

Report of Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Director of Protection & Assets

Feasibility of Droitwich Training Centre / Wyre Forest

Purpose of report

1. To update Members on the feasibility to relocate Training Centre (currently based in Droitwich) to Wyre Forest Fire Station.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the feasibility update and progress is noted, and Members approve the progression of a proposal to potentially sell part of the accommodation on the Droitwich site to fund the Training Centre relocation, if feasible and efficient.

Background

2. The Service's main Training Centre is located at Droitwich Fire Station. The existing site is relatively compact with limited facilities, making any future development difficult on the site. The location of the Training Centre on the Droitwich site also complicates any future potential development or relocation of the Droitwich Fire Station in the future.
3. The new Wyre Forest Fire Station already has excellent facilities on site including a new 'hot fire house', and extensive space for future development. The current location is no longer fit for purpose, outdated and would not be able to deliver a modern Training Centre even if refurbished due to the limited available space.
4. It was reported to the Policy & Resources Committee in September 2021 of the intention to assess the potential future relocation of Training Centre to Wyre Forest Fire Station. A paper proposed to investigate the feasibility of relocating the Training Centre to Wyre Forest. Approval was sought to appoint architects to complete a feasibility options and planning appraisal.
5. Officers were authorised to: "appoint architects to complete a feasibility options appraisal to relocate Training Centre to Wyre Forest Fire Station, and submit a planning application if feasible." It is the intention of officers to submit a planning application in 2024.
6. The estimated fees to complete a feasibility options and planning appraisal and application were provided to members in a confidential appendix. The Director of Finance advised the costs could be financed from within the reserve approved in June 2021. It was noted that an initial project reserve of £650k had

been allocated. However, if proposals were acceptable then additional funding would be required to enable the scheme to progress, and this could be phased over a number of years if funding is not immediately available.

Feasibility Options Update

7. It was noted in May that the architects who completed the Wyre Forest scheme had visited the existing Training Centre in Droitwich and met centre managers to commence initial scoping works, and formulate accommodation schedules for the proposed requirements of a new facility.
8. A number of sketch site spatial layouts have been reviewed, and architects are now reviewing comments and preparing preferred layouts for further review. Once approved by officers, additional documents will be drafted in preparation to submit a planning application. A detailed cost analysis will be completed at this stage, enabling proposed project costs to be explored, and it is envisaged this project may cost up to £2.5m, based upon current estimates in today's climate.
9. As part of the options appraisal work the property team are also exploring the potential value of the existing Droitwich Fire Station site. It is noted that this could be a two-phased approach to initially release funds to facilitate the move of the Training Centre. Two options are being considered;
 - i. the estimated value of the whole site, and
 - ii. to carry out an initial feasibility report on the value of the five houses that sit on the boundary of the existing site.
10. Should Training Centre move to Wyre Forest, then the current Droitwich site would be left with some redundant space. The Authority currently owns five houses on the boundary of the site which are used for Training, USAR, and Fire Cadets. However, as adjoined cottages they have never been ideal and truly fit for purpose.
11. Officers intend to explore the option of selling these properties (should planning permission be achieved for the Wyre Forest Training Centre buildings) to partially fund the proposed move. Officers are confident the site can be adjusted to relocate the function carried out in the cottages into the main Droitwich building, without compromising the future use of the Droitwich site as a Fire Station / USAR facility after Training Centre has moved.

Conclusion / Summary

12. The existing Training Centre at Droitwich Fire Station is very constrained. It was therefore proposed to investigate the feasibility of relocating the Training Centre to the Wyre Forest Hub. These proposals would be subject to identifying additional funding, and the project could be phased over a number of years.
13. Sketch proposals have been reviewed, and architects are now reviewing comments and preparing preferred layouts, and costs have been identified, in preparation to submit a planning application. Further work is being progressed

concerning project costings, and the potential to release funds from the existing Droitwich site. The Treasurer will review the financial predictions to allow a viable plan (phased if necessary) to enable the new Training Centre to be built at the Wyre Forest Fire Station.

Corporate Considerations

<p>Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues).</p>	<p>An initial reserve of £650k has been allocated for the relocation of Training Centre to the Wyre Forest Fire Station site. However, project completion would be subject to identifying additional funding.</p>
<p>Strategic Policy Links & Core Code of Ethics (identify how proposals link with current priorities and policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics).</p>	<p>Training of staff and maintenance of skills in a realistic environment is a key element of Service strategy, and therefore investing in new and improved training facilities is essential.</p>
<p>Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>None.</p>
<p>Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter).</p>	<p>Not applicable at this stage.</p>
<p>Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?).</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>Data Protection Impact (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling).</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>