reductions in Firefighter posts. It was also made clear that by reducing Firefighter posts this also reduces the number of appliances that the Authority can maintain.

Partners

14. As indicated in the last report, the CFO has sought to identify potential partners to share the new building and therefore costs. At this point in time neither Merseyside Police nor North West Ambulance Service have committed to having a presence in the station although discussions are continuing in this regard and Merseyside Police have expressed an interest in utilising any training facility built at the proposed site. In the event the Authority approve the recommendations of this report this dialogue will continue until such time as it is necessary to submit a planning application.

Interim crewing arrangements prior to the build completion

15. If Members were to approve the merger proposal a new station at Canal Street would not be operational until mid-2017 at the earliest. This is contingent on the purchase of the land and planning permission being granted.
16. 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.
17. The impact on appliance availability has previously been highlighted to Members at the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27th 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.
18. The fire appliance at St Helens is always maintained on wholetime availability as it is a key station. Eccleston is not a key station however the CFO has directed the Time and Resource Management Team to maintain the wholetime availability of the appliance whenever possible until such time as the new fire station at Prescot is operational (estimated to be early 2017). It may not be possible however to maintain the wholetime availability of the Eccleston appliance on all shifts. This situation will become more acute over time to the point where the appliance may never be crewed on a wholetime basis.
19. The CFO has previously detailed for Members the measures he is taking under delegated authority to maintain appliance availability (CFO/013/15) through the utilisation of wholetime retained crewing of non-key appliances at stations involved in the merger proposals. A second appliance located at St Helens fire station will therefore be crewed on a wholetime retained basis irrespective of whether the Eccleston appliance is crewed should members approve the merger proposal.

Option 2 – the outright closure of Eccleston

20. As Members are aware the consultation process also considered the option of the outright closure of Eccleston and the relocation of the Eccleston appliance to St Helens be crewed on a wholetime retained basis.
21. It remains the view of the CFO that the merger proposal will deliver the least overall impact on operational response when compared to the outright closure option, any of the other options contained within the Authority Consultation document or any other suggestion made during the consultation process.
22. It is the strong recommendation of the CFO therefore that Members approve the proposal to merge the existing Eccleston and St Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street and crew the Eccleston fire appliance on a wholetime retained basis subject to the interim provisions outlined at Paragraphs 8, 18 and 19.

Equality and Diversity Implications

23. The Equality and Diversity implications of the public consultation exercise are addressed in report CFO/092/15 and the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been updated to reflect the consultation outcomes. One action within the EIA for all the merger proposals is to “target Home Fire Safety Checks for those vulnerable older people most affected by the future station mergers and closures. This has been completed for Knowsley and activity is underway to ensure that the same action is completed for vulnerable people living in St Helens and Wirral.
24. Equality and Diversity considerations will be taken into account in the design of the layout of the new community fire station should that option be approved by Members.

Staff Implications

25. A net saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts is anticipated from the merger of Eccleston and St Helens and the conversion of the Eccleston 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.
26. 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

27. Participation in the scheme by Merseyside Police or North West Ambulance Service will require negotiation and agreement of an appropriate lease arrangement along with a Development Agreement if any partners wish to be involved.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

28. The estimated combined operating costs of the current Eccleston and St Helens fire stations total £2.079m. The forecast running costs of a new station at Canal Street are £1.193m, a saving of £0.886m. 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.
29. The predicted build costs of the new fire station at Canal Street, including land, are some £5.250m based on current estimated market rates. However, until any decision on planning permission is taken and detailed prices are calculated by the Authority's chosen building company Wates to reflect not only the Authority's (and any partner's) requirements but also to fulfil any planning conditions, 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 Eccleston and St Helens sites, together with grant already approved by DCLG in the sum of £1.490m.
30. Overall the forecast capital cost net of capital receipts and the Government grant is £3.060m. 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

31. A Risk Register has been created for the Station Mergers project and is 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 firefighting resources to staff the available appliances. This issue is covered in more detail elsewhere in this report.
32. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.
33. Any new building will be designed and built to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as the absolute minimum.

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34. The proposed station merger will, uniquely, improve response times across the existing Eccleston and St Helens station areas. It does however result in the conversion of one wholetime crewed appliance to wholetime retained. This will have an impact on the response times for any second and subsequent appliance attendance. It is however the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances and is considered reasonable given the financial challenge faced by the Authority.
 35. A new fire station will however provide an improved working environment for firefighters. 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.
 36. All the community groups currently using St Helens Fire Station will be accommodated within the new station if requested.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BREEAM	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
WTE	Wholetime Equivalent