

| <b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY</b> |  |                       |                           |
|---|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>MEETING OF THE:</b>                      | <b>AUTHORITY BUDGET MEETING</b>  |                       |                           |
| <b>DATE:</b>                                | <b>26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2015</b>                                     | <b>REPORT NO:</b>     | <b>CFO/010/15</b>         |
| <b>PRESENTING OFFICER</b>                   | <b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>  |                       |                           |
| <b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>                 | <b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>  | <b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b> | <b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b> |
| <b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>                  | <b>STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP</b>  |                       |                           |
| <b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>                     | <b>OPERATIONAL RESPONSE SAVINGS OPTIONS 2015/16 – LIVERPOOL DISTRICT</b> |                       |                           |

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| <b>APPENDICES:</b> | <b>APPENDIX A</b> | <b>ALLERTON 2<sup>ND</sup> PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT</b> |  |
|                    | <b>APPENDIX B</b> | <b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>                           |  |

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To advise Members of the operational response savings options for Liverpool following the consultation process (which commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 and concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015) over the proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate the Allerton appliance to Old Swan to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis on a 30 minute recall.

### **Recommendation**

2. That Members:
  - a) consider the outcomes of the public consultation process and the professional view of the Chief Fire Officer over the option to deliver least impact on overall operational response and
  - b) as a result approve the proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate the Allerton appliance to Old Swan to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis on a 30 minute recall.

### **Introduction and Background**

3. At the Authority meeting 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 Members approved a 12 week public consultation over the proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate the Allerton appliance to Old Swan to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis on a 30 minute recall (report CFO/102/14 refers). Appendix B to report CFO/102/14 explained the logic underpinning the selection of Allerton as the station in Liverpool for closure.
4. The consultation process commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 and concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015. The outcomes of the consultation process have been reported to Members within CFO/008/15. In summary there were no substantive issues raised during the consultation process that called in to question the reasonableness of the

proposal. However, Members are asked to fully consider the outcomes of the consultation process whilst considering the recommendations of this report.

5. In 2015/16 the Authority must make savings of £6.3m in addition to the £20m savings required as a result of cuts in the Authority budget over the period 2011/12 – 2014/15.
6. To date the Authority has increased its council tax by the maximum amount it can (2%) without undertaking a referendum. A referendum is estimated to cost £1m. It is assumed for the purpose of this report that the Authority will increase council tax by the maximum permissible amount for 2015/16.
7. The Authority has also identified all of the available non-operational savings options and adopted them in full. These total £2.9m. However this still leaves £3.4m of the £6.3m which must be delivered from operational response. This equates to a reduction of around 90 whole-time equivalent (WTE) Firefighter posts. These posts will be lost through natural turnover as firefighters retire.
8. As has previously been explained to Members any further reductions in Firefighter numbers directly impacts on the number of appliances that can be crewed on a whole-time basis which in turn directly impacts on the number of fire stations the Authority can realistically maintain.
9. Officers have previously undertaken extensive pan Merseyside public consultation over the options available to the Authority to make the structural and/or crewing system changes that inevitably result from the reduction in firefighter numbers. These options are;
  - Station mergers
  - Outright station closures
  - Increasing the number of “Low Level of Activity and Risk” (LLAR) stations
  - Introducing the Grey Book Day Crewing shift system
  - Crewing stations during the day time only
  - Crewing stations with community retained Firefighters
10. The merger of stations was recognised by the public as the best option to pursue given the circumstances; with the least resulting impact on operational response. The closure of stations was preferred over changes to the way fire stations and fire appliances are crewed as the majority of participants in the consultation process understood that it is firefighters and fire appliances that respond to incidents to save lives not fire stations. As there are no pairs of older fire stations in Liverpool that are adjacent to each other a merger of stations, whilst initially thought to be a feasible option, was found to not be realistic after a more detailed analysis. It is for this reason that the proposal to close Allerton outright was made to the Authority by the Chief Fire Officer.
11. The professional view of the Chief Fire Officer on the viability all of the options listed is contained within the public consultation document that was distributed at the Allerton consultation events and published on the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service website (attached to this report at Appendix A). This document also reiterates the logic underpinning the selection of Allerton as the station identified for closure within the Liverpool district. A summary of the alternative options considered is provided below.

Alternative options to station mergers or outright closure and the operational rationale as to why these have been considered and discounted by the Chief Fire Officer at this time

## Context

12. Paragraph 3.2 of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Scheme of Delegation places the following responsibilities on the Chief Fire Officer;

*To control all matters of the day to day administration of the Fire & Rescue Service which shall include taking and implementing decisions that are:-*

- (a) Concerned with maintaining the operational effectiveness of the Service,*
- (b) Matters incidental to the discharge of the Authority's functions which fall within a policy decision taken by the Authority.*

13. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England directs that 'The Fire and Rescue Authority must hold their Chief Fire Officer to account for the delivery of the fire and rescue service'.
14. The Chief Fire Officer is therefore responsible for all operational matters and is held to account by the Authority for decisions taken in this regard.
15. The Authority currently has 26 fire stations and 28 fire appliances. Of the 26 fire stations, 24 have 1 fire appliance and 2 of the 26, Kirkdale and Southport, have 2 fire appliances. Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for the Authority housing all of the non-Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) special appliances (which are located at Croxteth with the USAR team and attract a separate crewing grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government). The second appliance at Kirkdale operates as a support appliance to the special appliances. Southport has 2 fire appliances because of its geographic location and the travel distances involved for additional appliances responding from elsewhere on Merseyside.
16. The number of wholetime Firefighters employed directly equates to the numbers of fire appliances that can be staffed and therefore the numbers of fire stations the Authority can operate.
17. The removal of around 90 Firefighter posts will result in the loss of 4 wholetime fire appliances. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority should maintain 2 appliances at Kirkdale and Southport. In maintaining 2 appliances at Kirkdale and Southport the Authority can only staff enough appliances to maintain 22 fire stations on a wholetime basis. The Authority could as an alternative maintain 26 stations through altering the crewing arrangements on specific stations or across the Service.
18. The operational logic for station mergers is to close two adjacent 1 appliance wholetime stations and build a new 1 appliance wholetime, 1 appliance wholetime retained station at a location in between to deliver the best response times achievable in the circumstances from the 1 remaining wholetime appliance. (Such an option is possible in Knowsley, Wirral and St Helens due to the age and proximity of the stations hence the merger proposals which have been or will be the subject of public consultation). The second appliance is maintained in this option through the use of "wholetime retained" crewing.
19. "Wholetime retained" crewing means wholetime Firefighters having a second retained contract whereby they provide cover on their days off to respond in to the station to crew the second appliance within 30 minutes of an alert. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the 30 minute delay in responding criteria would attract volunteers from

sufficient numbers of existing staff to make the system viable. The retained (second) appliance would only be called in during periods of high operational demand and should not be considered as an appliance that would be used for an immediate response to incidents on the station area. Its function is as part of a strategic reserve, not as a first line response until such time as the crew had been called in which would take up to 30 minutes. The reason this option is proposed is that it uses wholetime Firefighters rather than solely community retained Firefighters.

20. There are no viable merger options in Liverpool due to the age and proximity of the stations across the city. An outright closure and the relocation of the wholetime appliance to be crewed wholetime retained at a neighbouring station has been proposed in these circumstances as it delivers the least impact on response times of all of the achievable options.

### Low Level of Activity and Risk

21. The Low Level of Activity and Risk (LLAR) duty system is currently in operation at 4 of the Authority's 26 stations. The system consists of a 12 hour wholetime day shift followed immediately by a 12 hour retained night shift (spent off the station) where the crew must respond to an incident within 1.9 minutes of an alert thus maintaining a comparable alert to mobile time as achieved by other wholetime staff during their night time rest period.
22. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to LLAR would deliver a saving of 8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger or outright closure 3 wholetime stations would need to convert to LLAR. Whilst this option would maintain an immediate emergency response (assuming it was possible to secure accommodation for the night time retained period separate from the station but within a 1.9 minute alert to mobile time) it is less resilient than wholetime crewing as the same staff cover the 12 hour wholetime period and the 12 hour retained period. For example, if a crew attends incidents during the night time period they will then require a period of stand down time to recover during the day shift, meaning they are not available to provide operational response.
23. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR appliances during the retained period is also reduced meaning they will attend more incidents and potentially no longer meet the LLAR threshold.
24. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert a further 12 wholetime appliances to LLAR. This would result in 16 of the Authorities 28 appliances being crewed in this way.
25. In order to comply with Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended) the Authority would be required to provide separate accommodation for the retained duty period within a 1.9 minute response isochrone from the stations in question.
26. The cost of building accommodation at existing LLAR stations has been around £300k. Converting 12 appliances to LLAR would therefore require a capital spend of around £3.6m for accommodation. Of the 10 key stations only one, Formby, is currently crewed LLAR which is as a result of its geographic location, the very low numbers of incidents on the station ground and number of appliance mobilisations. In any other circumstances a key station would not be crewed on the LLAR duty system. Of the stations not designated as 'key' a number have appliance mobilisation numbers which exceed the LLAR threshold of 825 incidents to the station area agreed in 2006

(Kirkdale, Kensington, City Centre, St Helens and Birkenhead). A number also do not have sufficient space within the curtilage of the station to build separate accommodation necessary to make the 1.9 minute alert to mobile time during the retained period (Toxteth and Aintree).

27. There is a very low likelihood anticipated that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew an additional 12 LLAR appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the LLAR system this would result in crews on LLAR stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the LLAR duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.
28. It is for these reasons that LLAR has been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

### Day Crewing

29. The Authority does not currently operate the Day Crewing duty system at any station on Merseyside. This system consists of a wholetime day shift (typically 10 hours duration) immediately followed by a 14 hour retained night shift where a response is made by a Firefighter from home within 5 minutes of an alert.
30. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to Day Crewing would deliver a saving of 10.8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts (assuming a 10% retaining fee). In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger or outright closure, 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to Day Crewing.
31. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime appliances to Day Crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on Day Crewing or LLAR crewing. Day Crewing is less resilient than wholetime crewing for similar reasons as for LLAR as the same staff cover the 10 hour wholetime period and the 14 hour retained period. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR or Day Crewing appliances during the retained period is also reduced.
32. This option would introduce a 5 minute delay in responding from 8 appliances for 14 hours each day. Assuming the 5 minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances would be able to attend an incident in at least the same time as the Day Crewing appliance if not quicker during the retained period.
33. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 Day Crewing appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the Day Crewing system this would result in crews on Day Crewing stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the Day Crewing duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.

34. It is for these reasons that Day Crewing has been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness. If as expected the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the day time period.

#### Day only crewing

35. The Authority does not currently operate day only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves Firefighters crewing the station for a 12 hour wholtime day shift only in order to maintain capacity to undertake training and community safety activities.
36. Changing the crewing at a station from wholtime to day only crewing would deliver a saving of 12 wholtime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger or outright closure 2 wholtime stations would need to convert to day only crewing.
37. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholtime appliances to day only crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authorities 28 appliances either on day only crewing or LLAR crewing.
38. Whilst an immediate response to incidents would be achieved during the 12 hour day shift there would be no response at all during the 12 hour night time period from day only crewed stations.
39. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 days only appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to day only crewing this would result in crews on day only stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholtime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for day only crewing being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.
40. It is for these reasons that day only crewing has been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time. If as expected the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the day time period.

#### Retained

41. The Authority does not currently operate retained only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves members of the community who live or work within 5 minutes of a fire station volunteering to be available for up to 120 hours per week for a retaining fee equivalent to 10% of a wholtime Firefighter's salary.
42. Changing the crewing at a station from wholtime to retained would deliver a saving of 22 wholtime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger or outright closure 1 wholtime station would need to convert to retained crewing.
43. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 4 wholtime appliances to retained in addition to the existing 4 LLAR

appliances. This would result in 8 of the Authorities 28 appliances either on retained or LLAR crewing.

44. Pursuing this option would require the Authority to either seek volunteers from existing Firefighters who would be required to live within a 5 minute response time of the station (wholetime retained) or for the Authority to recruit members of the public who live or work within 5 minutes of the station.
45. There is a very low likelihood indeed anticipated that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 4 wholetime retained appliances on a 5 minute recall. That being so, the Authority would need to recruit almost a full crew of retained Firefighters. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that a retained Firefighter does not have sufficient contact time within the Grey Book (Firefighters nationally agreed conditions of service) retained contract to acquire and maintain the skills of an existing Merseyside wholetime Firefighter (the Merseyside Trainee Firefighter course is 23 weeks duration and the wholetime work routine allocates in excess of 20 hours per week to on station training. A retained firefighter has approximately 2/3 hours per week contact time at station for training, development and maintenance duties). If the Authority were minded to still pursue this option they would have to accept that the retained Firefighters would not be trained to the same level as their wholetime counterparts and it would take a long period of time to train the crew to a position whereby they were deemed fit to ride. Additionally to maintain retained appliance availability a minimum of 4 members of the crew including a driver and an officer in charge would have to be permanently available within 5 minutes of the station.
46. With 3 hours contact time each week retained Firefighters would only be able to undertake very limited amounts of community safety work.
47. Assuming the 5 minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances would attend an incident in at least the same time as the retained crew if not quicker.
48. It is for these reasons that retained crewing has been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.
49. Whilst fully recognising the gravity and significance of the outright closure of Allerton fire station the Chief Fire Officer remains of the view that the outright closure of Allerton and the relocation of the Allerton fire appliance to Old Swan to be crewed wholetime retained on a 30 minute recall will result in the least impactful outcome on overall operational response and is therefore recommended to Members for their approval.

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### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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50. The Equality Impact Assessment has been updated to take account of the consultation process and is attached at Appendix B. In summary:

“The recent consultation on Allerton Station closure has not highlighted any significant Equality and Diversity issues in relation to the different equality groups with the exception of concerns around supporting different faiths and religious groups in times of heightened security and terrorist threats. Actions have been recommended to support those concerns.”

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**Staff Implications**

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51. In the event that Members approve the recommendation to close Allerton the Firefighters currently posted to the station will be transferred to the nearest surrounding stations subject to a 21 day notice period.
52. A collective agreement is in place with the representative bodies to ensure the availability of 4 wholetime retained appliances, one of which would be relocated from Allerton fire station to Old Swan fire station. This appliance will be crewed by personnel working 24 hour shifts across two locations (to be determined) and providing 24 hours retained cover in every 8 day reference period for a retaining fee of 5%.

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**Legal Implications**

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53. If the recommendation of the report is approved this will mean that savings required for the Authority to deliver a balanced budget will be made however if this report is not approved the Authority will still need to make savings in order to set a balanced and therefore legal budget as required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended).

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**Financial Implications & Value for Money**

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54. The change in crewing from wholetime to wholetime retained on four appliances is necessary to deliver the savings target of £3.4m from Operational Response required for the financial plan and 2015/16 budget.
55. The specific saving from converting a whole time appliance to wholetime retained is approximately £0.8m (22 WTE posts).
56. The expected savings in direct running costs like energy, rates and water bills through the outright closure of Allerton are £44,500. In addition day to day repairs and the overall maintenance bill for the station will be avoided.
57. In order to avoid compulsory redundancy the Authority is using natural retirement rates for Firefighters to deliver savings. Whilst these retirements will happen ahead of the new merged stations being delivered they will not happen fast enough to deliver the budget savings for 2015/16 therefore the Authority has committed to use reserves to meet the deficit.
58. Members will recall that the Authority has been successful in obtaining £4.5m of transformation and efficiency funding towards a programme of station mergers and integration with blue light partners. In the light of the outcomes of the public consultation officers have been exploring options with North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) and Merseyside Police to deliver the strategic outcome of blue light integration within South Liverpool. At this point in time it is considered most likely that effective joint working can be delivered with NWAS from Toxteth fire station and that investing resources in colocation will deliver significant operational efficiencies and meet the expected outcomes of the transformation and efficiency fund.
59. Officers will work up detailed proposals for Members to consider on how to achieve this outcome. This may require endorsement by CLG of the eventual proposal.



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

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60. The closure of Allerton and the relocation of the Allerton appliance to Old Swan to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis has been identified as having the least overall impact on operational response achievable in the circumstances.

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

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61. The Chief Fire Officer will continue to manage appliance availability in such a way so as to minimise the impact on response times.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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CFO/102/14 Operational Response Savings Options 2015/16 – Liverpool District

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**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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