

Report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Use of Fire Stations to support Homeless People

Purpose of report

1. To update the Committee on the potential use of fire stations to support homeless people during cold weather conditions.
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Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Background

2. At the Fire Authority meeting on 14 December 2017 the Service was asked to explore the potential for fire stations to be used to support homeless people during extreme cold weather conditions.
3. At the same meeting it was identified that such a provision could follow the example set by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS).

Analysis

4. HWFRS always seeks to support the community and has a vision of 'Saving more Lives'. As such, it is appropriate that the possibility of using Service facilities to support homeless people in times of extreme need are investigated.
5. The Maggs Day Centre in Worcester (Maggs) was founded in 1984 and in 2016 it was recognised with the Queens Award for Voluntary Service. It has helped to support homeless people for over 30 years.
6. Recognising the expertise of Maggs, officers from the Service met with Mel Kirk, its Chief Executive to discuss opportunities to support the homeless by utilising fire stations and fire service staff.
7. Mel Kirk identified a number of issues and requirements which rules out the immediate use of Service staff or volunteers to manage the provision, e.g., a comprehensive understanding of social needs and expectations of homeless people, an ability to deal with violence, aggression, drugs and alcohol misuse and theft.
8. She identified that five staff were required to manage current arrangements for each 24hr period and ruled out being able to support the Service in terms of providing experienced staff or volunteers due to capacity.

9. The Service has also researched the work of Greater Manchester FRS (GMFRS) to identify how their project was initiated. GMFRS has specific community fire stations, i.e., those with annexed facilities separate from the operational areas of the station containing heated rooms, toilets and hot and cold water.
10. Such community facilities were a critical part of the provision in GMFRS, allowing firefighters to respond to incidents in the usual way without compromising operational response or security.
11. The fire stations in HWFRS (such as the new station in Worcester) do not currently have such facilities.
12. The Service has recently spent approximately £200,000 strengthening site security in terms of access control and CCTV across the whole estate in response to identified security issues and the heightened risk.
13. Provision of facilities at stations in HWFRS to support homeless people would require significant additional security measures to be put in place in addition to the specialist support identified above, to allow firefighters to respond to incidents in the usual way.

Conclusion

14. The design of fire stations in HWFRS does not currently provide facilities to support Maggs or homeless people.
15. The site security measures recently installed do not readily allow for the use of fire stations in this manner.
16. The provision of qualified staff to support homeless people using fire stations is not currently available from within the city's current homelessness support sector.
17. The Service remains committed to exploring opportunities to help those who are most vulnerable in society, especially where external influences can have a detrimental impact upon them such as cold weather.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	It is anticipated that such a provision would incur staff, training and infrastructure costs which have not been identified at this time. Para 6, 7, 9, 11 & 12
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications)	The provision would support Saving More Lives. Para 2.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores)	There are health & safety and security risks associated with this provision. Para 6, 9, 10, 11 & 12

Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No. Not required. This Service does not intend to change.

Supporting Information

None

Background Papers

Fire Authority minutes 14 December 2017

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