

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	17 DECEMBER 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/097/15
PRESENTING OFFICER:	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER	REPORT AUTHOR:	COLIN SCHOFIELD
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	AREA MANAGER - STRATEGIC CHANGE AND RESOURCES HEAD OF ESTATES		
TITLE OF REPORT:	STATION MERGERS - PROGRESS REPORT		
APPENDICES:			

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the progress made to date in relation to the Station Mergers programme.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the contents of this report.

Introduction and Background

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

(1) "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 a site 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 Prescot 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.

(2) 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 that 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.*

(3) Members approve the associated consultation process.

(4) Reports be brought back on each of the individual mergers as soon as practicable.”

4. Since this original report was considered, extensive public consultation has been undertaken in Prescot, St Helens and West Wirral (a full public consultation process has been undertaken twice in Wirral; one for the Greasby proposal and one for the Saughall Massie proposal). Based on the outcomes of the consultation Members approved the merger of Whiston and Huyton and Upton and West Kirkby fire stations at Prescot and Saughall Massie respectively. A report related to the St Helens proposal is submitted elsewhere on this Agenda.
5. The paragraphs below give Members an update on progress against each of the schemes.

Allerton

6. The Authority, at its meeting on 26th February 2015, resolved that the proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate the Allerton appliance to Old Swan on a wholetime retained basis on a 30 minute recall, be approved.
7. As a result Allerton fire station was closed and the appliance relocated to Old Swan with effect from 1st April 2015. The site has been secured and regular monthly site inspections are undertaken to ensure this remains the case.
8. The Chief Fire Officer is liaising with Officers from Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Police about possible future use of the building. This involves a potential rationalisation of existing neighbouring publicly owned buildings (including the current Allerton library) as part of the ‘One Public Estate’ programme. This programme is a Central Government initiative which tasked local authorities to set up property boards to identify opportunities for joint

working and shared services. Further details on the proposals will be provided for Members as discussions progress.

Prescot

9. Members will recall that at its meeting on 20th October 2015, the Authority gave final approval to the building of a new community fire station, including a neighbourhood Police station, on land at Manchester Road, Prescot.
10. Negotiations continue with Officers from Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) to secure the land. Heads of Terms have been agreed for the sale but discussions currently centre on whether the gabion and retaining walls that support the roundabout and Manchester Road should be included or excluded from the land deal. Whatever the outcome, Knowsley MBC will retain its current responsibility for the inspection and maintenance of these structures and will require necessary access rights to carry this out. There is also a complicating issue regarding a strip of land which is used, but not owned by, the neighbouring Business Park which is currently causing some confusion over the exact site boundary. It is anticipated that this latter issue will be resolved shortly.
11. If the boundary of the Authority's site is at the back of the pavement on Manchester Road, then the Authority will assume responsibility for the boundary fence along Manchester Road and the mature trees within the site which Knowsley MBC's arboriculturist has requested be retained as they form part of the streetscape in Manchester Road. A survey is currently being undertaken to ensure that these trees are healthy and will not create a liability for the Authority when they complete the purchase of the site.
12. Following resolution of the boundary issues, commercial land and property agents, Bilfinger GVA, will be jointly appointed by both parties to value the site and set a purchase price.
13. Should the sale price be agreed, Knowsley MBC are required to seek approval from the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) as they provided grant funding some years ago to remediate this site for future business use, following vacation by the previous land owners (BICC). Knowsley MBC also need to seek formal agreement from the relevant Executive Director within the Council.
14. Knowsley MBC Officers are drafting a development agreement to permit the building of the new community fire station, including a neighbourhood Police station, on this site which needs to be in place prior to commencement of any building works.
15. Details of this development agreement need to be built into a (back-to-back) development agreement and agreement for lease with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This document will set out the arrangements to complete the project and will contractually require the PCC to enter into a lease on completion of the works. Negotiations continue with Officers from Merseyside

Police to agree their financial contribution to the building works and ongoing revenue costs for use of the building including both exclusive and shared areas.

16. A gas governor is situated in the north-eastern corner of this site (within the red line boundary of the site to be purchased) which is currently maintained by National Grid Gas plc. This governor will be fenced off from the rest of the site and National Grid provided with an easement across the land to service and maintain their equipment.
17. A flood risk assessment of the site has been carried out but has revealed no cause for concern.
18. A full planning application was submitted to Knowsley MBC on 6th November 2015. It is hoped that approval to the application will be given by Knowsley MBC Planning Committee on 14th January 2016. If approved, it is hoped to start work on site on 29th February 2016 with a build period of some 12 months.
19. Wates, the Authority's appointed contractor for the building works, held a well-attended 'Meet the Buyer' event in the Suites Hotel, Knowsley on 25th November, facilitated by Knowsley Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of this event was to publicise the project and try to get as many local companies as possible to bid for inclusion on the list of sub-contractors for this project. This event was also to promote the use of the apprentice scheme on the project. Wates have appointed Fusion 21, a Knowsley based community Regeneration Company, to work with them on this project to ensure delivery of social values within the project.
20. Officers are in discussions with North West Ambulance Services (NWAS) over the abortive design and delay costs incurred as a result of NWAS' four month involvement in, and subsequent withdrawal from, the project.

Saughall Massie

21. The Authority, at its meeting on 30th June 2015 resolved that:
 - a) *"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, be approved.*
 - b) *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, be approved.*
 - c) *the Capital Programme be amended to incorporate the Saughall Massie fire station scheme; and*
 - d) *delegated authority be granted to the Chief Fire Officer to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police and NWAS, with a view to sharing the new building."*

22. Discussions with Merseyside Police have resulted in the PCC deciding not to share this site. Merseyside Police have, however, indicated that they are likely to use any training facilities provided.
23. NWAS have indicated that they are likely to use the Saughall Massie site, on an infrequent basis, as a standby point for a rapid response vehicle but do not require any dedicated office or other space within the building.
24. A pre-application was submitted to Wirral Council on 8th October. Following this, a meeting was held with Planning Officers on 4th November to discuss the application. At this meeting it was emphasised that as the land in question is classified as Green Belt, the proposed fire station would constitute inappropriate development and could not be supported by the Local Planning Authority unless the Chief Fire Officer was able to clearly demonstrate that there are very special circumstances which justify the development and outweigh harm done to the Green Belt. The Chief Fire Officer believes that he can demonstrate very special circumstances in respect of response times to the West Kirby station area.
25. Planning Officers also requested that the design of the building, as proposed, be re-examined to ensure that the building footprint is the absolute minimum necessary to reduce the impact on the Green Belt. This work is currently underway.
26. Members may be aware that a copy of the formal letter setting out the advice given by Planning Officers was given to a third party before the letter was received by the Chief Fire Officer or the architects working on behalf of the Authority. This letter was then passed to the Liverpool Echo and Wirral Globe newspapers which both ran articles, quoting sections from this letter, and suggesting that the Authority would struggle to justify building a new fire station in Saughall Massie. The Chief Fire Officer has written to the Head of Regeneration and Planning at Wirral Council querying how the letter could appear in the press before it was received by the intended recipient and suggesting that this action could have prejudiced the formal planning application when received.
27. There is a medium pressure gas main running across the Saughall Massie site that may need to be diverted before a new station could be built. If this proves necessary, National Grid would require 16 weeks' notice (and payment up front) to undertake diversion works which would take up to seven weeks. The diversion works would need to be undertaken in the summer months when demand for gas is at its lowest. The timing of any diversion work would be crucial in terms of when a station could be built. If planning permission was to be granted and an order placed with National Grid by the end of April 2016, diversion works should be complete by mid-October and building works could start thereafter. If planning permission were to be granted later than that, the window of opportunity for the diversion works to be carried out in summer 2016 would be lost and this work could not be scheduled until April 2017, meaning that building works could not commence until late May 2017.

28. The Chief Fire Officer is seeking to submit the full planning application for this site in late December 2015 or early January 2016 which would allow consideration by Wirral Council Planning Committee in April 2016 and, if approved, thus facilitate a start on site in late 2016. The Chief Fire Officer will update members at the meeting on actual progress to achieve this.
29. To prepare the planning application, detailed intrusive site surveys will be required and the Chief Fire Officer is currently seeking the appropriate permission from Wirral MBC for these investigative works to take place.
30. Members should be aware that any decision by Wirral MBC to grant planning permission will be referred to the Secretary of State for ratification.

St. Helens

31. Reports on the outcome of the consultation undertaken and the Chief Fire Officers recommendation on the merger of St. Helens and Eccleston fire stations at a new site on Canal Street, St. Helens are submitted to today's agenda.
32. Provisional agreement to purchase an appropriate plot of land currently forming part of the Watson Street works and owned by Pilkington, has been reached following lengthy negotiations. The agreement is subject to Authority approval to proceed with the scheme, ground conditions on the site and receiving planning approval to build the new fire station.
33. Pilkington have agreed to commission a Phase 1 Environmental report on ground conditions which will be assignable to this Authority should the Authority agree to purchase the land. It is likely that Wates will wish to carry out further ground investigation works in due course.
34. Discussions with officers from St. Helens MBC have concluded that an access can be provided to the site for returning fire appliances only off Linkway which will help with the site layout.
35. Positive discussions have been held with Merseyside Police and NWAS over shared use of this site but no details of the extent of their involvement, if any, are yet available. If Members are minded to approve the proposal at today's meeting, further detailed discussions will be held.

Equality and Diversity Implications

36. The latest Equality Impact Assessment for the Station Mergers programme is attached as appendix 9 to report CFO/92/15 on the outcomes of the consultation process at St. Helens.

Staff Implications

37. All staff, the Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association and UNISON have all been consulted over the proposals and kept updated on developments.

Legal Implications

38. The legal implications of each of the proposals has been itemised in the separate reports on each of the proposed mergers. In report CFO/003/15 (Saughall Massie), paragraphs 76 – 79 refer. In report CFO/083/15, (Prescot), paragraphs 37 and 38 refer.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

39. The financial implications of each of the proposals has been itemised in the separate reports on each of the proposed mergers. In report CFO/003/15 (Saughall Massie), paragraphs 80 - 82 refer. In report CFO/083/15, (Prescot), paragraphs 39 - 47 refer.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

40. All Health & Safety implications of the new builds will be fully risk assessed and mitigated by Wates, as the appointed principal building contractor.
41. All new stations will be designed to achieve a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) 'Very Good' rating as a minimum requirement. This process evaluates the sustainable value of procurement, design, costs and operation of a development against targets that are based on performance benchmarks.

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

42. New community fire and rescue stations will provide improved working environments for firefighters, included enhanced training facilities. They will also provide improved facilities for community use, compared to what is available at the current stations, which in turn will lead to greater interaction between firefighters and community groups and hence assist in creating safer communities. Sharing the facilities with colleagues from other emergency services will lead to closer working relationships.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- CFO/003/15** West Wirral Operational Response Considerations (Post Consultation)
CFO/083/15 Proposed New Fire Station at Prescot

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BREEAM	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
DCLG	Department for Communities & Local Government
HCA	Homes & Communities Agency
MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
NWAS	North West Ambulance Service
PCC	Police & Crime Commissioner (for Merseyside)