

| MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY | | | |
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| MEETING OF THE: | AUTHORITY BUDGET MEETING | | |
| DATE: | 26TH FEBRUARY 2015 | REPORT NO: | CFO/013/15 |
| PRESENTING OFFICER | CHIEF FIRE OFFICER | | |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: | CHIEF FIRE OFFICER | REPORT AUTHOR: | CHIEF FIRE OFFICER |
| OFFICERS CONSULTED: | STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP | | |
| TITLE OF REPORT: | INTERIM MEASURES TO BE TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO ENSURE APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY | | |

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| APPENDICES: | |
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Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the interim measures taken by the Chief Fire Officer under delegated authority to ensure appliance availability prior to the structural changes required as a result of ongoing cuts to the Authority budget are implemented.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the measures being taken by the Chief Fire Officer under delegated authority to ensure appliance availability prior to the structural changes required as a result of ongoing cuts to the Authority budget are implemented.

Introduction and Background

3. At the Authority 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 the Authority will save £2.9m from support service and technical areas. The remaining £3.4m is assumed to be delivered from operational response for 2015/16 through the reduction of around 100 Firefighter posts from the staffing model. This will result in a reduction in wholetime (immediately available) fire appliances from 28 to 24.
4. The Authority has already approved the merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new 2 appliance station at Prescott. One appliance will be crewed wholetime and one appliance will be crewed wholetime retained. Typically the whole process of fire station merger including consultation, design planning, procurement and build can take two years or more. A construction contractor has been procured to help speed up the process but it still remains lengthy. Work on Prescott is proceeding but the new station will not be built and operational until mid-2015/16 at the earliest.
5. On the agenda today the Authority is considering the outcomes of the public consultation process concerning the proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate

the Allerton fire appliance to Old Swan fire station to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis.

6. A consultation process over the proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new 2 appliance station at Saughall Massie Road commences on 1st March. Under this proposal one appliance would be crewed wholetime and one appliance would be crewed wholetime retained. A similar proposal will be made for St Helens subject to securing an appropriate site. If these mergers were to be approved following the consultation then the planning application and construction would take in excess of 12 months to complete.
7. The current staffing model effective up until 31st March 2015 assumes 764 operational personnel to crew 28 wholetime appliances (including 4 crewed on the Low Level of Activity and Risk duty system). At the time of writing (6th February) the Authority employs 737 Grey Book operational staff. The budget as of 1st April supports a staffing model of 674 Grey Book operational staff to crew 24 wholetime appliances (including 3 crewed on the Low Level of Activity and Risk duty system) and 4 wholetime retained appliances.
8. The Authority has committed to avoiding Firefighter compulsory redundancies through the use of reserves until such time as the figure of 674 Firefighters is reached via natural retirement rates. This takes no account of the further cuts to the Authority budget that may result out of the spending review to be undertaken following the General Election in May.
9. Of the 737 Grey Book employees employed by the Authority 37 are on Other Duties, 13 are long term sick and 15 are on secondment or a career break (total of 65). In addition on any given shift an average of 6 operational Grey Book employees are absent through short term sickness. These figures are well in excess of the 3% assumption for all absences other than contractual and public holiday leave contained within the staffing model.
10. The Authority has committed £1m of reserves to support the recruitment of a limited number of wholetime Firefighters for succession planning purposes. A 23 week trainee course of 16 wholetime Firefighters commences in early April. These trainee Firefighters will not be available for operational duties until November 2015. This number may be supplemented by a limited number of transfers in to the Service.
11. The ban on undertaking voluntary additional hours as an element of action short of strike resulting from the ongoing Fire Brigades Union (FBU) pension's dispute remains in place.
12. The cumulative impact of all of these issues on appliance availability has previously been highlighted to Members at the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27th March 2014 within report CFO/038/14. In simple terms as more Firefighters retire and are not replaced in order to meet the savings target for 2015/16, other duties and long term sickness figures remain high and the structural changes in terms of the conversion of wholetime appliances to wholetime retained are not made it is no longer possible to continue to crew 28 wholetime appliances. As stated in paragraph 4 above the new Prescott fire station will not be operational until mid-2016 at the earliest. Assuming the merger proposals for West Wirral and St Helens are approved the new fire stations will not be operational until late 2016/early 2017.
13. On any given shift between 1 and 6 appliances are unavailable due to insufficient staffing as a result of the reasons previously highlighted. Over the last 3 months an

average of 25 appliances have been available out of 28 on each shift. These appliances have been staffed with 5 riders on 70% of occasions.

14. The Chief Fire Officer has reached a collective agreement with the representative bodies on a proposal to introduce 24 hour shifts on 8 stations in conjunction with the wholetime retained crewing of 4 appliances.
15. It is the intention of the Chief Fire Officer to implement as an interim measure, pending Authority decisions on permanent structural changes, wholetime retained crewing on 4 appliances as of 1st April 2015.
16. This will improve the situation in terms of overall appliance availability in that instead of appliances being unavailable other than via recall to duty which is voluntary, they will be available to be crewed by wholetime staff undertaking retained contracts on a 30 minute recall. It should be noted however that it will still not be possible to maintain 24 wholetime appliances in addition to the 4 wholetime retained appliances without the reintroduction of voluntary additional hours. This is recognised by the representative bodies and dialogue is on-going around measures to maintain appliance availability including the reintroduction of voluntary additional hours.

Equality and Diversity Implications

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

Staff Implications

18. The collective agreement reached with the representative bodies is predicated on a combination of the Grey Book wholetime and retained duty systems whereby personnel will work 2 x 24 hour wholetime shifts across two locations (to be determined) and provide 24 hours retained cover in every 8 day reference period for a retaining fee of 5% in addition to their core salary.

Legal Implications

19. The interim measures to be implemented by the Chief Fire Officer will ensure the highest levels of appliance availability achievable in the circumstances thus ensuring the Authority continues to meet its statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

20. 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.
21. The saving from converting a whole time appliance to wholetime retained is approximately £0.8m (22 WTE posts).
22. 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 using reserves to balance the budget in the meantime

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

23. The interim measures to be implemented by the Chief Fire Officer will result in the least overall impact on operational response achievable in the circumstances.

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

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

**CFO/038/14 BUDGET RESOLUTION TRANSITIONAL RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS –
ORDER OF APPLIANCE UNAVAILABILITY**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
