

11. Flooding Update

Purpose of report

1. To update the Fire Authority on the Service's current operational preparedness in relation to major flooding events.
 2. To update the Fire Authority on the Government's response to the "Pitt Review" into the 2007 floods.
 3. To seek the Authority's approval for a Flood/Water Rescue Strategy that takes account of national developments.
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Recommendations

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that:

- i) **the Authority notes the current national and local position in respect of flooding/water rescue;**
- ii) **the Authority approves the establishment of a cadre of Water Incident Managers and improved management and oversight for all specialist water/ flood capabilities;**
- iii) **the Authority consults stakeholders through the IRMP process on whether to establish a minimum or optimum "first responder" capability. The ongoing revenue costs of either proposal would be met through back office efficiencies to be agreed through the same IRMP process; and**
- iv) **the Authority tasks the Chief Fire Officer with seeking external funding support for existing and "first responder" capabilities that are made available to the National Asset Register, being compiled by the Government's Flood Rescue National Enhancement Programme (FRNE).**

Background

4. As part of the very first IRMP 2004/05 and in response to major flooding in 1998 and 2000, the Authority committed to providing a comprehensive Water Rescue Service. The main aim of the Water Rescue Strategy introduced at that time was to reduce the risk to front line staff and the community from the dangers presented by flooding and water related events.
5. Since that time the Authority has invested in equipment and training as well as engaging in partnerships to deliver water safety messages to schools throughout the two counties. These activities are now mainstreamed into our work.
6. Primary rescue responses are provided through 3 specialist water rescue teams at Hereford, Worcester and Evesham, supported by the rope rescue team at Malvern and the USAR team at Droitwich. The Authority's response to major flood events is strengthened through a groundbreaking agreement, led by the Service, which co-ordinates the response to flood incidents of all blue light agencies and voluntary rescue

teams such as Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) and Mercia Inshore Search and Rescue (MISAR). These teams are trained and equipped to operate interchangeably with our own in response to a major event.

7. In addition to these specialist resources, all front line and emergency response staff receive water awareness training and each pumping appliance has the equipment to carry out rescues from the water's edge. All other operational personnel, including Officers, have access to lifejackets.
8. Despite this investment and extensive use of specialist mutual aid from other FRS and the voluntary sector, the Service was severely stretched during the July floods of 2007. An issue of particular concern, identified through our internal scrutiny review, was the fact that many fire fighters were placed in positions where they entered the water without adequate PPE or training. Nevertheless, over 1100 people were successfully rescued from the water without significant injury to any member of staff.
9. Following the summer flooding events of 2007, the Government commissioned a comprehensive national review led by Sir Michael Pitt. At a local level, the BVPP Committee conducted a scrutiny review on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authority.
10. Given that issues of funding and statutory duty for the FRS were raised by Sir Michael and were under consideration by Government, the Service locally and nationally has been waiting for a Government response before making major changes to current strategies. As a consequence, in Hereford and Worcester we have continued to maintain funding and levels of service at pre-2007 levels despite a growing awareness that there are gaps in that provision.

Government's Response to the Pitt Review

11. On 17th December 2008, The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Hillary Benn, announced the Government's response to the Pitt Review, covering in detail its response to all 92 recommendations.
12. From an FRS perspective, one of the key issues raised from Sir Michael's report is recommendation No.39, which stated that;

"The Government should urgently put in place a fully funded national capability for flood rescue, with Fire and Rescue Authorities playing a leading role, underpinned as necessary by a statutory duty."

13. Government has accepted the recommendation in principle. However, there are no plans at this time to create a rescue duty for the FRS, or to fund the FRS, fully or otherwise, to deliver a national capability. Instead, DEFRA has been tasked with identifying ways of developing existing rescue capabilities from FRS and the voluntary sector and delivering a significant improvement in flood rescue capability and co-ordination between the agencies concerned.
14. Up to £2 million has been made available to DEFRA by Government within the current spending review period (i.e. to 31 March 2011) to carry out the initial project work and deliver any immediate enhancements necessary. The Chief Fire Officer has been appointed to the National Programme Board responsible for delivering this project, representing all Fire and Rescue Services.
15. The Chief Fire Officer's advice to Government has been that until or unless issues of statutory clarity and certainty are addressed, and the issue of long term funding resolved, this initial "one off" investment of £2m would best be spent on establishing the

foundations for safe systems of work, identifying ways to improve multi-agency co-ordination and response, and providing basic training and equipment to improve the safety of responders.

16. This approach has been accepted and Government has therefore challenged the DEFRA project with delivering flood rescue improvement in four distinct areas:
 - I. Making more effective use of existing flood rescue capabilities through a comprehensive multi-agency flood rescue framework supported by team typing and accreditation systems, along with national standards for training and equipment. **(First draft documents available for consultation by Autumn 2009)**
 - II. Quantifying current capabilities and rescue capacity to create a national register of capable flood rescue assets. **(Initial register to be completed by May 2009)**
 - III. Identifying any capability gaps and making recommendations for addressing them. **(Enhancements to be procured before winter 2009/10, long term recommendations to be formulated)**
 - IV. Ensuring certainty, clarity and consistency in major flood rescue approach by communicating and testing the outcomes of this project with all Local Resilience Forums, statutory and voluntary flood rescue providers. **(Testing the new arrangements through a national exercise in 2011)**
17. A decision on Sir Michael's recommendation, for statutory clarity around flood rescue supported by long term funding, has been deferred until this initial DEFRA project has examined existing capabilities and statutory arrangements. Recommendations for change and identification of any long term investment requirements will be one of the key outcomes from the DEFRA capabilities project.

Current Flood/Water Rescue Arrangements

18. Following reviews of the 2007 floods, the CFOA National Draft Guidance on flood/ water rescue work has been expanded to include a level of training and equipment for "first responders" who can be safely equipped with dry suits in order to enter still or slow moving water to carry out "wading rescues" and provide assistance to the public. The standards have also been expanded to encompass flood incident management.
19. Whilst these draft CFOA training standards cannot be considered as formal national guidance, they have been accepted within the UKSAR Group, which includes FRS, Police, Military, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and voluntary sector organisations such as the RNLI and cover the following levels:

Module 1 Water Awareness

General water safety awareness training and basic land-based rescue techniques.

Module 2 Water First Responder

To work safely near and in water using appropriate specialist PPE, land-based and wading techniques.

Module 3 Water Rescue Technician

Specialist water rescue operation.

Module 4 Water Rescue Boat Operator

Rescue boat operation (this goes beyond simple boat handling techniques identified in systems such as RYA power boat training).

Module 5 Water Rescue Incident Management

Water related incident command (bronze/silver).

20. In Hereford and Worcester, we currently operate only two levels of flood/water rescue response: fire fighters who are not trained or equipped to enter even shallow water, but can undertake bank side rescues, and specialist rescue teams. This equates to Modules 1, 3 and 4.
21. One way of reducing the risk that fire fighters without sufficient training or personal protective equipment will enter the water is to establish additional specialist teams similar to those at Hereford, Worcester and Evesham. However, this approach would be expensive and time consuming both in terms of establishing the team and maintaining the skills required long term. In addition, use of local and national mutual aid protocols and early warning provided by the new Flood Warning Centre can make further specialist resources available to us if required. It is therefore considered that our current specialist provision is adequate for our routine risks.
22. Many of the fire fighter safety and welfare issues identified at a local and national level following the 2007 floods may be addressed by adoption of a comprehensive response strategy with additional capabilities including “first responder” teams at selected stations and specialist supervisory officers who can ensure that safe systems of work are adopted at all times.
23. Although some financial support for expansion of a “first responders” and specialist flood/water incident supervisory programme may become available through the current DEFRA work programme, this is by no means certain.
24. Having considered local flood/water risks and strategic cover requirements, it is considered that provision of first responder teams at the following stations would provide a minimum standard of cover:
 - Kidderminster (funded as a safe system of work for the HVP asset)
 - Tenbury
 - Upton-on-Severn
 - Ross-on-Wye
25. The Chief Fire Officer recommends that in order to deliver an optimal level of cover that would provide extra flexibility and resilience across the two counties, the following stations would also be equipped to first responder standards:
 - Pershore
 - Bromyard (to also support safe system of work with Environmental Protection Unit)
 - Leintwardine
26. To maintain a safe and consistent system of work in this hazardous environment, specialist incident management training for flood/water events at a “Bronze” and “Silver” level will ensure that personnel are appropriately supervised. We have a number of personnel who have been trained to supervise flood/water operations, but creation and maintenance of a formal cadre of staff with specialist knowledge in this area would reduce risk to responders and the public.

27. To ensure that a cohesive and comprehensive approach to flood/water incidents can be maintained for the future, there needs to be clear ownership of our special rescue strategy with centralised oversight and quality control. There are recommendations within the 2010/11 IRMP to resolve this issue with the introduction of a technical rescue hub.

Cost Implications

28. Following the Authority's decision in 2004/5 to provide a water/flood rescue service, costs for existing levels of service are contained within base budgets.
29. Training to establish a cadre of Water Incident Management Specialist Officers can be delivered within existing resources and training budgets.
30. Establishment of clear lines of managerial accountability and the provision of oversight and control for all specialist flood/water rescue operations can be achieved without additional cost through revised structures in the Service Delivery Directorate and subject to IRMP consultations, supported by specialists from our USAR Team.
31. Provision of 4 new flood/water rescue first responder units to provide a minimum level of cover will require the following investment;
- Initial Capital cost £28k
 - Initial training cost £29k
 - Ongoing maintenance costs £21k
32. The provision of a further 3 units would provide the optimum level of cover, requiring the following investment;
- Initial Capital cost £16k
 - Initial training cost £21k
 - Ongoing maintenance costs £15k
33. Subject to the Authority's approval, initial costs for either option can be found by the reprioritisation of existing budgets. However, back office savings to meet ongoing revenue costs would need to be found in each case.

Conclusion / Summary

34. The Service has learned important lessons and gained invaluable experience from the flooding events of the past decade.
35. The Service has developed a Water Rescue Strategy which draws on this experience, and has regard to the national response to flooding events.
36. The Strategy identifies gaps in the provision of these essential services, and recommends solutions which can be provided within current financial constraints by the reprioritisation of existing budgets.

Corporate Considerations

37. A Business Impact Analysis form is attached at Appendix 1 to measure and address the proposals contained in this report. The form contains information on the potential resource implications, legal issues, strategic policy links, equality / ethical issues and risk management implications.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Business Impact Assessment Form
Background papers - None

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