

Report of Chief Fire Officer

Place Partnership Ltd

Purpose of report

1. To update Members on matters relating to Place Partnership Ltd. and the Authority's property function.
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Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Group Leaders, be given delegated authority to determine the future arrangements for the delivery of the Authority's property function including entering into any shared service or outsourced arrangement as appropriate.

Introduction and Background

2. Place Partnership Ltd. (PPL) was established in 2015 as a joint vehicle for delivery of property services across a number of public sector partners, including the Fire Authority. Following decisions by Redditch Borough Council and Worcester City Council to withdraw from the partnership in 2018, the current partners in addition to ourselves are Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police
3. Worcestershire County Council has now given 12 months' notice to terminate their service contract with PPL with effect from 31st March 2021. The County Council currently accounts for approximately one third of PPL's workload and so this decision will inevitably have a significant impact.
4. The ramifications of the County Council's decision and the implications for the remaining partners are still being explored. In particular, it forces the remaining partners to consider whether they wish to continue with the current arrangements, make changes to the structure or ownership model of PPL or look to provide some or all of their property functions in a different way, such as taking services back in-house or possibly entering into new shared service arrangements involving both Fire and Police. Each of these options needs to be considered in terms of financial implications, service delivery, the impact upon staff and existing service contracts.
5. These discussions are at an early stage. The Fire Authority is fully engaged in this process through the involvement of the Chief Fire Officer as the Authority's nominated director on the PPL Board and through the Chairman and Deputy Chief Fire Officer who represent the Authority at Shareholder meetings.

6. Furthermore, due to the fact that the overarching legal agreement requires the final shareholder decision on the future shape of PPL to be unanimous (even though each shareholder will have potentially different priorities, risks and pressures to manage), this means that any discussions between the partners could be fast moving, time-critical and complex in nature – hence the recommendation in this paper to delegate the decision to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Group Leaders, in order to maintain the Service’s flexibility to best manage the situation as it develops.

Conclusion/Summary

7. Discussions between the remaining partners in the wake of the County Council’s decision to terminate their arrangements with PPL are still ongoing. However it is likely that decisions will need to be made before the next scheduled meeting of the Fire Authority in October, to allow time for the considerable work that will be involved in relation to the transfer of staff, disaggregation of existing contracts and putting in place any new arrangements that may be determined. It is therefore proposed that these decisions be delegated in consultation with Group Leaders.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The cost of providing the Authority’s property services is currently £480,000 pa (with a total annual property related budget of £1.9m).
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	Ensuring effective management of the Authority’s properties is part of our overall asset management strategy and helps underpin the delivery of services.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	Any changes affecting Place Partnership or the delivery of the property function carry potential risks in relation to finance and service delivery. These will be addressed through the arrangements that are put in place.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Statutory consultation with any staff affected by subsequent proposals will be undertaken by Place Partnership Ltd at the appropriate stage
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Not applicable at this stage