

## Report of Chief Fire Officer

### 9. West Midlands Regional Collaborative Statement

#### Purpose of report

1. To inform Members about a proposal by the West Midlands region's Fire Services to enter into a Regional Collaborative Statement to provide clear operational and organisational benefits through collaboration across the five Fire and Rescue Services in the West Midlands region.

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#### Recommendation

***It is recommended that the Authority agree to the principles of the Regional Collaborative Statement and that agreement of this Statement is finalised by the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.***

#### Introduction and Background

2. Historically the five Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) within the West Midlands region (Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Warwickshire) have collaborated on a range of issues on an ad-hoc basis. However, following a meeting of the Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) and Chairs on 27 January 2014, it was proposed that this was made into a more formal Regional Collaborative Statement to demonstrate the strategic intention of FRSs to ensure best value through working together and also to support this Statement with a set of agreed principles.

#### Draft Regional Collaboration Statement

3. It is proposed that the following statement be adopted by the 5 Fire and Rescue Services in the West Midlands region.

*"The communities within the West Midlands Region are served by the 5 Fire and Rescue Services of Shropshire, Hereford & Worcester, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and West Midlands.*

*These 5 Services operate as distinct operational, legal, and local government led entities in accordance with the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.*

*Despite these separate local identities, the elected members and principal officers recognise the clear operational and organisational benefits that arise from close collaboration between the Services and that by working together the outcomes delivered to our local communities will be better. In addition to working together more closely all services will continue to explore opportunities of working with external agencies for the benefit of their communities and where appropriate.*

*The 5 organisations are committed to working together and sharing resources wherever possible to secure the delivery of the very best prevention, protection and response services to their communities, the safest possible working environment for their staff, and securing improvements in the health, safety and well-being for local people as efficiently and effectively as possible.*

*This statement serves to confirm the commitment of each of the 5 Fire and Rescue Authorities and their services to actively seek to identify, develop and implement new ways of working, based on the premise that we will work collaboratively unless there is a compelling, evidenced based and justifiable reason not to. This approach will be managed through the regional structure of the Chief Fire Officers Association and its associated workstreams.*

*This commitment will be incorporated within each Authority's respective IRMP and promoted by the political and professional leaders of the organisations, who will meet regularly to ensure progress is made and that the commitment to this pledge is demonstrated by the delivery of new, collaborative ways of working and improved outcomes for those we serve."*

#### **Working Principles of the Memorandum of Understanding**

4. The following principles underpin the Regional Collaborative Statement and it is anticipated that these principles will be cascaded down through the Service to ensure all staff are working cohesively on a regional basis.
  - a) The Regional Collaborative Statement is intended to become clear policy as set out in individual IRMPs. It states that the 5 FRSs will work collaboratively unless there is a compelling, evidenced based and justifiable reason not to.
  - b) The basis of a) above is that in future, any new development, operational or organisational need, change initiative, or procurement exercise will be firstly and consciously considered with a collaborative outcome in mind. A collaborative outcome could be in respect of just 1 other FRS or up to all 5.
  - c) In particular, the starting point of any tendering or procurement exercise for either a new or renewed need would be positive and proactive attention to achieving a collaborative outcome. This will include tender evaluation criteria being constructed in such a way to give due weight to such opportunities. Early work will also be advanced by the DCFO Group on providing for subsequent contract adoption by others following a procurement exercise in one FRS.
  - d) Staff who present a legal, constitutional, historical or other reason that suggests a lack of willingness to actively work towards b) above will be challenged vigorously. The CFOs will advance whatever legal support is necessary to support these working principles being achieved.

- e) Initial pieces of minor collaborative work may seem trivial and/or low cost, but the longer term convergence of more major issues are often aided by previous smaller “enabling” initiatives being delivered first.
- f) There is a strong desire to continue to develop common operational policies, procedures and working practices, as these are a key precursor to, and facilitator, of closer collaborative working.
- g) Services will naturally regard cost as a major factor in determining its arrangements for anything within it, and might well justify a non-collaborative approach by the associated initial direct or indirect costs with implementing a new collaborative approach. A clear focus must nevertheless be given to the opportunity for larger savings and efficiencies and potentially a safer and more resilient Service in the longer term if positive steps are collectively taken to closer regional working. When taking decisions after procurement exercises or during change programmes, full and appropriate advice should be given to officers and Members to enable them to consider the best possible long term view.
- h) It is anticipated that in operational terms there would be very few compelling reasons why operational equipment, working procedures, or other Fire Service specific needs would have to differ between FRSs. Only in instances where unique risks or geography applied would the CFOs regard there being “compelling reasons” for new bespoke requirements being required in the future.

## **Existing Collaborations**

- 5. HWFRS is currently involved in many ‘soft collaborations’ with partners including neighbouring FRSs. The most notable of these are the Project Arrow work with Warwickshire, referenced elsewhere in this meeting, and the fire control project with Shropshire. The agreement of the proposed Regional Collaborative Statement does not in any way compromise this work, in reality it enhances this work giving it a more formalised foundation.

## **Conclusion**

- 6. HWFRS is well used to working with a multitude of partners to seek the best outcomes for our communities. Seeking a more formalised agreement to work collaboratively with the regional FRSs enhances an already well established way of working and can only provide benefits to the Service and the communities we serve.

### Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	None.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None.
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	NA

### Supporting Information

None

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