

| <b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY</b> |   |                       |                        |
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| <b>MEETING OF THE:</b>                      | <b>AUTHORITY</b>  |                       |                        |
| <b>DATE:</b>                                | <b>6 MAY 2014</b>   | <b>REPORT NO:</b>     | <b>CFO/044/14</b>      |
| <b>PRESENTING OFFICER</b>                   | <b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>                                   |                       |                        |
| <b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>                 | <b>KIERAN TIMMINS</b>                                       | <b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b> | <b>COLIN SCHOFIELD</b> |
| <b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>                  | <b>DEB APPLETON, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY &amp; PERFORMANCE</b> |                       |                        |
| <b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>                     | <b>PROPOSED STATION MERGER OF HUYTON AND WHISTON</b>        |                       |                        |

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| <b>APPENDICES:</b> | <b>APPENDIX A: PLAN SHOWING LOCATION OF SITE FOR NEW FIRE STATION IN PRESCOT</b><br><b>APPENDIX B: 10 MINUTE ISOCHRONES FROM HUYTON &amp; WHISTON STATIONS</b><br><b>APPENDIX C: 10 MINUTE ISOCHRONES FROM THE NEW PRESCOT STATION</b><br><b>APPENDIX D: RISK MAP OF MERSEYSIDE</b><br><b>APPENDIX E: CONSULTATION PLAN</b><br><b>APPENDIX F: REVENUE COSTS (EXEMPT)</b><br><b>APPENDIX G: CAPITAL COSTS (EXEMPT)</b><br><b>APPENDIX H: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b> |
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***PLEASE NOTE: Appendices F and G are exempt under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.***

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To request that Members approve the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new site on Manchester Road, Prescott subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and reaching an agreement with the owners of the site, Knowsley Council, for a lease of the new site.

### **Recommendation**

2. That Members
  - a) approve the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new site on Manchester Road, Prescott subject to a 12 week period of public consultation to commence with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014; and
  - b) request the submission of a report to the Authority detailing the outcomes of this consultation. This report will contain any operational implications of the merger including details of Section 13/16 mutual aid arrangements with Cheshire FRS for the coverage of Cronton.

## Introduction and Background

3. The Authority, at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 considered report CFO/136/13 and resolved that:

*“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 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*

*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*

*Members approve the associated consultation process*

*Reports be brought back on each of the individual mergers as soon as practicable.”*

4. The Authority, at its Budget Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014, considered report CFO/020/14 and noted that all who had attended the stakeholder/public engagement events relating to station mergers and other operational response

options, came away fully informed and understand the position the Authority is faced with. Attendees also felt that the station merger option was the “least worst” option to adopt in the current circumstances. At this meeting the Authority resolved that:

*Members 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.”*

5. Paragraph 17 of the same report stated, inter alia, “The outcomes from the engagement that has taken place indicate 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”.
6. Consequently it is apparent that, following the consultation process undertaken to date, station mergers are the option that should now be pursued. This report deals with the merger of Huyton and Whiston stations at Prescot.

#### Prescot

7. Members may recall that they have previously considered a report (CFO/091/12) on the proposal to build a new fire station at Prescot and, following consideration of this report, the Authority, at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012 resolved that:
  - a) *The proposal of the creation of a combined blue light centre at Prescot 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, be approved in principle.*
  - b) *The Chief Fire Officer be directed to enter into appropriate legal agreements with the Police and Ambulance Service.*
  - c) *The application for grant funding from CLG for £1.7m to support the project be approved.*
  - d) *The Chief Fire Officer (in consultation with the Chair) be granted delegated powers to commence public and representative body consultation.*
  - e) *The Chief Fire Officer be granted delegated powers to execute the procurement process for the project on behalf of the Authority and to apply for planning permission.*

*f) The Chief Fire Officer be directed 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.*

8. However, Members will also recall that because of announcements made concerning cuts to overall grant funding from Government, little further work was done in respect of the resolution above with most of the actions being put 'on hold' until the overall position was clearer and a clearer approach to strategic changes to fire cover could be adopted.
9. A notable exception to this was that an application was made to CLG for capital grant funding to support this project. This application was successful and a grant payment of £0.885m was received in 2013/14 with a further payment of £0.885m due in early 2014/15. Since receipt, this grant funding has been held in a holding account and is now available, together with the 2014/15 payment, and totalling £1.770m to support the costs of the building work associated with the proposed merger.
10. At its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013, the Authority considered report CFO/102/13 "A Strategic Overview of Estates – Identification of Key Priorities". Whilst the report, and associated recommendations, covered the whole portfolio of building assets, the following parts of the Authority resolution are relevant to this report:-

*Members resolved that:*

*The Authority identify strategic mergers that allow operational response to be maintained, whilst improving community and firefighter facilities and reducing costs.*

*.....two key geographic options where strategic mergers should be considered following consultation are (Wirral and) St. Helens and Knowsley. Members have already approved in principle the working up of a feasibility study for the mergers of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at Prescott. There are a number of merger options to be considered across St. Helens and Knowsley, including Huyton/Whiston, St. Helens/Eccleston or Whiston/Eccleston.*

*The Chief Fire Officer report back with detailed proposals on how to take the above recommendations forward.*

*For all stations, the aim should be to encourage partners to create community hubs and to share costs, reduce wasted space and provide better facilities. Reserves should be used for invest to save schemes which deliver long term revenue streams from partners.*

11. As instructed by the Authority in December 2013, work has recommenced on the mergers and, as identified earlier in this report, the recommended option for Knowsley is the merger of Huyton and Whiston at Prescott. The preferred site, previously identified in report CFO/091/12, is at Manchester Road, Prescott on

the Prescott Business Park. The site is shown in yellow on the plan attached as Appendix A to this report. Knowsley Borough Council have agreed, in principle, to recommend to the Council the release of a portion of this land, for the new station, subject to the new station fitting in with an overall master plan for the development of the area, Prescott Business Park. Negotiations are therefore ongoing with the Council concerning the extent and location of the overall site.

12. Negotiations are ongoing with Knowsley Borough Council to acquire this land by way of a development lease. Agreement in principle to this lease has been obtained from officers at the Council but nothing will be finalised or formally approved by the Council until the outcome of the public consultation exercise is known & reported back to the Authority.
13. As the Chief Fire Officer has made clear in his reports and presentations to District Councils, the merger of two stations into one new station will not improve the operational service provided to the community. The attached plan (Appendix B) shows the 10 minute isochrones (this is the distance an appliance can cover in ten minutes from its station ground) from the existing Huyton and Whiston stations and Appendix C shows these from the proposed new Prescott station. As Members will note, there is a marginal reduction in overall coverage from the new location.
14. Both Appendices show the overall operational cover in the area, including by neighbouring stations from which Members will note that the vast majority of the area is still covered by the new Prescott station and surrounding stations (14, Speke/Garston; 16 Old Swan; 17, Belle Vale; 19, Croxteth; 42, Kirkby; 50, St. Helens; 51 Newton le Willows & 52 Eccleston). The Chief Fire Officer would emphasise that this only covers the Knowsley District & surrounding areas & does not include coverage from any stations in central Liverpool, Sefton or Wirral.
15. Also attached as Appendix D is the Risk Map of Merseyside. Members will note from comparing Appendices C and D that those areas not covered by the revised 10 minute isochrones from Prescott are either low or medium risk. The Chief Fire Officer will put additional preventative measures in place in those areas to ensure that any increased risk is mitigated including formalising mutual assistance arrangements with Cheshire FRA to cover Cronton from Widnes.
16. The new station will have one appliance staffed on a whole time basis and a second staffed on a whole time retained basis (recall to duty within 30 minutes).
17. As instructed, the Chief Fire Officer has sought to identify potential partners to share the new building and therefore the costs. Members may recall that the original proposal for Prescott was that it would be a 'Blue Light Hub' with a significant presence of both Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service (NWAS). However, since that proposal was put forward in 2012 Merseyside Police and NWAS have reconsidered their positions.
18. Discussions are still ongoing with Merseyside Police but current indications are that all they might require a relatively small presence in the new station.

19. NWS have confirmed that they will not now be co-locating at the new Prescott site.
20. However, the Chief Fire Officer has been approached by a security firm (currently based in industrial units next to the proposed building site) who expressed interest in leasing space at the site. A draft 10 year agreement has been proposed with the security firm to lease an area within the station for use as office & storage space. The Authority would seek protection around any such arrangement by the use of a bond or insurances.
21. If members approve the recommendation to proceed with the merger, a 12 week public consultation process will take place in Huyton, Whiston and Prescott. This consultation will also incorporate staff, representative bodies and station users. A copy of the proposed consultation plan is attached as Appendix E. It is also intended to produce a newsletter which will be used in the area around the stations to explain what is happening and encouraging them to participate in the consultation process.
22. The Chief Fire Officer will report back to the Authority in September 2014 on the outcome of the consultation process to allow any final decision to be made on the merger.
23. At that stage, it is anticipated that the Authority will have appointed a main contractor to design and build any of the first phase of new stations. If, as a result of considering the outcome of the consultation process, the Authority agrees to proceed with the new Prescott station, the contractor will immediately start work to design the new building and submit the appropriate planning applications to allow a start on site in early 2015.
24. It is anticipated that the build process should take no more than 12 months from start to finish.

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### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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25. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) originally considered by the Authority as part of CFO/136/13 was updated following the recent engagement process and was then considered as part of report CFO/020/14. This EIA is now attached to this report as Appendix H. This will be further updated following the consultation (stage 3 of the EIA process) which will result from today's Authority decision and will be submitted to Members as part of the report back following the consultation process.

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### **Staff Implications**

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26. A staff saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts in merging Huyton and Whiston stations is anticipated. 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 of £3.4m assumed in the current financial plan. These savings are included in the table of revenue expenditure

attached as Appendix F to this report. Firefighter posts are being lost by using natural turnover rates – reserves are being used to avoid compulsory redundancy amongst this part of the workforce. Staff will have the opportunity to earn extra money by taking secondary retained contracts.

27. Formal consultation with Representative Bodies has commenced and will continue throughout the process. In particular, representatives from each station are to be appointed to work on the project team to ensure that the new Prescott 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.

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### **Legal Implications**

28. Any lease of the land will be subject to title investigation and satisfactory lease terms being agreed and approved by both Knowsley Borough Council and the Authority.. The lease and development agreement terms will not be agreed so as to be contractually binding until public consultation has been sought and the Authority has considered the outcomes of this consultation.
29. Knowsley Borough Council and potential lessees and public sector partners are aware that all negotiations with regards to the site are subject to public consultation and Authority consideration of the outcomes of this consultation.

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### **Financial Implications & Value for Money**

30. The estimated operating costs of the current Huyton and Whiston stations currently total £1.993m. The forecast running costs of a new Prescott station are ££1.133m a saving of £0.860m. This forecast is based upon the operating costs of the new PFI stations. Details are included in Appendix F and as well as the potential development agreement/lease costs with Knowsley Borough Council for building on this land.
31. The estimated cost of acquiring the land at Prescott from Knowsley Borough Council as detailed in paragraph 11, is set out in Appendix G. Negotiations with Knowsley Borough Council are continuing and members will be advised of the agreed costs when the Chief Fire Officer reports back on the outcomes of consultation in September 2014.
32. The estimated build costs of the proposed new station are also included in Appendix G, together with an estimate of the potential income from the sale of the buildings and land at Huyton and Whiston.
33. Overall the forecast capital cost net of capital receipts and the government grant is £0.830m . It is currently anticipated that this cost will be met from reserves so as to avoid borrowing but the Deputy Chief Executive will report back in more detail alongside public consultation results.

## **Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications**

34. A Risk Register will shortly be created for the Station Mergers project and this will be regularly monitored by the Strategic Management Group. Probably the most significant risk 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 was highlighted in report CFO/038/14 to Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014.
35. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.
36. Any new building will be built to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as the absolute minimum.

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

37. Whilst, as stated above, the proposed station merger will not improve operational cover in the Knowsley area, it is the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances.
38. A new fire station will however provide an improved working environment for firefighters, including enhanced training facilities. It will also provide much improved community facilities compared to those available at the current Huyton and Whiston stations, which in turn will lead to greater interaction between firefighters and community groups and hence assist in creating safer communities.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- CFO/091/12** Revised Duty System at Whiston
- CFO/102/13** A Strategic Overview of Estates – Identification of Key Priorities
- CFO/136/13** Station Mergers
- CFO/020/14** Outcomes from Station Merger Engagement
- CFO/038/14** Budget Resolution – Transitional Response Arrangements – Order of Appliance Unavailability

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

- BREEAM** Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
- CLG** (Department of) Communities and Local Government

**NWAS** North West Ambulance Service

**WTE** Whole Time Equivalent

**ISOCHRONES** Travelling Time lines