



Nathan Travis CFO for Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service

Rod Hammerton CFO Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service

Date: 15th August 2018

Our ref: JPC/MW

Dear Nathan and Rod,

Thank you for your email dated 24th July 2018 attaching the SFRS & HWFRS "Fire Alliance Strategic Plan 2018 -2022".

I am pleased to recognise the progress that has been made on collaboration since I first raised it 18 months ago when there was little or no prospect of greater co-operation between yourselves, as well as with the police. I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft "Alliance plan", and I hope you find my feedback useful as you continue to refine the plan further prior to the transfer of Governance.

I am concerned that the overall aspiration of the plan is not far reaching enough. The forward for example states ***"The ambition is to create a strong alliance where both organisations can work together, often as one, to sustain and improve the high-quality prevention, protection and emergency response we currently deliver to all our local communities."*** I would expect this aspiration to be more forward thinking and that the two FRS should "act as one" as a default position, except where there is clear and evidenced rationale why they shouldn't.

The forward also states ***"The purpose of the alliance is to build capacity and resilience in both fire and rescue services in order to achieve long-term sustainability."*** Whilst I concur with these statements I am concerned about the lack of recognition of the community the FRS serves. I would suggest "improving value for money and efficiency" and "improving public safety" should also be core purposes of the alliance. Being outwardly facing is in my view vital if we are to continue to meet the needs of the community. The current focus of the plan is on resilience and sustainability of current service levels. There is very little reference to how a more structured and far reaching alliance between the two services will lead to service improvement, increased effectiveness and efficiency. This should be evident throughout the document.

Explicit reference to "improving efficiency and effectiveness" should be included in the Strategic Aim of the plan. I am surprised at the reference to "budgetary restrictions" in this section when the reduction in demand is not referenced.

On the same theme, the Purpose clearly sets out the means through which the Alliance will move forward in relation to modernisation and service planning, there is no reference to organisational learning or service improvement. The development of mechanisms to evaluate success and deliver organisational learning could be included within the Purpose to complete the planning circle (i.e. identify options for change – produce business cases – evaluate success). This final step would demonstrate the Services' commitment to learn from the strategies, projects and investments referenced within the plan, and continually improve the service provided to the public.

I had expected more explicit reference to partnership collaboration beyond the two fire services within the priorities and key deliverables. Whilst I am on record as stating that my first priority will be to create a Fire/Fire Alliance, I am also on record as stating that I will also drive greater collaboration with the Police and other partners. This is a stark omission in my view and indeed "police" are only mentioned five times in the whole seventeen page document. Whilst I appreciate that the plan sets out how the two fire services will come together as an Alliance, I think it is necessary to formally recognise the need to further develop collaborative opportunities. There may be some scope to have a greater emphasis on partnership collaboration within the 'Reassuring our communities' or 'Reforming our services' strands.

It is also stated within the purpose that the plan will enable the two services to:

- ***provide the strategic context for subsequent investments, and***
- ***facilitate the timely production of subsequent business cases for related investment.***

Whilst of course some investment will be required, either in terms of upfront investment or reinvestment of savings delivered by the plan, the plan is silent on development of funding/investment.

I welcome the overall approach contained within the guiding principles, though I am concerned that within the "Cultural and Leadership" section of the principle it states ***"The Alliance will review and align processes, structures and leadership wherever it improves capacity, resilience and sustainability."*** I would expect that efficiency and effectiveness should also feature as a reason as to why "processes, structures and leadership would be aligned" between the two organisations.

Within the "Sustainability" statement of the principles it states ***"The Alliance will work to ensure that both organisations remain sustainable and are able to meet the needs of their communities through effective use of resources."*** Both organisations do not currently have self-sustaining budgets. The guiding principle in my view should be that both organisations become sustainable as a result of the alliance.

The "Partner Strategies" statement of the principles state ***"The Alliance will be aligned to, and supportive of, the strategies of other key partners; including the PCC's Safer West Mercia Plan. This will ensure the coordinated delivery of services focused on local priorities and a clear demonstration of how the Services meet their duty to collaborate."*** I would suggest that the Alliance should not only aspire to align its strategies to be supportive of other organisations' strategies, but to aspire to influence them to ensure they support the two services' aims. I would also expect a clearer reference to local Government, Police and Health services in this principle also.

With reference to the *“Intelligence Driven and Evidence Led”* and *“Innovation”* principles there is a danger that they can be perceived as insular. The alliance is an opportunity to develop talent within, but it is also an opportunity to capitalise on best practice from others in public and private sector organisations. I would not want the alliance to “reinvent the wheel” as it seeks to act as one.

Some more detailed observations in relation to each individual strand are provided below.

Reassuring our communities:

I support the focus on prevention and protection activities, particularly targeting the most vulnerable. Whilst the priorities outline how the Alliance will continue to identify needs and risks within local areas, there is no reference to community engagement, visibility, accessibility or transparency.

The wording of the Risk Management Plan (RMPs) priority appears counterintuitive; suggesting that each service will maintain current RMPs whilst simultaneously aligning analysis and methodology. This should be amended to clarify the future vision to align and combine RMP analysis and methodology. Similarly, under Key Deliverables, the aspiration should go beyond standardisation of methodology to include identification of areas for future alignment.

The “Key Deliverables” talk about reviewing and developing plans/strategies. I would hope these could be more action based rather than policy/process focused.

Making our communities more resilient:

The first two priorities within this strand focus on delivering an aligned Command and Control function and the development of the On-Call Duty Systems. These priorities appear more relevant to operational resilience than community resilience, and may sit more comfortably under *‘Reforming our services’*.

I am also not clear as to the difference between this strand and the *“Reforming our services”* strand.

Building safe and secure communities:

The priorities and key deliverables within this strand are all welcomed. I would however welcome more explicit reference to the drive to “join up” the community safety work that partners are involved in to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Reforming our services:

The focus on cultures and values within this strand welcomed this will be essential to the success of the Alliance. However, this should be further emphasised and given greater attention, given its importance. The services should consider what they are aiming for in terms of culture(s), shared or individual identities, and how this vision will be delivered.

I am unsure as to the reference to *“This will provide the foundation block for delivering better ways of working in complex environments, for our teams and improving engagement in diverse communities during difficult and uncertain times.”* What are the difficult and uncertain times being referred to? Are they Community-based or organisational?

Further clarity could be given to the key deliverable relating to the senior leadership team which is currently ambiguous and lacking clarity of direction and how this will then cascade through the alliance. I would also expect more reference to alignment of processes etc. along the theme of commonality within the new alliance.

Managing our performance:

Inclusion of performance management as a key development strand is also welcomed. The priority relating to the standardisation of performance data could be more ambitious. The priority should reflect the standardised performance management Key Deliverable which is more aspirational and sets the right tone for the future.

The priority relating to transparency for communities and development of feedback mechanisms may be better aligned with the 'Reassuring our communities' development strand. As stated above, the 'Reassuring our communities' strand currently lacks sufficient reference to transparency, accessibility and community engagement. The community should have the confidence in the way its FRS acts, including a default position that it will be open and transparent, and continuously engage with the community it serves.

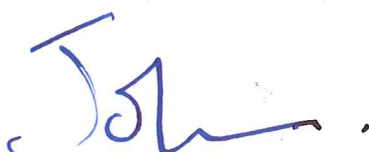
With reference to the proposed fire alliance governance and planning model, the infographic, whilst useful, could be simplified to illustrate how the RMPs and mid-term financial plans feed into the change programme (i.e. 2 boxes instead of 4).

As it stands, the proposed governance arrangements include PCC representation at Strategic Alliance Board level only. I would suggest that PCC representation at the Programme Delivery Boards should be included as this is where strategic priorities will be identified and business cases analysed and approved.

The above is intended to be constructive and to help you understand my priorities for when the governance of both services transfers. The above comment is not exhaustive nor does it fetter my discretion in the future.

As I stated at the start of this letter, I welcome the progress both services have made over the last 18 months around collaboration. This is an opportunity make sure the ambition in this work is bold and far reaching to ensure we maximise the benefits of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability for the community that we all serve.

Yours sincerely



John Campion
Police and Crime Commissioner
West Mercia