

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY BUDGET MEETING		
DATE:	27 FEBRUARY 2014	REPORT NO:	CFO/020/14
PRESENTING OFFICER	[PRINCIPAL/ STATUTORY OFFICER]		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEB APPLETON	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	COLIN SCHOFIELD		
TITLE OF REPORT:	OUTCOMES FROM STATION MERGERS ENGAGEMENT		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A:	TABLE DETAILING ENGAGEMENT
	APPENDIX B:	ORS IRMP FORUMS REPORT
	APPENDIX C:	CONSULTATION TEMPLATE
	APPENDIX D:	EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Purpose of Report

1. To request that Members consider the outcomes from the stakeholder/public engagement related to station mergers (and other operational response) options.

Recommendation

2. That Members;
 - a. Note the content of this report and its appendices; and
 - b. 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.

Introduction and Background

3. The Authority at its meeting on 3rd December 2013 considered report CFO/136/13 and resolved that:
 1. *“Members, 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, approve 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 a site 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.*
- 2. *Members give delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in consultation with the Chair and Party Spokespersons to;*
 - i. Identify the most suitable merger sites from which to operate whilst ensuring response standards are maintained.*
 - ii. Identify potential partners for joint working.*
 - iii. 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.*
 - iv. Submit a bid for resources to support any scheme as appropriate to any available funding sources*
- 3. *Members approve the associated consultation process.*
- 4. *Reports be brought back on each of the individual mergers as soon as practicable.”*
- 4. This report details the stakeholder/public engagement undertaken in relation to the recommendations agreed by the Authority (stage one). Within CFO/136/13 the following engagement principles were set out:
 - a. “It is proposed that the Authority enters into a two-stage ‘consultation’ process to scrutinise the options and consider others. As such it is proposed to enter into consultation comprising of a more open-ended listening and engagement phase on the OPTIONS and a formal consultation process on the eventual PROPOSALS.*

Stakeholder/public engagement

- b. Following approval of the recommendations contained within this report Officers will, on behalf of the Authority, commence a series of presentations to those stakeholders directly affected by the proposals. These presentations will be delivered via the most appropriate forums in each area including established local authority forums and where appropriate facilitated public events.*

- c. *The consultation will explore and review the options and rationale applied in reaching the recommendations prior to formal consultation.*
- d. *The Authority will also conduct a number of deliberative Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) consultation events where the public will be asked to consider whether the recommendations reflect the proposals within the IRMP and are reasonable given the significant financial challenges placed on the Authority.*
- e. *This will allow the Authority the opportunity to consider the OPTIONS in the light of any public concerns prior to moving to formal consultation, where more specific details on the PROPOSALS will be available.*

Political engagement

- f. *Members and Officers will continue discussing the options with local and national politicians.*

Staff Engagement

- g. *Staff engagement will underpin the consultation process –using the successful approach adopted with the PFI stations.*

Trade Union Engagement

- h. *Engagement with the trade unions will underpin all aspects of the consultation process.”*

The Engagement Process

5. The table attached as Appendix A details the range of public, political, partner and staff engagement that has taken place in relation to the options being considered by the Authority. This has included five IRMP forums (one in each District); two local Council forums, both in Knowsley (which was the only District to host such events); Council meetings in each District; City Region Cabinet meetings; individual meetings on request from councillors and MPs; representative body meetings and meetings with Council and other partner officers. In all cases the participants were provided with information that enabled them to consider the relative merits, or otherwise, of the following operational response options.
 - Additional Low Level of Activity and Risk stations (LLARs)
 - Introduction of day only crewing at some wholetime stations
 - Introduction of Community Retained crewing
 - Merger of pairs of older stations and their replacement by modern community fire stations
 - Closure of some stations without replacement.

6. In every case it was made clear that the Authority would not be considering these options if it was not for the known and anticipated budget constraints. The time available to present the information varied considerably, from only a few minutes at some Council meetings, to three hours at the Wirral IRMP Forum. As might be expected the feedback varied proportionately.

Outcomes from the Engagement Phase

7. Stakeholder/Public Engagement-Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Forums: Members will recall that the deliberative forum approach (facilitated by Opinion Research Services (ORS)) is a well-established element of the Authority's consultation and engagement programme that has proved very effective in gauging public opinion on Authority ideas and proposals over the last five years. The 2014 IRMP Forums took place in January. The Forums were well attended with between 18 and 25 engaged and enthusiastic participants at each; 111 in total. The Forums used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about the Fire and Rescue Service, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing service delivery options in detail.
8. Full details of the approach and outcomes from the Forums can be found at Appendix B. The outcomes are summarised below. When considering the outcomes Members should note the following comment from ORS:

"Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the five meetings reported here gave diverse groups of people from Merseyside the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's current and future direction of travel.

Because the recruitment was inclusive and participants were diverse, we are satisfied that the outcomes of the meeting are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions. In summary, the outcomes reported here are reliable as examples of the reflections and opinions of diverse informed people reacting to the important and diverse issues discussed in the meetings."

9. Following detailed consideration of the options referred to in paragraph 5 above and of the Authority's financial and operational resource position, the response of the Forums was to favour the option of mergers with more LLAR and station closures being second and third choices respectively (although some way behind mergers). There was limited support for day only crewing and less support for Community Retained crewing.
10. The ORS report summarises the outcome as follows:

"The overall impression is that, when faced with a broad choice between keeping all stations and changing to cheaper duty systems or reducing stations while protecting duty systems, the participants clearly favoured the latter. In other words, they made at least an implicit choice in favour of reducing stations rather than changing the way Merseyside is crewed."

11. There were of course comments and concerns expressed regarding all of the options and these are detailed in the report at Appendix B, but the overall preference was clearly for mergers.
12. Stakeholder/Public Engagement- Knowsley public forums: Only Knowsley Council holds the type of public forum that MFRA was seeking to attend and meetings were held on 21st and 22nd January in Huyton and Whiston respectively. The meetings were promoted in advance by the Council to a network of contacts and by posters in public areas. Despite this promotion, only one member of the public attended the Huyton meeting and one attended at Whiston. Councillors and Council officers were also present. As a result of the attendance the meetings took the form of an informal “round table” style discussion. The questions and answers are detailed at Appendix A.
13. Political Engagement: Appendix A details the engagement with politicians that has carried out by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO). The CFO attended meetings at each Council and gave either a statement or a full presentation depending on the time allocated. In each case he was able to detail the fundamental issues of reducing budget, historical over provision and the five options referred to in paragraph 5. The responses were as follows:

Knowsley – 11/12/13 – The presentation was well received with Councillors understanding that changes to operational provision would need to be made. Only three questions were raised about support services, the views of the FBU and further consultation. Details of these questions and the answers given are in Appendix A

St Helens – 9/1/14 – The CFO was able to explain the presentation in more detail and it was well received by the Councillors. Questions were received about whether Newton would revert to whole time if mergers implemented, whether MFRA has considered co location with partners, whether there would be a capital receipt for the sale of buildings, whether the Parr site would be saleable, about the wholetime/retained model, had MFRA identified land and would hospitals be suitably covered. Answers are detailed in Appendix A. In addition, comments included - “sounds sensible”, “best to look at the cover provided, not the stations”, “pragmatic”.

Liverpool – 15/1/14 – The CFO delivered a short statement at this meeting. There were no questions but Mayor Anderson offered support to the Authority and commented that the Council understood the challenges facing the Authority.

Sefton – 23/1/14 – the CFO delivered a presentation to the full Council. Only one question was asked, regarding the number of PFI stations in Merseyside.

Wirral – 27/1/14 – At the Wirral Economy and Environmental Policy and Performance Committee meeting the CFO delivered his presentation on options to the Committee, together with a number of other Wirral councillors in the public gallery. Questions were asked about the impact on response times,

funding for a new station, why MFRA has received the cuts it has, timescales and prevention. Details can be found at Appendix A

14. In addition to the Council based engagement detailed above, a number of individual and group meetings have taken place with Councillors and MPs. These are also detailed in Appendix A. On each occasion the CFO outlined the challenges and options and discussed the potential implications for the areas concerned. All Councillors and MPs understood the challenges for the Authority and appreciated the CFO meeting with them to explain the thinking behind the options. Although some Councillors understandably had concerns for their own areas, they were reassured by the information given to them. All understood that this has been an engagement phase and that full consultation would follow with any detailed proposals.

Staff Engagement

15. District Managers and other senior managers have been involved in the engagement process, attending meetings and meeting colleagues and other partners to progress the actions. A series of regular Principal Officer briefings have provided updates for staff on the cuts/station response options; with staff given the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Mergers were recognised as the least worst option.

Trade Union Engagement

16. The CFO has undertaken extensive dialogue with both the FBU and FOA in advance of the formal consultation meetings detailed in Appendix A. Both representative bodies appreciate the financial situation faced by the Authority and whilst not supporting the proposals, understand why they are being considered.

Conclusion on engagement

17. 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. This is a factor that Members must now take in to account when considering options involving Liverpool and to a lesser extent Sefton. There is a strong operational logic for mergers in Liverpool but this would invariably involve the closure of one old and one new or relatively new station to build a new station in an optimum location or the closure of two new stations to build a new station in an optimum location. It is the strong recommendation of the CFO that the Authority now consider this as a viable option as a result of the outcomes of the stakeholder/public and engagement and his professional judgement.
18. The ORS facilitated Forums worked particularly well as part of this engagement phase and similar Forums would be used for formal consultation. However,

consideration has to be given to how to market open public consultation events prior to any formal consultation and this has now been added as an activity on the formal consultation template attached at Appendix C.

Progress on Programme Management actions

19. The four actions contained within point 2 of the recommendations from CFO/136/13 all relate to programme management activities. The progress that has been made in relation to these actions is detailed below:
20. In Knowsley, Officers have held two meetings with colleagues in Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council to progress the acquisition of the previously identified site in Prescot. Discussions are proceeding to agree a price, pending a formal report back on the outcome of the engagement process.
21. In St. Helens, two meetings have been held with colleagues in St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council to attempt to identify possible sites in the town centre for a merged station. Difficulties are being encountered in finding an appropriate plot of land as the Council has no suitable land available. Council officers have provided contact details of other land owners and a meeting has recently been held with one land owner to look at a particular piece of land and discuss potential prices for purchase or lease. However, it is not certain whether this site will prove suitable in terms of response times and modelling is currently underway to check this. In the meantime, the search for other sites continues.
22. In Wirral, two meetings have been held with colleagues from Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, as a result of which one potential plot of land has been identified in the Greasby area. Further details are awaited from Council officers of land ownership and other information. It is not certain that this land will be suitable for a variety of reasons but enquiries are continuing and members will be kept informed of developments.
23. Meetings have been held with colleagues from Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) to discuss opportunities for sharing sites. Whilst discussions are ongoing, early indications are that in Prescot, the Police will have a presence, although not to the extent that was originally envisaged when the merger was initially proposed in 2011, but NWAS are unlikely to commit. In St. Helens the Police are unlikely to commit but a final decision will be made when the site is agreed. NWAS are also unlikely to commit. There is however a possibility that other partner organisations, e.g. NHS Health Improvement Teams, may wish to share any new facility. At Greasby, the Police may have a limited presence but NWAS indicate that there is a strong possibility they will use the site as a joint fire and ambulance station. Obviously this may well change as proposals become firmed up.

24. Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 14th January 2014, approved a response to the Government's consultation on the bidding process for transformation funds. The consultation process closed on 14th January 2014. Nothing further has been announced on the results of this consultation so it is still assumed that the bidding process will take place in April 2014 with the results announced in autumn 2014.

Equality and Diversity Implications

25. The Equality Impact Assessment originally considered by the Authority as part of CFO/136/13 has been updated following the engagement phase and is attached at Appendix D. There were no issues raised at this stage that would indicate any disproportionate impact on any of the protected groups.

Staff Implications

26. Formal consultation with Representative Bodies has commenced and will continue throughout the process. In particular, representatives from each station affected will be appointed to work on the project team to ensure that any new stations are suitable for a modern Fire and Rescue Service, mirroring the successful process undertaken on the recent PFI Project.

Legal Implications

27. Legal challenges to local authority decisions often focus on a perceived lack of consultation. It is important in avoiding any application for Judicial Review by members of the public that public consultation can be shown to have been "meaningful". This means that no decisions should be made before the outcomes of any consultation are known and have been properly considered. The case of *R v North & East Devon Health, ex parte Coughlan* (2001) and other cases since have reiterated the fundamental principles of consultation and the balancing of disclosure against confidentiality as being that consultation should be:
- At a 'formative stage' of a proposal
 - Give people 'sufficient reasons' for a proposal to allow intelligent consideration and an intelligent response
 - Allow 'adequate time' for responses
 - Be taken 'conscientiously into account' when the ultimate decision is made
28. Therefore the wider the consultation and the better informed the consultees, the lower the opportunity for challenge.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

29. The only direct costs incurred to date involve the employment of ORS which amounted to some £15,000 for which provision exists in the current year's revenue budget and forms part of the Authority's regular IRMP consultation and engagement processes and budget. There will be further direct costs as the Authority embarks upon the next phase of public consultation detailed above.

Other costs will emerge as progress is made upon identifying and procuring appropriate sites and these will be detailed in the reports on the individual mergers.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

30. Engaging at this stage of the decision making process reduces the risk of challenge at a later stage as the views of stakeholders will be taken into account.
31. Environmental Implications will be taken into account when identifying appropriate sites for any station mergers.

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

32. Engaging with our stakeholders ensures that the Authority does not make decisions in isolation and that feedback can be used to ensure that a wide variety of views can be considered.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/111/11 If this report follows on from another, list the previous report(s)

CFO/136/13 Station Mergers, MFRA 3rd December 2013

CFO/008/14 Government Consultation on the Bidding Process for 2015/16 Transformation Funds, Policy & Resources Committee 14th January 2014

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CFO	Chief Fire Officer
MFRA	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
NWAS	North West Ambulance Service
ORS	Opinion Research Services