

AGENDA ITEM:

REPORT TO:	MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE:	3RD JULY, 2012
REPORT NO.	CFO/091/12
REPORTING OFFICER:	KIERAN TIMMINS, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE EXT. 4202
CONTACT OFFICER:	PHIL WEBSTER, HEAD OF ASSETS. EXTN 4515
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP
SUBJECT:	REVISED DUTY SYSTEM AT WHISTON

APPENDIX		TITLE
1		Map of Area
2		Letter from Police Authority
		Letter from NWAS
3		Land Option Identified
4		Draft Proposed Building Layout (Ground Floor)
5		Draft Proposed Building Layout (First Floor)
6		Draft Proposed Building Layout (external)
7		Equality Impact Assessment
8		Grant Bid to CLG

ATTACHED – HARD COPY

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on progress against the delivery of the budget saving option 'implementing a revised duty system at Whiston fire station and to recommend an alternative to that option.

Recommendation

2. That Members;
 - Approve the proposal in principle of the creation of a combined blue light centre at Prescott with the two pump fire station element to replace the

existing one pump fire stations at Huyton and Whiston, subject to successful planning permission, the outcomes of public and staff consultation and final tender prices being known.

- Direct the Chief Fire Officer to enter into appropriate legal agreements with the Police and Ambulance Service.
- Approve the application for grant funding from CLG for £1.7m to support the project.
- Grant delegated powers to the CFO (in consultation with the Chair) to commence public and representative body consultation at the appropriate time.
- Grant delegated powers to the CFO to execute the procurement process for the project on behalf of the Authority and to apply for planning permission.
- Direct the CFO to report back on the outcomes of the tender exercise, grant bid and the consultation processes before the final decision is taken on the project.

Executive Summary

The Authority has previously assumed savings of £0.3m from a revised duty system at Whiston fire station, which would include the option of implementation of the LLAR crewing system.

As an alternative, an option has been identified for a combined blue light hub at Prescott.

This would include:-

- A two pump wholtime community Fire Station (relocating the whole time pumps from Huyton and Whiston)
- A Police Station
- A 6 bay Ambulance Station

It is expected that this option would allow the delivery of the Authority's required savings. This option is therefore recommended to Members for approval in principle.

Introduction & Background

3. Members will recall that as an element of the budget decision for years 1 and 2 of the Spending Review they approved an anticipated saving of £0.3m p.a by introducing a new duty system at Whiston Fire Station. The anticipated level of saving was based around an assumption of what an LLAR duty system might deliver but the Authority was open to considering innovative alternatives.
4. Subsequent to this decision, the Chair of the Police Authority has contacted the Fire Authority Chair with a view to discussing ways of working with Merseyside Police around their requirements for policing at Prescott and the surrounding area.
5. The Authority currently has two one pump wholetime Fire Stations at Huyton and Whiston which provide operational response coverage to the South Knowsley area. (See map Appendix 1)
6. Initial operational assessments have identified that it would be possible to locate both pumps at a single central location (Prescot) which would serve the two station areas and maintain fast response standards.
7. Following the approach from Merseyside Police the Head of Assets has had extremely positive contacts with Officers from Merseyside Police and the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS). Discussions have taken place around the feasibility of a combined blue light hub in Prescot. An understanding of the building requirements and aspirations of each Service has been developed. This interest has been confirmed in formal correspondence, attached as Appendix 2.
8. A Review of location options across the Prescot area has been undertaken and a potentially suitable site has been identified on Manchester Road in Prescot - Appendix 3.
9. Based on operational requirements a floor plan outline has been captured within design drawings, attached to this report at Appendix 4, 5 and 6. This comprises:-
 - A two bay community Fire Station
 - Police Neighborhood Centre / office facilities
 - A six bay Ambulance Station
10. The initial forecast capital cost for a shared building is £5.1m (excluding land).
11. Knowsley MBC has been approached to request the availability of the land identified and if land is free for development.
12. Knowsley MBC have advised that they are willing to sell the land but are required to seek VFM assessment for the land and need to undertake an independent property valuation . They have however indicated some support

for the innovative nature of this project. Further negotiations will be required however the forecast cost of the land is no more than £0.2m.

Impact on MFRA

13. Moving to a two pump single location wholetime station would immediately reduce staffing requirements by 8 posts saving £0.3m as required by the savings option.
14. It would maintain two fully whole time crewed appliances rather than having another single pump LLAR crewed appliance. It is understood that pursuing this approach as an option would be favoured by the representative bodies.
15. There would also be savings from maintaining a single newer, more efficient station (rather than two old inefficient stations) as well as efficiencies from sharing communal areas.
16. The existing Whiston Fire Station has no training facilities, therefore is no longer fit for purpose moving forward.

Impact on Fire Cover

17. A full assessment of the impact on fire cover has been undertaken. The overall impact on fire cover would be a reduction in response performance of approximately 0.42%.
18. It should be noted that the proposal would increase the number of areas within Merseyside which could not be reached within the current standard response time. In particular;
 - A small area of Stockbridge Village (is predominantly medium risk with one small area of high risk);
 - The village of Cronton
19. These areas cannot currently be reached within existing response target times but the response standards would remain towards the very highest levels in the country.
20. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer, that whilst the proposal results in a small diminution in fire cover, that this is offset by the benefits of :
 - Maintaining the more resilient duty system of whole time staffing.
 - Delivering increased operational efficiency through a two pump resource in a single location.
 - Addressing the issue of there being no training facilities at the existing Station At Whiston.

21. Members should note that to deliver the savings which are as a direct result of Government cuts there is no option which will not have an impact on operational performance or resilience. It is recommended, therefore, that the Authority:-

- Approve the development of a combined Blue Light Centre at Prescot, including the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations
- Progress negotiations with Merseyside Police/NWAS and Knowsley Council to assess the feasibility of a shared site.

22. The following table summarises the benefits and disadvantages of the original options and the proposal contained within this report.

OPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
LLAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agreed duty system ▪ Relatively speedily achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No collaboration with other emergency services ▪ Still maintains two buildings/sites one of which has no training facilities. ▪ Need to purchase/build LLAR accommodation <p>Potential difficulties recruiting maintaining numbers for LLAR duty system</p>
Shared Site 2 pump wholetime station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Income from police and ambulance ▪ Single building ▪ Energy efficient building ▪ Joint working ▪ Improved Community Prevention and Protection and community facilities working jointly with other blue light services ▪ Provide better community access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential large capital cost ▪ Time to deliver (But staff savings only delivered by natural turnover) ▪ Requires public consultation/potential public opposition ▪ Small impact on response times

	<p>and DDA compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better staff facilities and accommodation ▪ Maintains wholetime duty system ▪ Capital receipts from current sites ▪ Supported by representative bodies as preferred option a ▪ Capital Grant available. ▪ Purpose built training facilities. 	
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Next Steps

23. If Members confirm they support this proposal the next steps will be:

- Formal confirmation from Police and Ambulance Service to take part in the project
- Public consultation on the proposed fire cover changes
- Staff consultation on the proposal
- Tender process for a construction partner and to firm up costs (this would also involve seeking planning permission)
- Procurement of the appropriate piece of land.

24. There will be a need to consult on this proposal with the public and representative bodies. It is proposed that formal consultation be undertaken with the public, using the model for IRMP consultation as supplemented by open public meetings as required. It is recommended that delegated power be granted to the CFO to enter into the consultation at an appropriate time (after consulting with the Chair to the Authority).

Equality & Diversity Implications

25. The Equality Impact assessment is attached as Appendix 7.

Staff Implications

26. The Authority has assumed staff savings of £0.3m in its financial plan The Authority is working to avoid compulsory redundancy in delivering its savings

plan and these savings will be delivered from Firefighter roles by natural turnover. This means this saving will not be delivered (whichever option chosen) until late 2012/13.

27. Some cleaning/catering staff may be affected by the move to a single site.

Legal Implications

28. Agreement needs to be reached between the partner organisations with regards to land ownership.
29. Contractual agreements and appropriate lease arrangements to be made between partner organisations as necessary once the land ownership is clear.
30. A full public consultation exercise should be carried out and the outcome of this consultation considered fully by members prior to the final decision to continue with the project.
31. Planning permission will be required for the project.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

32. The Authority has assumed savings from changes at Whiston Fire Station of £0.3m. This can be achieved by implementing an LLAR duty system or by considering a station merger.
33. Implementation of LLAR would require the building or purchase of housing for the staff working the duty system (estimated at £0.4m).
34. Negotiations about the price of the potential site indicate a cost of no more than £0.2m.
35. A plan has been developed for the potential shared building which may house all three services. The estimated total build cost including professional fees and contingency is approx £5.1m. The MFRA contribution to the project would be an estimated £1.77m. A new building would avoid ongoing maintenance and repair costs at current buildings.
36. CLG have introduced a capital grant bidding process for the next two financial years and the Deputy Chief Executive has prepared a capital bid for the £1.77m which is attached as Appendix 8. If that bid were unsuccessful the Authority would need to fund its element by borrowing (less the potential capital receipts identified below).
37. The capital receipts from the sale of the two fire station sites in the current market are estimated as £100k for Whiston and £250k for Huyton. Staff savings delivered from this option is approx £0.3m p.a.
38. It is assumed that in relation to day-to-day running costs the overall impact of:

- Savings from reducing two stations to one
- Reduced costs from a single more energy efficient building
- Any increase in costs from improved/enlarged community safety facilities
- Any increase in the rates bill for a new facility

would be broadly cost neutral. NWAS and the Police are expected to contribute towards their element of running costs. The current total running costs for both stations is £65k (not including provision for longer term maintenance).

39. There would be a capital cost contribution and an annual rental contribution from NWAS and Police towards the building yet to be negotiated. It is expected that the long term lease agreements would be established.
40. If the actions proposed in this report are undertaken and the project cannot proceed some costs would be incurred. This is estimated to be no more than £0.1m.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

41. An improved fire station will improve the working environment for firefighters, including appropriate training facilities.
41. The new building will be more energy efficient

Contribution to Achieving the Mission:

“Safer, Stronger, Community – Safe Effective Firefighters”

42. High quality, appropriately located Fire Stations contribute towards the mission.