

## **13. Fire fighting Water Supply**

### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide a summary of the current position with respect to the provision, inspection and maintenance of water supplies and to request support with a national campaign to change legislation, which would benefit the Fire and Rescue Authority.

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### **Recommendations**

***The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the Policy and Resources Committee:***

- i) note the pro-active steps which have been taken to secure fire fighting water supplies; and***
- ii) endorse the Service's support of a national campaign which would result in a change in legislation around the costs for on-going maintenance of fire hydrants.***

### **Background**

2. Fire and Rescue Services have a statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to secure fire fighting water supplies.
3. Hydrants are currently owned by the individual water companies with maintenance costs being the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Authority. Maintenance is undertaken either by the relevant water company and costs re-charged to the Fire and Rescue Authority, or minor works can be undertaken by in-house technicians.
4. All works within the public highway come under the New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) 1991, and operatives have to be trained and certified to comply with this Act. As a consequence operational crews no longer carry out this task.
5. There are approximately 18,000 fire hydrants in the Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority area of which 13,000 are on wholetime/day crewed station grounds and 5,000 on retained station grounds.
6. Hydrant inspection and minor repairs are currently carried out by dedicated Hydrant Technicians and in addition to inspections, the hydrant technicians undertake minor repairs (such as hydrant posts and plates), and also inspect repair work carried out by the water companies' contractors prior to payments being made. This latter function is important as the quality of this work of some of these contractors can be very poor.

7. National guidance advocates a risk based inspection programme, where potentially the most used hydrants are inspected more regularly than ones where the incidence of use would be lower, but suggests a maximum inspection period of 2 years.

### **Hereford and Worcester position**

8. Prior to 2011 the Service employed 2 hydrant inspectors who inspected and carried out minor repairs to approximately 3,000 hydrants per annum. At this time simply inspecting the hydrant infrastructure would have taken an estimated 6 years to complete. The inspection programme focussed on risk and meant that there was an estimated backlog of 10,000 fire hydrants which had not been inspected or maintained for around 5 years. The majority of these hydrants were on wholetime/day crewed station grounds and were not considered to be high risk.
9. In early 2011 in preparation for the 2011/12 financial year the Senior Management Board (SMB) reviewed the provision of hydrant maintenance. Following national guidance a risk based maintenance regime for hydrants has been adopted which will ensure that the inspection programme and maintenance work focuses on the hydrants that are a priority, at locations where the Service is likely to attend an incident, rather than treating all hydrants in the same way.
10. To support this approach SMB approved:
  - the introduction of two further technicians, with one technician becoming a 'lead' technician to coordinate reducing the backlog of work (funded from budget savings identified in year).
  - the procurement of a tablet type portable IT solution to capture hydrant data (accurate location under GPS), which will manage the risk based element and devise work schedules for the inspectors. More specifically, this will link directly in real time to the new Command and Control System and directly to Mobile Data Terminals in operational appliances.
11. The overall cost of the current regime (including £60,000 water company charges) is £146,000 and is contained within the current approved budget.

### **National Developments**

12. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (H&WFRS) has supported a national campaign by London Fire Brigade (LFB) with the aim of changing legislation so that the responsibility for hydrant maintenance would fall onto the water supply companies, with the Fire and Rescue Service only retaining responsibility for inspection.
13. LFB has contacted H&WFRS to gain further support to put more weight behind this campaign: for example, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was in the process of drafting a Water Bill, which has now been delayed somewhat and LFB will be putting forward their case. LFB are also in the process of liaising with the Consumer Council for Water to ensure that

savings to council tax-payers are not recycled into increased costs for water rate payers.

14. Whilst there are obvious direct benefits to the Fire Service in cost savings, there are benefits to the water industry in that it would facilitate the removal of unnecessary hydrants. There is currently no incentive for a Fire and Rescue Service to ask for redundant hydrants to be removed as they are required to pay for the removal (in London alone this ranges from £419 to £979 dependent on the water supply company) and there are estimated to be a million such hydrants in the UK; they are a major source of potential leaks and contamination and therefore their removal provides advantages for the water companies.

## Conclusion

15. Water supplies for fire fighting is an essential element of a firefighter's requirement to deliver front line fire fighting response. The Service has taken action to secure the provision of fire hydrants throughout the Authority's area but this does impact on the Authority's budgets. This financial impact is recognised throughout all fire and rescue services and therefore the Service has fully supported the LFB's attempt to amend existing legislation.

## Financial Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are financial issues that require consideration	Yes	11

## Legal Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are legal issues e.g. contractual and procurement, reputational issues that require consideration	Yes	Reference to work being undertaken by LFB.

## Additional Considerations

16. The table below sets out any additional issues arising from the proposals contained in this report and identifies the relevant paragraphs in the report where such issues are addressed.

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
<b>Resources</b> (e.g. Assets, ICT, Human Resources, Training & Development, Sustainability).	Yes	Assets – whole document.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (e.g. IRMP, Authority Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships, Environmental Impact).	No	
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (e.g. risk management and control measures, risk register score).	Yes	Risk based inspection – whole document.
<b>Consultation with Representative Bodies</b>	No	

### Contact Officer

Ian Edwards, Head of Asset Management  
(01905 368360)  
Email: [iedwards@hwfire.org.uk](mailto:iedwards@hwfire.org.uk)