MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**		
DATE:	**25 JANUARY 2024**	**REPORT NO:**	**CFO/02/2024**
PRESENTING OFFICER	**ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, DAVE MOTTRAM (PRESENTED BY SM JOHN KELLAWAY)**		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	**AM BEN RYDER**	**REPORT AUTHOR:**	**SM JOHN KELLAWAY**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**JOHN KELLAWAY, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM**		
TITLE OF REPORT:	**THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE IMPACT ON MFRS'S OPERATIONAL RESPONSE - WILDFIRE SPECIALISM**		

APPENDICES:	**APPENDIX A: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the Authority on the way in which Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) responds to changes in risk; this presentation focusing particularly on the environmental impacts and Service response to Wildfire.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;

   a) note the introduction of the Wildfire Specialism into Operational Response capabilities of MFRS, as contained within Appendix A Wildfire presentation; and

   b) apply scrutiny to the approach adopted.

Introduction and Background

3. The MFRA Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021/24 included an action to locate a capability specialised to respond to wildfire in areas of Merseyside with the highest risk of those events. The action included providing the skills, knowledge and equipment to our firefighters to enable them to effectively deal with this type of fire.

4. The National Security Risk Assessment is produced by the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom. This identified Wildfire as an environmental hazard within the National Risk Register (2023). This is a key document which is reviewed within planning cycles to ensure MFRS has the capability to respond effectively to identified risk.

5. MFRS aim is to:
    a) Mitigate the likelihood of wildfires occurring
    b) Prepare our communities to be safer from the effects of wildfire
    c) Respond effectively to wildfires
    d) To provide assistance to promote recovery from the environmental effects of wildfires.

6. The locations chosen to base the specialism are Formby and Heswall.

7. The target date for operational availability of the specialism is 1st April 2024

8. A presentation on the wildfire specialist capability will accompany this report at the meeting.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. The EIA is attached as Appendix A and is in relation to MFRA's capabilities.

10. E&D considerations have been made, but as the activity in question is not a new role, no implications were identified (It is a development based on enhancing knowledge and skills of existing firefighters who already perform the activity of responding to wildfires).

Staff Implications

11. The staff at the selected locations have been widely consulted with over defining the role, training, specifying equipment and vehicles. This has included in person visits, equipment trials, online questionnaires and emails over the last twelve months.

12. The role is not a departure from routine activity associated with the role of a firefighter or manager. The skills, knowledge and equipment allow; more tactical options to be used than the existing methods of firefighting and a proactive approach to working with landowners and residents to reduce risk and potential severity of wildfires.

13. Initial training has already been provided but to embed continuity of the specialism, further training is required. A training needs analysis has been produced and further courses are being sourced for 2024/25.

14. The production of the station plans at these locations will reflect the implications of the introduction of the wildfire specialism going forward from 2024.

Legal Implications

15. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 Section 7 states that each Fire and Rescue Authority must make provision for the purpose of extinguishing fires in its area and protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.

16. The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 states;
    a) Every Fire and Rescue Authority must assess all foreseeable Fire and Rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national in nature from fires to terrorist attacks.

17. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Section 2 details our duty to plan for emergencies.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

18. The initial costs have been provided for from existing budgets.

19. The existing vehicles are contained within the asset refresh plan; therefore replacements are already provided for within existing budgets.

20. Further review of the costs associated with maintaining the specialism will be reviewed as part of the routine budgetary cycle conducted within each directorate.

21. One of the aims of the action is to reduce the number and severity of wildfires, which in turn will reduce the demand on operational appliances and personnel. This will allow front line resources to be available for emergency response and other activity more often.

Risk Management and Health & Implications

22. Initial training has been undertaken and ongoing training and exercising is planned.

23. Appropriate tools and equipment are being sourced, to mitigate the risks associated with deploying the tactical firefighting options.

24. The role has been defined to ensure that the team can utilise support from other frontline firefighters, rather than undertake all activity themselves. Specifically, the prediction of wildfire behaviour, identify appropriate firefighting tactics and manage the health and safety of all firefighters at the incident.

Environmental Implications

25. Management of the environmental impact of wildfires is fundamental to the process of predicting wildfire behaviour and selecting the appropriate firefighting tactic, for the specific circumstances of each wildfire.

26. Planning with landowners and stakeholder before any wildfires occur, allows crews to gain better understanding of the precise environment at each of our high risk open land locations. This allows plans to identify appropriate tactical options not only for each plot of land, but specific areas within each plot.

27. The powered tools which have been procured are all battery powered. This requirement is part of the procurement process.

28. The recovery process is considered within the role of the teams, allowing feedback on the fire to be given to landowners and stakeholders. This understanding will better target the recovery activity by landowners.

Contribution to Our Vision: ***To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.***

Our Purpose: *Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

29. The reduction of risk and demand is central to our purpose of protecting the public. These are primary aims of this action.

30. Embedded within the team's role is the provision of advice to the public to protect their lives and homes. This will improve the safety of the public but will also improve public resilience to wildfires.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/039/21 IRMP 2021-24 Post Consultation Report

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA **M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **A**uthority is the physical and legal entity.

MFRS **M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **S**ervice is the service provided by MFRA.