

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27TH MARCH 2014	REPORT NO:	CFO/038/14
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CFO STEPHENS	REPORT AUTHOR:	CFO STEPHENS
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	AM MOTTRAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	BUDGET RESOLUTION TRANSITIONAL RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS – ORDER OF APPLIANCE UNAVAILABILITY		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: SEQUENTIAL APPLIANCE UNAVAILABILITY
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Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the sequence in which appliances and therefore stations will become unavailable due to insufficient staffing as Firefighter numbers are reduced to meet the savings target required as a result of Government cuts to the Authority budget and prior to structural changes in relation to station mergers/closures are made.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the contents of this report.

Introduction and Background

3. At the time of writing (10th March 2014) the Authority employs 787 personnel in operational firefighting roles against an established staffing model of 764 posts. This over provision is as a result of the Authority commitment to seek to avoid Firefighter compulsory redundancy through the use of reserves to compensate for low rates of natural turnover through retirement up to and including 2015/16.
4. The distribution of personnel across stations is such that a ridership factor of 1.2 is achieved for each of the 28 appliances operated by the Authority. The ridership factor is the number of people employed for every riding position. On a single pump wholtime fire station on Merseyside the staffing level is 5 riders so 6 personnel are allocated to each of the 4 watches to achieve the required numbers of available personnel taking in to account abstractions such as annual leave and sickness (a figure of 3% is assumed for sickness). Accordingly the ridership factor is 1.2 in that 0.2 of a Firefighter post is allocated additionally to each riding position to meet planned abstractions (1.2 x 5 riding positions = 6 posts per Watch).
5. At the time of writing there are 43 personnel on other duties. This number fluctuates between 40-50 at any time. Personnel on other duties are not classed as being sick in the sense that they attend work and carry out meaningful duties. They are not however available to ride fire appliances. This number of personnel in itself well exceeds the 3%

assumption for sickness absence in the staffing model before short term sickness absence is taken in to account. In addition we have 6 personnel on career breaks and 4 personnel seconded out of the organisation.

6. The Authority has recognised the challenges it faces in relation to sickness absence and through its task and finish group has established a range of new policies and procedures which will help to deliver effective absence management. Members will note that these policies are currently under consultation and will be enacted once they have been through due process.
7. The net impact is that there are insufficient staff now to crew the existing 28 appliances' with the result that appliances will become unavailable unless off duty personnel commit to undertake Additional Voluntary Hours. Members will be aware that all but two stations now only have one whole time appliance. This means that stations will also be unavailable when an appliance at a single pump station is not crewed due to insufficient staffing.
8. On 7th March 2014 the FBU chose not to extend the current Additional Voluntary Hours agreement. Members should be aware that this will have an immediate impact on appliance availability - although negotiation is on-going within the Joint Secretaries to reach a new agreement on the use of Additional Voluntary Hours.
9. At the budget meeting on 28th February 2014 the Authority unanimously approved the budget for the 2014/15 and 2015/16 period. The assumptions the Authority have made in its budget are that in order to meet the £6.3m savings target as a result of Government cuts to the grant for 2015/16 100 Firefighter posts will be removed from the staffing model and the number of stations will reduce from 26 to 22. This reduction in posts will result in a directly related reduction in fire appliances from 28 to 24.
10. As a result of the staffing abstractions described previously there are insufficient personnel at this time to maintain 28 fire appliances. This situation will be compounded further as personnel retire and are not replaced in order to achieve the required post reductions and prior to the structural changes being delivered i.e. the reduction from 26 to 22 stations achieved via station merger or closure. The Authority has already anticipated the potential for this to occur and reflected this within the Budget Resolution specifically; "The Authority recognises that the exact timing of both new station delivery and Firefighter retirements is difficult to forecast and recognises that the Chief Fire Officer will need to continue to manage appliance availability on a dynamic basis under his delegated powers as the financial plan proceeds to delivery".
11. Irrespective of whether or not a new agreement is reached with the FBU on Additional Voluntary Hours appliances will be unavailable now and in the future. The CFO has delegated authority to manage staffing to limit as much as possible the impact of appliance unavailability in line with the Authority resolution.
12. The matrix attached at Appendix A details for Members the sequence in which appliances will become unavailable and therefore stations will close due to insufficient staffing. This sequence has been developed following analysis of mobilisation and other response data in order to deliver the least impactful outcome on performance.
13. Members will note that the unavailability sequence does not directly correspond to the station merger options. This is due to the fact that the merger options reflect the age, condition and distribution of our fire stations, the outcome of the recent stakeholder engagement and the fact that there is capital available to bid for from the DCLG Transformation and Efficiencies fund. A substantive consideration for Members in

agreeing the budget assumptions was also the fact that the public was almost unanimous in support for station mergers rather than outright closures whilst recognising that outright closures may be unavoidable.

14. Members recognised in the budget process that further funding cuts are highly likely beyond 2015/16. Given the limited options available to Members to make savings in 2015/16 it is very likely indeed that outright station closures will follow if there are no outright station closures prior to this time. The appliance unavailability sequence reflects what these closures would be if and when mergers are no longer an option. Information and data regarding closures will be used to inform future strategic decisions regarding assets as fundamental element of financial plans.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. There are no equality and diversity implications contained within this report.

Staff Implications

16. Where an appliance becomes unavailable due to insufficient staffing, the remaining personnel originally allocated to that appliance will be detached to other stations to maintain rider levels at 5 where possible or appliance availability where not.

Legal Implications

17. There are no direct legal implications associated with this report however if sufficient numbers of appliances become unavailable then the Authority may be at risk of not meeting its statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 sections 6 to 9 as well as other related legislation. The Authority should note that a minimum of 10 appliances are required to be available at all times to meet the 10 minute response standard.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

18. The use of Additional Voluntary Hours to maintain appliance availability is not contained within established budget lines and is therefore met from reserves. This can therefore only ever be a short term measure.
19. If reserves are used to support Additional Voluntary Hours they are then not available to finance other long term measures to support revenue budgets such as the repayment of debt.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

20. This sequence utilised to determine appliance unavailability has been developed following analysis of mobilisation and other response data in order to deliver the least impactful outcome on performance.

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

21. The CFO will seek to manage appliance availability in such a way so as to minimise the impact on response times.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NONE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CFO	Chief Fire Officer
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
FBU	Fire Brigades Union