

<b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>			
<b>MEETING OF THE:</b>	<b>FULL AUTHORITY</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2015</b>	<b>REPORT NO:</b>	<b>CFO/058/15</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 FOR WEST WIRRAL – 2015/16</b>		

<b>APPENDICES:</b>	<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>UPTON AND WEST KIRBY OPERATING COSTS</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>CAPITAL COSTS</b>

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To request that Members, having considered the outcomes of the public consultation as detailed in report number CFO/059/15, approve the merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, subject to agreement from Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) to transfer ownership of the land to the Authority and the granting of planning permission.
2. To request that members having considered the outcomes of the public consultation approve the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire appliances as "wholetime retained".

### **Recommendation**

3. That Members;
  - a. approve the merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, subject to agreement from Wirral MBC to transfer ownership of the land to the Authority and the granting of planning permission;
  - b. approve the relocation of the West Kirby fire appliance to Upton to be crewed wholetime retained as an interim measure prior to the construction of the new station
  - c. amend the capital programme to incorporate the Saughall Massie fire station scheme; and
  - d. give delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service, with a view to sharing the new building.

## Introduction and Background

4. At its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015 the Authority considered report CFO/003/15 which proposed the merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road. The Authority resolved that:

*In respect of all the available options, due to the Authority seeking to avoid firefighter redundancy using natural turnover; and as a result of current absence and other duties rates, it be noted that there are insufficient available operational personnel to maintain all 28 fire appliances in advance of any structural changes through strategic mergers and station closures being implemented. This will mean that the West Kirby fire appliance will be only be available on a wholetime retained basis for significant periods during the consultation process and will only be staffed on a wholetime basis should sufficient personnel be available.*

*The Chief Fire Officer be instructed to provide a further report to the Authority dealing with the operational implications of recommendation 1 (above).*

*A decision on the closure of West Kirby Fire Station, be deferred and twelve weeks' public consultation (to commence on 2<sup>nd</sup> March) be approved, which will consider the alternative option of:*

*The closure of West Kirby and Upton fire stations, the building of a new station on Saughall Massie Road and the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30 minute recall), whilst also inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options*

*The requirement for Wirral Borough Council (WMBC) to agree to transfer the land on Saughall Massie Road into Authority ownership, prior to any new build on the site, be noted.*

*In order to establish whether there is potential for the Saughall Massie Road site to be utilised as a location for a new fire station, it be noted that officers have already approached Wirral MBC to request a decision on land transfer. Officers will also need to engage with Wirral planning officers as the proposal relates to building a new community fire station on green belt land.*

*Should Wirral MBC agree to transfer the land, it be noted that this would allow the Authority to fully consider the feasibility of the proposal. It also be noted that the approach will ensure that Members are fully informed in relation to the views of the public and the feasibility of building a fire station at that location prior to making any decision.*

5. The operational rationale supporting the merger proposal is that closing the two existing stations to build a new station as close to the mid-point between the two station areas as possible will result in the least impact on response times when compared with any other option.

6. Report CFO/059/15, elsewhere on today's agenda, provides detailed feedback on the comprehensive 12 week public consultation process undertaken between 2<sup>nd</sup> March and 24<sup>th</sup> May. An overall majority of those participating in the consultation process thought that the proposal to close Upton and West Kirby fire stations and build a new fire station on Saughall Massie Road was reasonable given the circumstances.
7. There was however significant opposition to the proposal from Saughall Massie residents who raised a number of concerns. The majority of concerns raised related to planning rather than operational response issues. The issues that relate to operational response are addressed below.

#### Use of Brigade Response Vehicles as an alternative to closing West Kirby

8. The use of Rapid Response Vehicles or Brigade Response Vehicles (BRV) as an alternative to closing West Kirby was advanced within the consultation questionnaire responses and at the public consultation meetings.
9. Members may be aware that Merseyside was the first Authority to introduce what were known at the time as Targeted Response Vehicles (TRV's - later renamed Small Fires Units) over 10 years ago. The purpose of these vehicles was to respond to small, non-life risk incidents to ensure Rescue Pumps remained available to respond to life risk incidents. These vehicles were introduced as an additional resource or as an alternative to Support Pumps (which are the second appliance at two appliance stations) as they are smaller, carry less equipment and are typically crewed by 2-3 Firefighters (a Rescue Pump is crewed by 5 Firefighters and a Support Pump is crewed by 4 Firefighters).
10. Members will recall that as a direct result of cuts to the Authority budget during the last Spending Review all but two Support Pumps were lost when appliance numbers were reduced from 42 to 28 on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The budgetary provision for the Small Fires Units was also utilised at this time to maintain as many Rescue Pumps as possible across the Service. All of the stations on the Wirral, including Upton and West Kirby are now single appliance (Rescue Pump) stations.
11. Nowhere across the Country has a TRV been introduced to replace a Rescue Pump at a single appliance station. A TRV cannot be deployed to a life risk incident as a first response as it carries insufficient equipment and crew to achieve a safe system of work required to make an effective intervention. It is not a credible option therefore for the Authority to replace the Rescue Pump at West Kirby with a TRV, notwithstanding the fact that to crew a TRV on a 24/7 basis would require at least 12 wholetime equivalent posts which would not deliver the savings necessary to meet the 2015/16 budget assumptions.

#### Traffic conditions in the area

12. A common concern among attendees at forum/public meetings and in correspondence was the potential danger of fire appliances using the roads in

the area of Saughall Massie. Whilst this is strictly speaking a planning issue the operational response aspect is addressed below.

13. All Authority drivers are highly trained to arrive safely at an incident and do not drive at speeds in excess of that than are appropriate for the road conditions. The roads in West Wirral present no greater challenges to Authority drivers than the roads in other parts of Merseyside, all of which require them to drive safely in the proximity of schools, homes and all other types of building to reach an emergency incident in the quickest time possible.
14. The fire appliance from Upton already responds as part of the pre-determined attendance to life risk incidents occurring within the West Kirby station area on many occasions using Saughall Massie Road and the roads in the vicinity.
15. There is also no evidence from analysis of response times around peak hours that there is any adverse impact, indeed response times are faster from the Upton to West Kirby station area between 0700hrs – 1000hrs and 1600hrs – 1900hrs.

#### Partners

16. As indicated in the last report, the CFO has sought to identify potential partners to share the new building and therefore costs. At this point in time neither Merseyside Police nor North West Ambulance Service have committed to having a presence in the station.

#### Interim crewing arrangements prior to the build completion

17. If Members were to approve the merger proposal a new station at Saughall Massie would not be operational until late 2016 early 2017 at the earliest. This is contingent on Wirral MBC agreeing to transfer the land and planning permission being granted.
18. The Authority has approved using natural turnover rates from Firefighter retirements to deliver the reduction in Firefighter numbers required to deliver a balanced budget. The Authority has committed to use reserves to avoid compulsory Firefighter redundancies as the rate of retirements is not as fast as is required to balance the financial plan in year 2015/16. The rate of retirements does however exceed the time frame anticipated to deliver all of the proposed mergers through to operational conclusion.
19. The impact on appliance availability has previously been highlighted to Members at the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

20. The fire appliance at Upton is always maintained on wholetime availability as Upton is a key station. West Kirby is not a key station therefore the fire appliance is on occasion unavailable for full shifts due to insufficient staffing caused by high numbers of personnel on other duties (as explained within CFO/038/14). This situation will become more acute over time to the point where the appliance would never be crewed on a wholetime basis.
21. The CFO has previously detailed for Members the measures he is taking under delegated authority to maintain appliance availability (CFO/013/15) through the utilisation of wholetime retained crewing of non-key appliances at stations involved in the merger proposals. The appliance at West Kirby will therefore be crewed on a wholetime retained basis should members approve the merger proposal or the outright closure of West Kirby.

#### Other options

22. As Members are aware the consultation process also considered the option of the outright closure of West Kirby and the relocation of the West Kirby appliance to Upton be crewed on a wholetime retained basis. All of the other options open to the Authority and an explanation from the CFO as to why he would not recommend them at this time were contained within the West Wirral merger proposal consultation document which is attached to report CFO/059/15 as Appendix 1.
23. It remains the view of the CFO that the merger proposal will deliver the least overall impact on operational response when compared to the outright closure option, any of the other options contained within the West Wirral merger proposal consultation document or any other suggestion made during the consultation process.
24. It is the strong recommendation of the CFO therefore that Members approve the proposal to merge the existing Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road and crew the West Kirby fire appliance on a wholetime retained basis.

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#### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

25. The Equality and Diversity implications of the public consultation exercise are addressed in report CFO/059/15 and the Equality Impact Assessment has been updated to reflect the consultation outcomes.
26. Equality and Diversity considerations will be taken into account in the design of the layout of the new community fire station should that option be approved by Members.

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#### **Staff Implications**

27. A net saving of 22 WTE firefighter posts is anticipated from the merger of Upton and West Kirby and the conversion of the West Kirby appliance from wholetime crewing to wholetime retained. 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 target of £3.4m assumed in the current financial plan. Firefighter posts are being lost by using natural turnover rates – reserves are being used to avoid compulsory Firefighter redundancy. Staff will have the opportunity to earn extra money by taking wholetime retained contracts.

28. Formal consultation with Representative Bodies has continued throughout the process. If the proposal is approved, staff representatives would be appointed to work on the project team to ensure that any new 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**

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29. Any building licence and eventual transfer of the land will be subject to title investigation and the outcome of appropriate searches and ground investigation. In addition satisfactory land transfer terms and an appropriate premium need to be negotiated and agreed between the parties and approved by Wirral MBC before a building licence or lease can be entered into.
30. Participation in the scheme by Merseyside Police or North West Ambulance Service will require negotiation and agreement of an appropriate lease arrangement.

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

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31. The estimated combined operating costs of the current Upton and West Kirby stations total £2.034m. The forecast running costs of a new Saughall Massie station are £1.154m, a saving of £0.880m. As previously stated this is based on a reduction in WTE firefighter posts from 48 to 26, and similar building costs as those at new fire stations. This savings has been assumed in the 2015/16 operational staffing saving target. Details are included in Appendix A.
32. The predicted cost of building the new Saughall Massie fire station is £4.2m based on current estimated market rates. However, until any decision on land transfer and planning permission is made and detailed prices are calculated by the Authority chosen building company Wates to reflect not only the Authority's (and any partner's) requirements but also to fulfil any planning conditions, including any works required on the land, this can only be an estimate. Details of the potential capital costs and income are detailed in Appendix B to this report. This income includes assumed capital receipts from the sale of land at the current Upton and West Kirby sites, together with grant already approved by DCLG of £1.49m.
33. After allowing for capital receipts and the Government grant the net cost to the Authority is estimated to be £2.160m. Members have created a capital investment reserve to meet any funding shortfall in the capital build cost of the station mergers initiative and thereby avoid additional borrowing.

34. Members will be aware that the proposed site sits in the Green Belt. Building on Green Belt land is only allowed in very special circumstances. Officers believe they can demonstrate special circumstances effectively to the Planning Authority but it is highly likely that there will be public opposition to any planning application. The process is likely to take a significant period of time and any decision to grant planning permission may be called in by the Secretary of State.

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

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35. A Risk Register has been created for the Station Mergers project and is regularly monitored by the Strategic Management Group. The most significant risk for the project as a whole 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 issue is covered in more detail elsewhere in this report.
36. All Health & Safety implications of the new station build will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by the responsible contractors.
37. Any new building will be designed and built to achieve a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating as the absolute minimum.
38. The proposed site is in the Green Belt as there are no operationally viable Brown Field sites available to the Authority. Planning permission will only be granted where special circumstances can be demonstrated. Any building design will endeavour to minimise the impact on the Green Belt.

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

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39. Whilst the proposed station merger will not improve operational cover in the West Wirral area, it is the least worst option to adopt in the circumstances and is seen as reasonable given the financial challenge faced by the Authority.
40. A new fire station will however provide an improved working environment for firefighters. It will also provide much improved community facilities compared to those available at the current Upton and West Kirby stations, which in turn will lead to greater interaction between firefighters and community groups and hence assist in creating safer communities.

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### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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**CFO/059/15** Wirral Fire Cover Consultation 2 Outcomes

**CFO/003/15** West Wirral Operational Response Considerations (Post Consultation)

**CFO/038/14** Budget Resolution Transitional Response Arrangements - Sequential Appliance Unavailability

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**CFO/013/15** Interim Measures to be Taken Under Delegated Authority to Ensure Appliance Availability

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**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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**BREEAM** Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology

**MBC** Metropolitan Borough Council

**WTE** Wholetime Equivalent