

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		
DATE:	17 TH SEPTEMBER 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/081/15
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER	REPORT AUTHOR:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP MERSEYSIDE POLICE PRINCIPAL OFFICER TEAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY – GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS		

APPENDICES:	NONE
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Purpose of Report

1. To propose a response from the Authority to David Parr (Chief Executive Halton Council) on the options under consideration by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority over future governance arrangements for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service which could involve Halton falling under the operational responsibility of the Service.

Recommendation

2. That Members approve the response as set out within this report.

Introduction and Background

3. Within his e-mail dated 19th August David Parr advised on discussions held with DCLG and Home Office civil servants around the implications of the Cities and Devolution Bill. The advice he received is copied below;

Should a directly elected mayor for the LCR be established this does not mean the mayor will automatically take over the responsibilities of the PCC (from Merseyside Police Area and the Halton part of the Cheshire Police Area) or from the Merseyside or Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Each case is considered on a case-by-case basis.

In determining the case for the LCR the views of the following will be taken into consideration:

- Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- PCC – Merseyside Police Area
- PCC – Cheshire Police Area
- LCR – Local Authorities
- Cheshire West & Chester LA
- East Cheshire LA

- *Warrington LA*

A strong business case will be required making the case for the elected LCR mayor to take on the responsibilities of the PCC or the Fire and Rescue Authority in all/part of the LCR area.

The HO/DCLG will not support a change unless there is a good reason to do so.

Any business case must demonstrate there are advantages in:

- *Policing*
- *Community Safety*
- *Fire and Rescue provision*
- *Wider integration with non-policing / non-fire services, (e.g. mental health services, general health services etc)*
- **AND** – *added value in quality, cost, efficiencies*

DCLG have further advised

To help in your conversations with fire and rescue authority partners you asked for clarification on Government's rationale for PCCs/elected mayors being responsible for fire.

As discussed, Government's ambition is to enable closer working between the emergency services which has been affirmed by the manifesto commitment.

The rationale is clear – directly accountable leadership can play a critical role in securing better commissioning and delivery of emergency services at a local level and where a local case is made, PCCs/elected mayors could provide just that.

This also offers them the strong mandate to pursue ambitious reform through collaboration to improve and deliver effective and efficient services to local communities.

On the issue of including fire or PCC in the combined authority, which we understand was clarified during your discussions with the Home Office, any decisions about whether or not to include fire in the combined authority in a devolution deal are for local partners and local decisions.

We would expect fire and rescue authorities to be ambitious in exploring the scope for collaboration, whether that is through combined authorities or with the police or other partners. "

The options currently under consideration in the LCR in respect of Fire are:-

Status Quo

*Fire and Rescue Authority for Merseyside F&R Area
Fire and Rescue Authority Cheshire F&R Area (including Halton)*

Hybrid

Elected LCR Mayor (if this Governance Model is accepted by the LCR local authorities this is still to be determined) acts as Fire and Rescue Authority Merseyside F&R Area
Fire and Rescue Authority for Cheshire F&R Area (continues for Halton)

Change of Boundaries

Halton area moves into Merseyside F&R Area
Cheshire F&R Area covers East Cheshire, Warrington, Cheshire West & Chester
Elected LCR Mayor (if this Governance Model is accepted by the LCR local authorities - this is still to be determined) as Fire and Rescue Authority for extended Merseyside F&R Area (including Halton)
Fire and Rescue Authority for revised Cheshire Force Area (East Cheshire, Warrington, Cheshire West & Chester)

4. Halton has two fire stations at Runcorn (1 pump wholetime, 1 pump wholetime days retained on nights, 1 Incident Command Unit alternately crewed) and Widnes (2 pump wholetime).
5. In comparison to the other districts of the Liverpool City Region, Halton is the smallest from the viewpoint of population (circa 125,000) and dwellings, representing what would be 8% of a joint Merseyside total. However though Halton has a population 20,000 less than Knowsley and approximately 50,000 fewer than St Helens, the district over compensates in terms of Non Domestic properties.
6. Halton has over 600 more Non Domestic Properties than Knowsley, with the opposite being true when St Helens is considered, however the Rateable Value of industry in Halton is comparable with St Helens - even though there are over 600 fewer premises.
7. Levels of deprivation in Halton are most similar to St Helens, although Halton does have slightly higher levels of deprivation than St Helens.
8. The proposed Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) response to the 3 Options is detailed below.

Option 1 – Status Quo

Authority response – MFRA are of the view that this option would result in the least impact on the Merseyside and Cheshire FRA's. MFRA also recognise that this option does not deliver full devolution.

Option 2 – Hybrid

Authority response – MFRA do not consider that this option can be delivered in practice.

Option 3 – Boundary Changes

Authority response – MFRA recognise that any advantages to Merseyside FRS arising from this option might conversely be disadvantages to Cheshire FRS. MFRA believe however that any decision over pursuing this option rests with Halton and the 5 remaining Local Authorities within the Liverpool City Region.

The overriding concern of MFRA is public safety, preventing incidents and managing risk. MFRA recognise that deprivation is a significant determinant in particular with regard to accidental dwelling fires, deaths and injuries. MFRA recognise that a primary objective of devolution is to drive economic growth which has a positive impact on community safety. MFRA will therefore support any decision of the Combined Authority that delivers this outcome.

In the meantime MFRA will continue to work collaboratively with our Emergency Service and Health partners to deliver the best possible service in the face of ongoing and unprecedented financial challenges.

In the event that the Combined Authority elect to pursue Option 3, MFRA are of the view that the governance arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Service would be best delivered via the model proposed for Greater Manchester (GM). The MFRA understanding of the GM model is that the Mayor will have responsibility for approving the Integrated Risk Management Plan, the budget and the appointment of the Chief Fire Officer. The Mayor will be supported by a Committee, the Chair of which he/she will appoint to oversee day to day matters, with representatives from each of the constituent Authorities. The Committee will deal with all Policy related issues.

The Chief Fire Officer retains delegated authority for all operational matters as is the case now.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been undertaken on any of the options at this time.

Staff Implications

10. There are no direct staff implications at this time as no decision over governance arrangements has been taken.

Legal Implications

11. Any legal implications associated with Option 3 would need to be addressed within the Cities and Devolution Act.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

12. A full financial analysis has not been undertaken on any of the options at this time.
13. If a decision was taken to subsume Halton into MFRA then there would be a need to equalise council tax precept. The Merseyside FRS precept is £71.47 compared to the Cheshire FRS precept of £70.46, a difference of £1.01.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

14. The risk management, H&S and environmental implications have not been considered within this report.

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

15. Achieving the most appropriate governance structure across the most appropriate geographic footprint will ensure the best levels of service delivery in terms of fire and rescue provision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
