

## **Report of Area Commander - Operations**

### **7. Merger of the Urban Search and Rescue Team into Droitwich Fire Station**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To gain approval to merge the Service's Urban Search and Rescue team with Droitwich Fire Station to create a single multi-functional operational unit.
2. To gain approval to transfer the government provided and maintained National Resilience Incident Response Unit and equipment from Droitwich Fire Station to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, subject to agreement by the National Resilience Board.

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#### **Recommendations**

##### ***It is recommended that:***

- i) the Service's Urban Search and Rescue team is merged into Droitwich Fire Station to create a single multi-functional operational unit; and***
- ii) subject to agreement by the National Resilience Board, the existing National Resilience Incident Response Unit and equipment be transferred to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service.***

#### **Introduction and Background**

3. The Service currently maintains a day crewed (DC) fire station in Droitwich consisting of 14 wholetime (WT) staff. On the same site is a complement of 14 WT Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Technicians who are also firefighting staff. The USAR team is able to respond to any major unstable or collapsed structure or major transportation incident as part of a national response and is therefore funded by a central government section 31 grant.
4. Both Droitwich and USAR units are supported by a contingent of On-Call (Retained) staff. Both WT units function with a joint Station Commander but for day-to-day and operational purposes work separately and independently.
5. The entire complement of WT staff (jointly 28) on the Droitwich site will naturally reduce within this calendar year to approximately 20 through anticipated and planned retirements, transfers and promotions. This presents an opportunity to review the delivery of the USAR function and develop a new more efficient model.

6. A research project has been completed which demonstrates that the USAR functions could be delivered more efficiently and effectively through merging with Droitwich Fire Station. Similar models to the one proposed are used to good effect in a number of other Services in the country. It needs to be emphasised that the section 31 grant is paid to provide a capability not a specific number of staff or a specific crewing model.

## **Proposal**

7. This paper proposes the creation of a single merged unit at Droitwich Fire Station of two watches of 9 personnel (a total 18 operational staff), to replace the existing four watches currently at Droitwich and USAR (a total of 28 staff). This proposal removes 10 posts from the uniformed establishment. However these 10 posts are employed through the section 31 National Resilience grant and not from the Service's base budget.
8. Supported by the existing On-Call units, the new response model could deploy to either '*normal*' Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) incidents or USAR incidents as appropriate. Where on-duty staff are committed to FRS incidents and a USAR response is also required (either locally or nationally), there will be sufficient On-Call staff available to respond to the USAR incident. The operational activity for USAR incidents is extremely low and the requirement and criteria to deploy a USAR team nationally allows for a team to be formed within much longer time scales than normal FRS emergency response activities.
9. If staff are deployed on a USAR related incident out of the Service area for any significant period of time, existing resilience arrangements would be able to provide fire cover in Droitwich.
10. When fully trained this larger group of more widely trained staff will provide a greater level of overall resilience for USAR related incidents than the smaller group of dedicated specialists currently in place. It is envisaged that the progressive up-skilling of staff in the necessary USAR skills will take up to two years to complete. Due to the number of anticipated and known staff movements this year, an extensive USAR training programme will be needed regardless of this proposal.

## **Financial and Employment Considerations**

11. The current annual funding for the various National Resilience functions held within the Service is approximately £1m of which approximately £0.8m pays for the salaries and operating costs of the USAR functions. The funding received through the section 31 grant does not specify how a USAR team is employed, formed or delivered. The adoption of this proposal will create approximately £0.3m savings per year.
12. It is not envisaged that there will be a need to impose any changes to existing terms, conditions and shift systems as both units currently operate very similar systems. All existing USAR staff are currently contracted to provide the necessary fire fighting (FRS related) skills and all started their fire service careers as firefighters.

13. Reducing the number of personnel employed directly through the grant funding significantly reduces the Service's employment liabilities should the grant funding from central government reduce or cease in the future. Should this happen and the USAR function cease to be funded, Droitwich Fire Station would remain unaffected and could revert to its current status.

#### **Droitwich - National Resilience Incident Response Unit (IRU) for Mass Decontamination**

14. The section 31 grant also funds the training for two Incident Response Units (IRU) within the Service, one based at Droitwich. The IRU is a mass decontamination and firefighter decontamination unit provided by the government as part of a national strategy to counter any large scale chemical or hazardous material incidents. The operation of these units requires a high degree of familiarity and continuation training. The proposed new model for Droitwich could not support these skills in addition to those required for FRS and USAR operations and therefore the IRU would need to be relocated.
15. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service has indicated a willingness to accept this vehicle and therefore it is proposed that arrangements for the transfer of this vehicle and its equipment to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service are made through the National Resilience Board.
16. The transfer of this vehicle out of the Service would result in an annual reduction in section 31 grant of circa £0.036m which is currently received to pay for the training on the existing vehicle. However, as the vehicle would no longer remain in the Service there would be no training requirement and therefore the reduction of this grant would be cost neutral.

#### **Consultation**

17. In order to obtain the views of staff and their representative bodies on this proposal a period of consultation has commenced. Initial responses from staff has been extremely positive. Discussions with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) have also been positive with representatives advising us that they have no major objections to the proposals although they have concerns regarding the loss of 10 posts.
18. It is anticipated that following this consultation and through a natural reduction in staffing in the very near future, this proposal could be implemented by December 2013. Any surplus staff above the new establishment level would be utilised at Droitwich until such time as they could be released or transferred voluntarily. No staff member would be forced to move.

#### **Conclusion/Summary**

19. This report proposes the merger of the Urban Search and Rescue Team into Droitwich Fire Station creating a single multi-functional station. This proposal will realise revenue savings of approximately £0.3m which will reduce pressure on the revenue budget.

20. The existing provision of a core FRS response from Droitwich Fire Station will remain unchanged. The proposed new combined unit would consist of both USAR and fire trained specialists working together, alongside their On-Call colleagues. It should also be noted that this model and other similar models are currently utilised in a number of other FRSs nationally.
21. The provision of a USAR response against the national key requirements specified as part of the section 31 funding will be enhanced and become more resilient with more trained staff being made available through this new model. Additionally, the FRS response through Droitwich Fire Station will also be strengthened with more staff being available and trained in additional specialist skillsets.
22. To allow the merger to take place it is also proposed to transfer the Incident Response Unit and equipment (currently based at Droitwich) to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

### Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The entire report considers a reduction in overall employed staff and proposes a restructure of Droitwich which reduces pressure on the revenue budget.
<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).	This report proposes an efficiency which also realises a number of objectives against previous IRMP proposals for the delivery of technical rescue and the integration of the USAR function, alongside strategic considerations such including the delivery of quality services and resourcing for the future.
<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)	Consultation has already commenced with affected staff and trade unions and is included in sections 17 & 18.  This proposal does not affect the public directly and therefore consultation to a wider audience is considered unnecessary.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	An Equality impact assessment will be completed if this proposal is agreed and following the closure of the consultation and development of the detail, however initial considerations do not appear to highlight any significant issues.

### Supporting Information

#### Appendix 1 Duty Systems at Droitwich Fire Station

## **Background papers**

Proposed Merger of Stations 19 and 26 – Consultation  
IRMP 2009-2012  
Local Government Act 2003 - Section 31

## **Contact Officer**

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