



HEREFORD & WORCESTER Fire Authority

Full Authority

AGENDA

Tuesday, 11 October 2016

10:30

**Council Chamber
County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester, WR5 2NP**

Fire Alarm

- The fire alarm is tested every Tuesday at 13:45. Should the alarm sound at any other time you will need to leave the building via the nearest safe exit.)
- You will need to follow Officers to Assembly Point E (Northside) which is located outside the building.

Toilets

- There are male and female toilets with baby change facilities in reception and a disabled toilet within the Register Office at the entrance adjacent to reception.

Parking

- If you have parked in the visitor car park please collect a token from Reception upon leaving.
- Once the token has been inserted please wait for the traffic light to change to green before driving off. The barrier will lower only when the light is green.

Smoking Policy

- Smoking is not permitted anywhere within the building. There is a smoking shelter located by the cascades which are situated between the upper and lower lakes.

OPTIONAL INFORMATION

Cafe

- There is a cafe located on the ground floor, a short distance from Reception which you are welcome to use. It sells a range of hot and cold foodstuffs as well as having a coffee bar.
- The Lakeview Cafe is open for business 08:00 to 15:00 Monday to Friday. The area is available for informal meetings unless specifically booked for an event although we ask that you only do so outside the busy lunchtime period when diners are given priority use.

Shop

- There is a shop adjacent to the cafe and stocks a range of sandwiches, snacks, sweets and newspapers.
- The shop's opening hours are 08:00 to 14:00 Monday to Friday
- There is a snack/cold drink vending machine immediately outside the shop for use during and outside of the shop's hours of business. There is also a KLIX hot drinks machine.

Grounds/Site traffic

- Please note that County Hall and its grounds are public therefore there may be any number of people walking around the site including those walking their dogs or travelling to the nearby schools.
- Due to this we have a site wide 10 mph speed limit

Public Transport

- There are two bus stops within the grounds of County Hall, one adjacent to each of the site entrances. Both have timetables and as a guide there are generally four buses per hour into the city centre.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – YOUR RIGHTS. The press and public have the right to attend Local Authority meetings and to see certain documents. You have:

- the right to attend all Authority and Committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose “confidential information” or “exempt information”;
- the right to film, record or report electronically on any meeting to which the public are admitted provided you do not do so in a manner that is disruptive to the meeting. **If you are present at a meeting of the Authority you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed or recorded by anyone exercising their rights under this paragraph;**
- the right to inspect agenda and public reports at least five days before the date of the meeting (available on our website: <http://www.hwfire.org.uk>);
- the right to inspect minutes of the Authority and Committees for up to six years following the meeting (available on our website: <http://www.hwfire.org.uk>); and
- the right to inspect background papers on which reports are based for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting.

A reasonable number of copies of agenda and reports relating to items to be considered in public will be available at meetings of the Authority and Committees. If you have any queries regarding this agenda or any of the decisions taken or wish to exercise any of these rights of access to information please contact Committee & Members’ Services on 01905 368209 or by email at committeeservices@hwfire.org.uk.

WELCOME AND GUIDE TO TODAY’S MEETING. These notes are written to assist you to follow the meeting. Decisions at the meeting will be taken by the **Councillors** who are democratically elected representatives and they will be advised by **Officers** who are paid professionals. The Fire and Rescue Authority comprises 25 Councillors and appoints committees to undertake various functions on behalf of the Authority. There are 19 Worcestershire County Councillors on the Authority and 6 Herefordshire Council Councillors.

Agenda Papers - Attached is the Agenda which is a summary of the issues to be discussed and the related reports by Officers.

Chairman - The Chairman, who is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting, sits at the head of the table.

Officers - Accompanying the Chairman is the Chief Fire Officer and other Officers of the Fire and Rescue Authority who will advise on legal and procedural matters and record the proceedings. These include the Clerk and the Treasurer to the Authority.

The Business - The Chairman will conduct the business of the meeting. The items listed on the agenda will be discussed.

Decisions - At the end of the discussion on each item the Chairman will put any amendments or motions to the meeting and then ask the Councillors to vote. The Officers do not have a vote.



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Full Authority

Tuesday, 11 October 2016,10:30

Agenda

Councillors

Mr D W Prodger MBE (Chairman), Mr R J Phillips (Vice Chairman), Mr R C Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr B A Baker, Mr S C Cross, Ms L R Duffy, Mrs E Eyre BEM, Mr A Fry, Ms K S Guthrie, Mr Al Hardman, Mrs A T Hingley, Ms R E Jenkins, Mr J L V Kenyon, Mr R I Matthews, Mrs F M Oborski MBE, Professor J W Raine, Mr C B Taylor, Mr J W R Thomas, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Mr G J Vickery, Mr S D Williams, Mr G C Yarranton

No.	Item	Pages
1	Apologies for Absence To receive any apologies for absence.	
2	Declarations of Interest (if any) This item allows the Chairman to invite any Councillor to declare an interest in any of the items on this Agenda.	
3	Confirmation of Minutes To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2016.	8 - 17
4	Chairman's Announcements To update Members on recent activities.	

5	Public Participation	
	To allow a Member of the public to present a petition, ask a question or make a statement relating to any topic concerning the duties and powers of the Authority.	
	Members of the public wishing to take part should notify the Head of Legal Services in writing or by email indicating both the nature and content of their proposed participation to be received no later than 2 clear working days before the meeting (in this case 6 October 2016). Further details about public participation are available on the website. Enquiries can also be made through the telephone numbers/email listed below.	
6	Attendance of Police & Crime Commissioner at Meetings	18 - 21
	To make proposals to enable the Police & Crime Commissioner for West Mercia to attend, speak but not vote at meetings of the Fire Authority.	
7	Changes to Arrangements for Appointment of External Auditors	22 - 27
	To approve arrangements for the appointment of external auditors following the end of the transitional arrangements at the conclusion of the 2017/18 audits.	
8	Revision to the Medium Term Financial Plan	28 - 30
	To consider changes to the Medium Term Financial Plan, as recommended by the Policy & Resources Committee.	
9	Wyre Forest Emergency Hub - Preferred Sites Consultation Responses	31 - 100
	To receive the outcome of the public consultation on suitable sites for the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub.	
10	Chief Fire Officer's Report	101 - 103
	To inform the Authority of recent key developments and activities.	
11	Minutes of the Audit & Standards Committee	104 - 107
	To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2016.	

12	Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee	108 -
	To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2016.	115
13	Exclusion of the Press and Public	
	In the opinion of the Clerk to the Authority the meeting will not be, or is not likely to be open to the public at the time Item 14 is considered for the following reason:	
	Item 14 is likely to disclose information relating to the financial affairs or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).	
14	Wyre Forest Emergency Hub - Land Acquisition & Costs	
	Details	



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Full Authority

Thursday, 16 June 2016,11:00

Minutes

Members Present: Mr R C Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr B A Baker, Ms L R Duffy, Mrs E Eyre BEM, Mr A Fry, Mr Al Hardman, Mrs A T Hingley, Ms R E Jenkins, Mr J L V Kenyon, Mrs F M Oborski MBE, Mr D W Prodger MBE, Professor J W Raine, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Mr S D Williams, Mr G C Yarranton

Substitutes: none

Absent: none

Apologies for Absence: Mr S C Cross, Ms K S Guthrie, Mr R I Matthews, Mr R J Phillips, Mr J W R Thomas, Mr G J Vickery

80 Election of Chairman

Resolved that Mr D W Prodger MBE be elected as Chairman of the Fire Authority for the ensuing year, to hold office until his successor becomes entitled to act.

81 Election of Vice Chairman

Resolved that Mr R J Phillips be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Fire Authority for the ensuing year, to hold office until his successor becomes entitled to act.

82 Public Participation

None.

83 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 17 February 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84 Chairman's Announcements

- The Chairman welcomed Nathan Travis to his first Authority meeting, welcomed Councillor Adrian Hardman back onto the Authority and thanked outgoing Member Councillor Phillip Gretton.
- A minute's silence was held for Councillor Maurice Broomfield who had passed away recently.
- Congratulations were given to Councillor Liz Eyre who was recently awarded the British Empire medal.
- Members were informed of recent meetings the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer had attended regarding potential collaborations with:
 - Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service;
 - Worcestershire County Council; and
 - The Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Finally, Members were reminded of the Service Exercise on Saturday 1 October at the Fire Service College and urged Members to attend.

85 Appointment of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

Following the Appointments Committee on 26 May 2016 and subsequent interview of Nathan Travis on 7 June 2016, it was agreed unanimously by the Appointments Committee that the Authority appoints Nathan Travis to the post of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive on the current terms and conditions.

RESOLVED that Nathan Travis be appointed to the post of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive on the current terms and conditions.

[Councillor Kenyon left the meeting at 11.10am and returned at 11.12am]

86 Appointment to Committees

A report was presented on the allocation of Committee seats to political groups and which sought to make appointments to those Committees.

Resolved that:

i) the number of seats on each Committee and the allocation of those seats to political groups be as follows:

Group	Appointments Committee	Audit & Standards Committee	Policy & Resources Committee
Conservative	4	7	7
Labour	1	2	2
Independent	1	1	2
2013	1	1	1
Non Aligned	0	1	1
(Total)	7	12	13

ii) the following Members be appointed as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the following Committees:

a. Appointments Committee

Chairman: Mr D W Prodger

b. Audit and Standards Committee

Chairman: Ms L R Duffy

Vice-Chairman: Mr G C Yarranton

c. Policy and Resources Committee

Chairman: Mr C B Taylor

Vice-Chairman: Mr R C Adams

iii) in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders, membership of Committees be as set out in Appendix 1;

iv) non-aligned Members Mr S C Cross and Mr J L V Kenyon be appointed to the Audit and Standards Committee and to the Policy and Resources Committee, respectively;

v) Ms P Agar and Mrs F M Oborski be appointed to the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group;

vi) Mr G C Yarranton be appointed to the Health and Safety Committee, and

vii) Mrs A T Hingley be appointed as the Chairman to the Young Firefighters' Association Executive Committee.

87 Appointments to Outside Bodies

A report was presented to consider appointments to the Local Government Association and to the Place Partnership Ltd. Shareholder Group.

RESOLVED that:

i) the previous practice for representation and voting on the Local Government Association be continued as follows:

a. that the Authority's four representatives on the Local Government Association should be the Leaders of each of the current four political groups or their nominees;

b. that the 13 Service votes on the Local Government Association Assembly be allocated between its representatives on a politically proportionate basis as follows:

Conservative Group 8

Labour Group 2

Independent Group 2

2013 Group 1

Total 13; and

c. the corporate vote on the Local Government Association Assembly be exercised by the Chairman or his nominee;

ii) the place and vote on the Local Government Association Fire Commission be exercised by the Chairman of the Authority; and

iii) the Chairman be appointed as the Member representative on the Place Partnership Ltd. Shareholder Group.

88 Provisional Financial Results 2015/16

A report was presented with the financial results for 2015/16. Members were reminded that although this subject is normally a matter for the Policy and Resources Committee, this year the Committee did not meet between the end of the financial year and the date by which the Statement of Accounts had to be submitted.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the provisional financial results for 2015/16 be noted;**
- ii) £0.094m be transferred to the Equipment Reserve;**
- iii) £0.042m be transferred to a Fleet Funding Reserve;**
- iv) £0.130m be transferred to an Insurance Reserve;**
- v) £1.163m being the balance of the underspend be transferred to the Budget Reduction Reserve; and**
- vi) the re-phasing and presentation of capital budgets to 2015/16 as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report be approved.**

89 Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Preferred Sites Consultation

A report was presented reviewing the outcome of investigations into potential locations for the Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station.

During discussions a site plan was shown to Members detailing the exact location for Silverwoods Park and concern over traffic congestion was raised. Members agreed unanimously for the consultation to proceed on Monday 4 July 2016.

RESOLVED that:

- i) at this stage, Silverwoods Park is the preferred site for the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station, but Stourpoint 5 is also considered to be a satisfactory location;**
- ii) further detailed negotiations and site investigations continue in respect of both sites;**
- iii) a further phase of public consultation be undertaken to determine public support for the proposed Hub Station if it is on one or other of the two sites identified above; and**
- iv) following the consultation, the Authority receive a report from ORS setting out the public feedback in respect of the preferred sites, prior to the Authority making a final decision at their meeting on 11 October 2016 on whether or not to proceed with the Hub Station project.**

2015-16 Performance Report: Quarters 1 to 4

The annual performance for 2015-16 was presented using the set of Performance Indicators agreed by the Senior Management Board.

RESOLVED that the Authority notes the following headlines taken from Appendix 1 relating to performance in Quarters 1 to 4, 2015-16:

- i) A total of 6,459 incidents were attended in Q1-4, an overall increase of 5.7% (347 incidents) in comparison to the same Four Quarters of 2014-15. Despite this, the overall incident trend over the last 4 years indicated that incident numbers have remained at a consistent level.
- ii) The majority of the increase over Q1-4 is accounted for by rises in the numbers of Fires and Special Service incidents:
 - a. Fires: an increase of 10.8% (187 incidents) is largely related to a peak in grassland, woodland and crop fires during the drier summer months of May to August 2015;
 - b. Special Services: an increase of 10.0% (135 incidents) can be largely accounted for by an increase in the numbers of road traffic collisions (RTCs) and weather-related incidents in the wake of several severe storms, which impacted on the two counties in mid-November 2015 to March 2016;
- iii) Incident numbers in each of the three main categories (Fires, Special Services and False Alarms) have remained consistent over the last 3 to 4 years;
- iv) Overall Staff Sickness levels have remained within tolerance levels for Quarters 1 to 4;
- v) The Service attended 60.2% of Building Fires within 10 minutes in Q1-4 2015-16 compared with 61.1% in the same period in 2014-15. The average time for the first fire appliance attendance at all building fires is just above the 10 minutes standard (10:09); and
- vi) Retained availability has improved slightly in Q1-4 rising to an overall 94.3% compared to 93.7% in the same period in 2014-15.

The Fire Authority's Annual Report 2016/17 was presented for adoption and approval for publication.

RESOLVED that the Fire Authority Annual Report 2016/17 be adopted and approved for publication subject to any final minor changes as agreed by the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chairman.

92 Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme

A report was presented from the Task and Finish Group with their findings and recommendations following scrutiny of the Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme.

RESOLVED that:

- i) a revised and updated Fleet Strategy be provided to the Policy and Resources Committee in September 2016 for approval;**
- ii) further detail on the fleet provision be included in the yearly budget report to the Policy and Resources Committee;**
- iii.) the Fleet Strategy should in future be reviewed at least every five years and in the interim, a yearly update on the Strategy consisting of a two year forecast, should be provided to Members as part of the budget setting process.**
- iv) the revised Fleet Strategy should reflect the distinction between operational decisions over the specification and choice of vehicles/equipment, which were matters for officers, and broader strategic issues affecting the Authority's finances or the Service to the public, which would require Member involvement.**

93 Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority of recent key developments and activities, which included:

- Introduction to the Service;
- Installation of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire and Worcestershire;
- Health and Safety Peer Review of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service;
- Service Exercise 2016;
- National Breathing Apparatus Challenge Service Run Off; and

- Young Firefighters Passout.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

94 Minutes of Audit & Standards Committee

The Chairman of the Committee reported the proceedings of the Audit and Standards Committee meeting held on 13 April 2016.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee meeting held on 13 April 2016 be received and noted.

95 Minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee

The Chairman of the Committee reported the proceedings of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 21 March 2016.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 21 March 2016 be received and noted.

96 Minutes of the Appointments Committee

The Chairman of the Committee reported the proceedings of the Appointments Committee meeting held on 26 May 2016.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Appointments Committee meeting held on 26 May 2016 be received and noted.

The Meeting ended at: 12:25

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman

Committee Memberships 2016/17

<u>Policy and Resources Committee (13)</u>	<u>Conservatives (7)</u>	<u>Labour (2)</u>	<u>Independents (2)</u>	<u>2013 (1)</u>	<u>Non-Aligned (1)</u>
	Mr K Taylor (Chair)	Mr R Udall	Ms R Jenkins	Mrs F Oborski MBE	Mr J Kenyon
	Mr R Adams (Vice Chair)	Mr A Fry	Mr J Thomas		
	Mr B Baker				
	Mrs E Eyre				
	Mr R Phillips				
	Mr D Prodger MBE				
	Mr P Tuthill				
<u>Audit & Standards Committee (12)</u>	<u>Conservatives (7)</u>	<u>Labour (2)</u>	<u>Independents (1)</u>	<u>2013 (1)</u>	<u>Non-Aligned (1)</u>
<i>Cannot include:</i>	Ms L Duffy (Chair)	Ms P Agar	Mr B Matthews	Prof. J Raine	Mr S Cross
<i>Chair/Vice-chair of</i>	Mr G Yarranton (Vice-Chair)	Mr G Vickery			
<i>Authority;</i>	Mr A Amos				
<i>Outgoing Chair of</i>	Ms K Guthrie				
<i>Authority;</i>	Mr A Hardman				
<i>Chair of Policy &</i>	Mrs A Hingley				
<i>Resources; or Group</i>	Mr S Williams				
<i>Leaders</i>					
<u>Appointments Committee (7)</u>	<u>Conservative (4)</u>	<u>Labour (1)</u>	<u>Independent(1)</u>	<u>2013 (1)</u>	
<i>Should normally include:</i>	Mr D Prodger MBE (Chair)	Mr R Udall	Ms R Jenkins	Mrs F Oborski MBE	
<i>Chair of Authority</i>	Mr R Phillips				
<i>Chair of Policy &</i>	Ms L Duffy				
<i>Resources</i>	Mr K Taylor				
<i>Chair of Audit &</i>					
<i>Standards</i>					

Member / Officer Working Group Representatives

Equality & Diversity Advisory Group:

Ms P Agar

Mrs F Oborski MBE

Health & Safety Committee:

Mr G Yarranton

Chairman of the Young Firefighters' Association Executive Committee

Mrs A Hingley

Report of Head of Legal Services

6. Attendance of Police & Crime Commissioner at Meetings

Purpose of report

1. To make proposals to enable the Police & Crime Commissioner for West Mercia to attend, speak but not vote at meetings of the Fire Authority.
-

Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Authority's Constitution be amended by the inclusion of the additions set out in the appendix to this report.

Introduction and Background

2. The Police and Crime Bill is currently being considered by Parliament and is intended to give effect to the former Home Secretary's proposals, set out in the fire and rescue reform programme, to enable Police & Crime Commissioners in England & Wales to take over responsibility for Fire & Rescue Services where a local case is made or to sit as voting members of a fire & rescue authority where the PCC and the Fire Authority agree.
3. As the law stands at the moment, before the bill is passed, it would be possible to co-opt a PCC to become a non-voting member of any of the Fire Authority's committees. The Bill, as currently drafted, would extend that so that the PCC could be co-opted as a voting member of committees.
4. There is no provision at the moment that would allow the PCC to be co-opted as a member of the Fire Authority (as opposed to a committee of the Fire Authority) but there is no reason in principle why the PCC could not be 'invited to attend' Fire Authority meetings and be invited to speak at the Chairman's discretion. The PCC would not be entitled to vote.
5. The Police & Crime Bill contains provision for PCCs to become voting members of fire & rescue authorities in future. The route to achieve this in the case of a combined fire authority such as Hereford & Worcester is somewhat complex and would involve the Authority having to seek a new Combination Order from the Secretary of State if it wished to go down that path.
6. Following discussions between the Chairman of the Authority and the PCC for West Mercia, the PCC has expressed a wish to have an involvement in the deliberations of the Fire Authority but on a non-voting basis. The matter has been considered by Group Leaders who agreed that this would be beneficial in terms of the relationship between fire and police and the level of joint

working between the two organisations. It is therefore proposed that the PCC or his deputy be invited to attend and speak (but not vote) at meetings of the full Authority but would not be co-opted as a member of either of the Committees. Group Leaders have asked that this be reflected in the Authority's constitution.

Conclusion/Summary

7. The proposed amendments to the Constitution set out in the appendix to this report will enable the Police & Crime Commissioner to be an 'invited attendee' at meetings of the Authority and to speak but not vote on the business of the Authority. If approved, these amendments would take effect immediately and apply regardless of the future enactment of the Police and Crime Bill.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	None
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	This proposal supports the principle of closer working between fire authorities and Police & Crime Commissioners as set out in the Governments reform programme for fire & rescue.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	The matter has previously been considered by Group Leaders and the draft proposal has been shared with the Police & Crime Commissioner's office.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Not applicable

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Draft additions to the Authority's constitution

Background papers - None

Contact Officer

Nigel Snape, Head of Legal Services
(01905 368242)
Email: nsnape@hwfire.org.uk

Standing Orders for the Conduct of Business

Add

6A Police & Crime Commissioner

- 6A.1 Copies of the agenda, reports and minutes of the meetings of the Authority shall be sent to the Police & Crime Commissioner for West Mercia at the same time as they are sent to Members of the Authority
- 6A.2 The Police & Crime Commissioner for West Mercia (or in their absence the Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner) is not a member of the Authority but may:
- (a) attend any meeting of the Authority
 - (b) participate in the discussion and debate on any matter under consideration by the Authority in accordance with Standing Order 21 but shall not vote nor move or second any motion or amendment
 - (c) ask a question in accordance with Standing Order 20.1
 - (d) ask for an item of business to be included:
 - (i) on the agenda for the Authority; or
 - (ii) on the agenda for any committee (subject to the provisions of Standing Order 31.1)
 - (e) attend the meeting of any Committee in accordance with Standing Order 30.1 but subject to the provisions of Standing Order 30.2
- 6A.3 Standing Order 22 (improper conduct) and Standing Order 25 (interests of members) shall apply to the Police & Crime Commissioner (or Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner) if present as they apply to Members
- 6A.4 The Police & Crime Commissioner (or Deputy) shall not be excluded from any part of a meeting that is not open to the public (and shall receive copies of any papers marked 'Not for Publication') unless in the opinion of the Chairman this would prejudice the proper conduct of the business
- 6A.5 The Police & Crime Commissioner (and their Deputy) shall comply with the Authority's code of conduct except paragraph 10 (registration of disclosable pecuniary interests) which is not applicable.

Report of the Treasurer

7. Changes to Arrangements for Appointment of External Auditors

Purpose of report

1. To approve arrangements for the appointment of external auditors following the end of the transitional arrangements at the conclusion of the 2017/18 audits.
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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Authority “opt in” to Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) for the procurement of future external audit provision (Option 3).

Background

2. The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 brought to a close the Audit Commission and established transitional arrangements for the appointment of external auditors, and the setting of audit fees for all local government and NHS bodies in England. On 5 October 2015 the Secretary of State Communities and Local Government (CLG) determined that the transitional arrangements for local government bodies would be extended by one year, to also include the audit of the accounts for 2017/18.
3. The Authority's current external auditor is Grant Thornton, this appointment having been made under a contract let by the Audit Commission. Following closure of the Audit Commission, the contract is currently managed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), the transitional body set up by the Local Government Association (LGA) with delegated authority from the Secretary of State. Over recent years the Authority has benefited from a reduction in fees of around 50%. This has been the result of a combination of factors including new contracts negotiated nationally with the firms of accountants, and savings from closure of the Audit Commission. The Authority's current external audit fees are £33,000 per annum.
4. When the current transitional arrangements come to an end on 31 March 2018, the Authority will be able to move to the local appointment of the auditor. There are a number of routes by which this can be achieved, each with varying risks and opportunities.
5. Current fees are based on discounted rates offered by the firms in return for substantial market share. When the contracts were last negotiated nationally by the Audit Commission they covered NHS and local government bodies and offered maximum economies of scale.

6. The scope of the audit will still be specified nationally. The National Audit Office (NAO) is responsible for writing the Code of Audit Practice which all firms appointed to carry out authorities' audits must follow. Not all accounting firms will be eligible to compete for the work; they will need to demonstrate that they have the required skills and experience and be registered with a Registered Supervising Body approved by the Financial Reporting Council. The registration process has not yet commenced and so the number of firms is not known, but it is reasonable to expect that the list of eligible firms may include the top ten or twelve firms in the country, including the Authority's current auditor. It is unlikely that small local independent firms will meet the eligibility criteria.

Options for local appointment of External Auditors

7. There are three broad options open to the Authority under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act):

Option 1 - To make a stand-alone appointment

8. In order to make a stand-alone appointment the Authority will need to set up an Auditor Panel. The members of the panel must be wholly or a majority of independent members as defined by the Act. Independent members for this purpose are independent appointees, this excludes current and former Authority Members (or officers) and their close families and friends. This means that Authority Members will not have a majority input to assessing bids and choosing which firm of accountants to award a contract for the Authority's external audit. A new independent auditor panel established by the Authority will be responsible for selecting the auditor.

Advantages/benefits

9. Setting up an auditor panel allows the Authority to take maximum advantage of the new local appointment regime and have local input to the decision.

Disadvantages/risks

10. There will be costs associated with the recruitment and servicing of the Auditor Panel, running the bidding exercise and negotiating the contract; in addition, on-going expenses and allowances will be incurred.
11. The Authority will not be able to take advantage of reduced fees that may be available through joint or national procurement contracts.
12. The assessment of bids and decision on awarding contracts will be taken by independent appointees and not solely by Authority Members.

Option 2 - Set up a Joint Auditor Panel/local joint procurement arrangements

13. The Act enables the Authority to join with others to establish a joint auditor panel. Again this will need to be constituted of wholly or a majority of independent appointees (members). Further legal advice will be required on the exact constitution of such a panel, having regard to the obligations of each authority under the Act, and the Authority's requirement to liaise with other local authorities to assess the appetite for such an arrangement.

Advantages/benefits

14. The costs of setting up the panel, running the bidding exercise and negotiating the contract will be shared across a number of authorities.
15. There is greater opportunity for negotiating some economies of scale by being able to offer a larger combined contract value to the firms.

Disadvantages/risks

16. The decision making body will be further removed from local input. There will be potentially no input from Authority Members where a wholly independent auditor panel is used or limited input where only one Authority Member is appointed to the joint panel to represent the Authority.
17. The choice of auditor could be complicated where individual authorities have independence issues. An independence issue occurs where the auditor has recently or is currently carrying out work such as consultancy or advisory work for the Authority. Where this occurs, some auditors may be prevented from being appointed by the terms of their professional standards. There is a risk that if the joint auditor panel choose a firm that is conflicted for this Authority, then a separate appointment, with all the attendant costs and loss of economies possible through joint procurement, may still be required.
18. It also requires a willing partner or partners of sufficient size to give the exercise a chance of being financially favourable. Indications are that most of our potential partners are opting for 3 below.

Option 3 - Opt-in to a Sector Led Body

19. In response to the consultation on the new arrangement, the LGA successfully lobbied for authorities to be able to 'opt-in' to a Sector Led Body, appointed by the Secretary of State under the Act. A Sector Led Body would have the ability to negotiate contracts with the firms nationally, maximising the opportunities for the most economic and efficient approach to procurement of external audit on behalf of the whole sector.

20. On 22 July 2016, the LGA confirmed that Public Service Appointments Ltd (PSAA) had been approved by the Government to become the body which is authorised to make future audit appointments on behalf of principal local authorities. The first appointments will commence in relation to the financial year 2018/19.

Advantages/benefits

21. The costs of setting up the appointment arrangements and negotiating fees would be shared across all opt-in authorities.
22. By offering large contract values the firms would be able to offer better rates and lower fees than are likely to result from local negotiation.
23. Any conflicts at individual authorities would be managed by the Sector Led Body who would have a number of contracted firms to call upon.
24. The Authority would not need to set up an Auditor Panel and therefore locally appointed independent members would not be required. Instead, a separate body would be set up to act in the collective interests of the 'opt-in' authorities.

Disadvantages/risks

25. Individual Authority Members will have less opportunity for direct involvement in the appointment process other than through the LGA and/or stakeholder representative groups.
26. In order for the Sector Led Body to be viable and to be placed in the strongest possible negotiating position, authorities would be required to indicate their intention to opt-in before final contract prices are known.

Next Steps

27. The Authority has until 31st December 2017 to make an audit appointment, (Section 7 Local Government and Accountability Act 2014). In practical terms this means that one of the options outlined in this report will need to be in place by spring 2017 in order that the contract negotiation process can be carried out during 2017.
28. Authorities that wish to "opt in" to the PSAA arrangements have been asked to confirm this to PSAA by 31st December 2016, and this decision has to be made by the Full Authority.

Financial Implications

29. Current external fee levels are likely to increase when the current contracts end in 2018.

30. The cost of establishing a local or joint Auditor Panel outlined in options 1 and 2 above would need to be estimated and included in the Authority's budget from 2017/18. This would include the cost of recruiting independent appointees (members), servicing the Panel, running a bidding and tender evaluation process, letting a contract and any agreed payments to Panel members.
31. Opting-in to a national Sector Led Body provides maximum opportunity to limit the extent of any increases by entering into a large scale collective procurement arrangement and would remove the costs of establishing an auditor panel. There will be no fee to join the sector led arrangements.
32. The audit fees that opted-in bodies will be charged by the sector led body will cover the costs of appointing auditors. The LGA believes that audit fees achieved through block contracts will be lower than the costs that individual authorities will be able to negotiate.

Conclusion/Summary

33. In practice it would appear that Option 2 is not feasible as there are unlikely to be any partners, therefore it is a choice between Option 1 and Option 3.
34. On balance the benefits of Option 3 outweigh Option 1, and in adopting that approach the Authority would be consistent with other bodies in Herefordshire and Worcestershire and most other Fire Authorities.
35. The Authority should therefore "opt-in" to the PSAA arrangements.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	As set out in report
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	n/a
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	n/a
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	n/a
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	n/a

Background Papers

None

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Report of the Treasurer

8. Revision to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Purpose of report

1. To consider changes to the Medium Term Financial Plan, as recommended by Policy & Resources Committee.

Recommendation

It is recommended that amendments to the Medium Term Financial Plan resulting in a revised budget gap of £1.657m by 2019/20 be approved.

Introduction and Background

2. In February 2016 the Authority approved a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which showed a budget gap of £0.299m in 2017/18 rising to £2.423m by 2019/20.
3. As part of the grant settlement under-pinning the MTFP, government committed to confirming the four grant allocations for those Authorities that submitted an Efficiency Plan. The intent is that those Authorities that do not do so may be subject to further grant reductions
4. Details of the Home Office's requirements about the Efficiency Plan now indicate that it would be helpful for the Authority to re-align the current MTFP assumptions.
5. These changes to the MTFP were considered by Policy & Resources Committee on 21 September 2016 and are recommended for approval by the Authority prior to the 14 October deadline for submission of the Efficiency Plan.
6. Additionally there are changes that have already occurred in respect of the 2016/17 budget which have an impact into future years.

Changes to the MTFP

7. Appendix 1 shows the impact of all the proposed changes to the MTFP which are outlined below:
 - a. 2016/17 Pay Awards: The budget and MTFP made provision for pay awards at 2%, these national awards have now been agreed at 1% for all staff groups, resulting in a saving in the base budget.
 - b. 2016/17 base inflation: Although provision is made for general inflation it is only allocated to budget holders when an evidenced case is made. It has

not been necessary to allocate the whole provision so the balance can be deleted from future years' requirements.

- c. HQ Rental Service Charge: there is now sufficient information to quantify the running costs of the building that are payable by the tenant.
- d. Future Pay Awards: provision had previously been made at 2% but government policy remains that public sector pay increases should not exceed 1%. There is a risk that the Home Office may reject the Authority's Efficiency Plan if it is based on different assumptions.
- e. Firefighter Pension Rates: Government has announced that the discount rate used in calculating future pensions liability is to be reduced. This has the consequence of increased employer costs from 2019/20.
- f. General Balances: Within the context of the overall precept strategy (to secure the future) the net effect of these changes allows the approved use of general balances to be deferred by a year. When the 2017/18 budget is considered in detail the Authority will be able to consider the final position more thoroughly.

Conclusion/Summary

- 8. The net result of these changes is that (subject to detailed changes) there is a balanced budget in 2017/18 and gaps of £0.480m and £1.657m in 2018/19 and 2019/20 respectively. The changes have been considered by Policy & Resources Committee and are recommended for approval by the Authority.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Impact on future budget
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	None
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores)	None
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?)	None

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Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016-17

Revised Medium Term Financial Forecasts

Col Row	1	2 2017/18 Forecast £m	3 2018/19 Forecast £m	4 2019/20 Forecast £m
1	Feb 2016 Approved MTFP Budget Gap	0.299	1.634	2.423
2	2016/17 Pay Awards at 1%	(0.200)	(0.200)	(0.200)
3	2016/17 Base Inflation Saving	(0.150)	(0.150)	(0.150)
4	HQ Rental Service Charges	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
5	Future Pay Awards at 1%	(0.227)	(0.454)	(0.681)
6	Fire-fighter Pensions Rates			0.315
7	Defer approved draw on General Balances	0.300	(0.300)	
8	Revised MTFP Budget Gap	(0.028)	0.480	1.657

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

8. Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub – Preferred Sites Consultation Responses

Purpose of report

1. To receive the outcome of the public consultation on suitable sites for the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) the report from Opinion Research Services, which sets out the feedback from formal public consultation exercises in respect of two suitable sites for the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub, be noted;*
- ii) subject to land acquisition and approval of building costs, it be agreed in principle to relocate the existing fire appliances, resources and crews of Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley fire stations into the proposed Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub.*

Introduction and Background

2. In May 2015, the Authority received an award grant of £2.38 million from the Government's Transformation Fund to develop a proposal to create a new purpose-built, multi-agency Emergency Services Hub to serve the Wyre Forest area and replace the three current fire stations at Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport. In addition to the Fire and Rescue Service, the Hub would accommodate West Mercia Police Community Support Officers and provide facilities for the Severn Area Rescue Association, St. John Ambulance and the British Red Cross.
3. The proposal recognised that maintaining the status quo was not sustainable or financially viable over the longer term for a number of reasons:
 - risk levels and incident numbers have seen substantial reductions in the Wyre Forest area and generally across the two counties, which means having three fire stations in very close proximity compared to other areas of the Service is no longer an effective and efficient way to provide fire cover,

- the potential to relocate and combine resources in a single Hub should improve the availability of on-call crews and their appliances by creating a larger pool of on-call firefighters,
- facilities at the existing three fire stations are limited and confined by the available space,
- the existing fire stations will need expensive maintenance and refurbishment work, which will be a drain on reducing financial resources,
- the £2.38 million Government funding towards the overall proposal cost of £5.8 million (as at the date of the bid) is not available for any other purposes or proposals.

Summary of Decisions Taken by the Fire Authority to date

4. Following consultation with the Authority's political Group Leaders and formal sign-off by the Chairman and Treasurer a bid was submitted to the Fire Transformation Fund in June 2014 seeking funding to support the creation of an Emergency Services Hub in the Wyre Forest. It was subsequently announced by the Government in October 2014 the bid had been successful.
5. In anticipation of the Service needing to conduct a period of formal consultation on the proposal to create a Hub in the Wyre Forest, independent social research specialists, Opinion Research Services (ORS), were commissioned to facilitate a programme of 'Listening and Engagement'. In accordance with best practice guidance, this acted as pre-consultation with a small representative sample of residents from Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley and the affected crews from the Wyre Forest to contribute to the development of possible operational options to inform future consultations on the area.
6. The Policy and Resources Committee on the 19th November 2014 authorised officers to carry out the necessary preparatory work to develop a detailed scheme and proposal to implement the project, including the provision to incur professional fees where necessary. This Committee also directed that a further report should be submitted to the Fire Authority prior to undertaking formal public consultation or entering into any contractual arrangements to purchase land.
7. On the 17th June 2015, the Authority authorised formal public consultation on the principle of the proposal. The consultation process was facilitated by ORS, who undertook an extensive 12-week programme between 1st September and 27th November 2015 of public meetings and stakeholder forums in Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport, as well as a public consultation document and questionnaire.
8. The outcome of the consultation was reported to the Authority on the 17th February 2016, and the Authority requested a detailed investigation of potential sites be carried out and reported back for determination of a preferred location, prior to a second period of public consultation.

9. The results of the site investigations were reported to the Authority on the 16th June 2016, and the Authority authorised the second period of public consultation on two suitable sites. The consultation process was facilitated again by ORS and their findings are reported in the following sections.

Summary of Preferred Sites Consultation Responses

10. The public consultation was carried out over 10-weeks from 4th July to 9th September 2016 and again included a consultation document and questionnaire, meetings with staff and stakeholders and two public meetings. The consultation focused on finding out local views on the Hub proposal if it was located at either of the identified sites. Both sites are on the Stourport Road, south of Kidderminster; namely Silverwoods Park (the former site of Romwire) and Stourpoint 5 (the former site of British Sugar).
11. In respect of the potential impact upon response times, the consultation document reported that whilst both sites were considered as being suitable, overall the Silverwoods Park site showed better results. However, the Authority will also need to consider a number of other key factors in determining the Hub's preferred location, such as its proximity and potential impact upon residential and commercial properties adjacent to each site, overall comparative land costs and the respective ability to incorporate a strategic training facility. The results of this further research, which contains commercially sensitive information, will be presented in a separate exempt report on the Authority's agenda.
12. The consultation returned 127 completed questionnaires. While not a representative sample of Wyre Forest residents, the response does demonstrate the strength of feeling of those residents who were motivated to put forward their views. There were also three deliberative forums, one group being drawn randomly from a representative sample of members of the public and two meetings with members of HWFRS staff who volunteered to attend. Two public meetings were also held, but only attracted 22 attendees despite extensive publicity involving adverts in the local free newspaper, radio adverts, awareness events in the affected towns and social media coverage. However, all participants were well informed, and were mainly town or district councillors, union representatives, current and ex-firefighters and relatives of firefighters. Six written submissions were also received.
13. The ORS report (attached as Appendix 1) provides a detailed analysis of all views and comments received during the consultation, and the key points are summarised in the following table.

Consultation Method	Balance of Opinion
Questionnaire 127 completed questionnaires were returned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unfavourable on siting a new emergency services hub at either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5 (marginally more support for the former) open text comments suggest continued resistance to the hub concept among many respondents
Staff Forums The first forum was attended by 5 members of staff and the second had 21 members of staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the first forum accepted the principle of a single hub site and accepted the feasibility of both sites the second staff forum was firmly opposed to the principle of a single hub site – and was unable to make a judgement on site options
Public Forum The forum was attended by 32 randomly selected members of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally favourable to the principle of a single hub site general preference for Silverwoods Park
Public Meetings Seven people attended the first meeting and 15 attended the second.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the first meeting was unfavourable to the principle of a single hub site and made no comment on the two site options the second meeting was non-committal on the hub principle and site options
Submissions Six written submissions were received.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two were unfavourable – including a submission from the Fire Brigades Union four were favourable – including the Corporate Team at Wyre Forest District Council, Kidderminster Town Council and Rock Parish Council of the two sites, there was most support for Stourpoint 5

14. The table above shows similar levels of support for and against the Hub project. Those who opposed one or other of the two sites were generally opposed to the Hub as a matter of principle. In terms of site options, there was only marginally more support for Silverwoods Park than Stourpoint 5.
15. The ORS report concludes that the Fire Authority will need to assess the balance of opinion in the consultation elements alongside all the evidence and

with the benefit of professional and political judgement in order to determine the future direction. It notes that “consultation is not a ‘numbers game’ in which the biggest ‘side’ always wins. In this context, ORS attaches particular importance to the forums and written submissions for being deliberative and thoughtful. This does not mean that the other findings should be disregarded, for they show the opinions of important groups of people who were motivated to participate; but it must be borne in mind that the open questionnaire results are not necessarily representative of the whole population, and the staff meetings were very small.”

Viability of the Preferred Sites

16. As reported at paragraph 11 above, further research on the viability of the two sites has been undertaken. This work was carried out by Place Partnership Limited (PPL), who assessed each site having regard to land acquisition and implementation costs and key factors such as access to infrastructure, operational requirements and planning matters. The details of that assessment along with updated project costs are commercially sensitive and are set out in a separate report on the Authority’s agenda, to be considered in private as it relates to the financial and business affairs of the Fire Authority.

Financial Considerations

17. The estimated cost of the project is to be partly met by the Transformation Fund grant and partly by the anticipated proceeds of selling the three existing sites, with the remaining balance being met by funding from capital borrowing. The additional financing costs will largely be covered by savings in running one modern building instead of three older ones and the potential reductions in on-call crew turnouts as the new location makes more effective use of the wholetime crewed appliance.
18. To put these costs into context, if the new Hub is not built the existing three buildings will need maintenance and refurbishment works in the next few years. Indicative costs prepared by PPL suggest that some £650,000 would be needed over the next five years, but this may only extend the life of the buildings by 10-15 years, at which time replacement would be required anyway. These future costs are unlikely to generate savings and would add approximately £0.075m of capital financing costs to the annual revenue budget.

Implications of not proceeding with the Hub project

19. The previous report on 16th June 2016 noted a number of implications should the Hub project not proceed. Among these were:
 - the £2.38 million Transformation Fund grant would potentially need to be returned to central government,

- there may be a reputational risk to the Fire Authority and a potentially detrimental impact on future funding applications to central government,
- the three existing fire stations will still need costly modernisation and refurbishment to meet current standards,
- HWFRS still faces a challenging budget situation, which requires ongoing reviews of operational resource deployment,
- partner organisations would need to reassess their accommodation requirements separately, which could affect inter-agency working relationships,
- HWFRS would lose a significant example of how the Service is demonstrating its commitment to collaborating with other emergency services. Collaboration between emergency services is proposed as a statutory duty in the Policing and Crime Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament.
- circa £110,000 will have been spent on the formal consultation programme, data modelling, site search fees and architect designs to prepare the Hub proposal, which would not be able to be offset against the transformation funding awarded,
- HWFRS would lose opportunities for redevelopment at the three existing fire station sites contributing towards town centre regeneration.

Conclusion/Summary

20. Following completion of the first phase of formal public consultation on the principle of creating a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub, an investigation of potential sites was carried out and two suitable sites were identified. The second phase of consultation provided a public perspective on the two sites, and the views expressed ranged from opposition to the overall principle to broad support for the proposal.
21. Having taken this into account and acknowledging public concerns and anxieties about issues such as response times, it is the assessment of officers that such matters can be addressed through normal operational procedures and management, and both sites provide suitable locations.
22. Following consideration of the consultation outcomes, Members are asked to consider as part of this report whether, in principle, the Authority should proceed with the development of a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub and the subsequent closure of the three existing fire stations at Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport. If this is agreed in principle then a final decision on progressing the project to fruition, budget allocation and choice of preferred site are the subject of a subsequent report on the Authority's agenda and will be considered in private due to the commercial sensitivity of those decisions.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	<p>The project will contribute towards the savings required in the period up to 2019-20 as well as forming part of the 2020 Vision Programme aimed at achieving a sustainable future for the Service.</p> <p>Costs incurred to date are circa £110,000. If the project does not proceed, or if the bid funding is withdrawn for any reason, then under the funding terms and conditions the project costs to date would need to be absorbed from other areas of the Fire Authority budget.</p>
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	<p>The project is directly linked to delivering 'Our Strategy' (Resourcing the Future and Buildings and Infrastructure).</p>
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	<p>A Risk Management log is included within the project documentation.</p>
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	<p>Listening and Engagement forums have been held with key stakeholders and two formal public consultation programmes were carried out between 1st September and 27th November 2015 and between 4th July and 9th September 2016. This extensive programme meets the key good practice requirements of being open and accessible, proportionate, fair and ensuring full accountability.</p>
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	<p>An overall Equalities Impact Assessment was completed in August 2015 prior to the first phase of public consultation. Assessments of the Silverwoods Park and Stourpoint 5 sites have also been completed.</p>

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Site, Report of Consultation with Operational Staff, Stakeholders and Members of the Public, Opinion Research Services, © September 2016

Background papers

Fire Authority Reports:

- 17 June 2015: Item 14, Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub
- 17 February 2016: Item 9, Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Consultation Responses
- 16 June 2016: Item 12, Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Preferred Sites Consultation

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Transformation Fund Application, 4 June 2014

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Consultation document

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Consultation on the choice of location

Wyre Forest Transformation Funding and Other Issues – Preliminary Listening and Engagement Forums with members of the public and operational staff, Opinion Research Services, © June 2015

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Report of Consultation with Operational Staff, Stakeholders and Members of the Public, Opinion Research Services, © January 2016

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Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Site



Report of Consultation with Operational Staff, Stakeholders and Members of the Public

Opinion Research Services
Spin-out company of Swansea University



As with all our studies, findings from this research are subject to Opinion Research Services' Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract.

Any press release or publication of the findings of this research requires the advance approval of ORS. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

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Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority (H&WFRA) on the consultation programme reported here.

We are grateful to all of those who completed the questionnaire or submitted a written submission - and to the operational staff, stakeholders and members of the public who took part in the forum and public meetings. The forum participants were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions about potential sites for the hub station. They engaged with the service, with the issues under consideration and with each other in discussing their ideas readily.

We thank H&WFA for commissioning the project and we particularly thank Nathan Travis (Chief Fire Officer), Mark Preece (Area Commander) and Jean Cole (Head of Corporate Services) from Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service (H&WFRS) for their collaboration and for attending the sessions to answer many questions by the staff, stakeholders and public. Such meetings benefit considerably from such readiness to respond fully to participants' questions, as in this case.

At all stages of the project, ORS's status as an independent organisation facilitating the consultation as fairly as possible was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute to H&WFRS's development. We hope also that ORS has been instrumental in continuing to strengthen H&WFRS's public engagement.

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Executive Summary and Conclusions

The Commission and its Context

1. Early in 2015, the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (H&WFRA) undertook two consultation programmes which led the Authority to propose an emergency services hub station for the Wyre Forest. The first programme was an extensive 'pre-consultation' or 'listening and engagement' process to understand people's opinions and to 'test' principles and possible operational options for the area. Later in 2015, having taken account of the initial findings and other available evidence, H&WFRA consulted very extensively on the principle of closing the three existing Wyre Forest fire stations in order to combine their resources at a single hub station.
2. Following the two extensive consultations, both carried out by ORS, the Authority approved a further phase of public consultation to be undertaken to determine public support for a Hub Station sited at either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5, both of which are about 800 metres apart on Stourport Road.
3. The consultation period lasted ten weeks, from 4th July to 9th September 2016, and ORS's role in the programme comprised:
 - Drafting the consultation document;
 - Designing, implementing, analysing and reporting an open online and paper questionnaire;
 - Facilitating and reporting two public meetings; two forums with wholetime and retained operational staff; and one forum with members of the public drawn from all three areas of the Wyre Forest;
 - Analysing and summarising any written submissions received by H&WFRS during the consultation period; and
 - Providing an independent interpretive report of findings.

Executive Summary Report of Findings

4. While this Executive Summary seeks to give a balanced assessment of the discussion outcomes, readers are referred to the detail of the full reports following for a more comprehensive account of the views expressed, in particular, for an account of people's priorities, assumptions and reasons for these views. It also includes ORS's conclusions about how to interpret the balance of opinion in the consultation.

5. It is important to note that the views reported are those expressed by consultation respondents. In some cases, these views will not be supported by the available evidence - and while ORS has not sought to highlight or correct those that make incorrect statements or assumptions, this should be borne in mind when considering the findings below.

Open Questionnaire

Introduction

6. The open questionnaire (with an accompanying Consultation Document) was available online and as a hard copy between 4th July and 9th September 2016. 127 questionnaires were completed; 115 were submitted online and 12 by post.
7. Although the open questionnaire is an important consultation route that is open to all, due to its very nature it cannot be distributed to or completed by a representative sample of Wyre Forest residents. As such, because the respondent profile is an imperfect reflection of the area's population, its results must be interpreted carefully. Crucially though, this does not mean that the open questionnaire findings should be discounted: they are analysed in detail in this report and must be taken into account as a demonstration of the strength of feeling of residents who were motivated to put forward their views (and in many cases concerns) about the proposed change.

Main Findings

Silverwoods Park

8. Nearly a third (32%) of individual respondents agreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station. However, 6 in 10 (61%) respondents disagreed, and around half (48%) strongly disagreed. The main reasons respondents gave for their agreement or disagreement can be seen below:

Hub station will lead to increased risk to life/property
Disagree with proposed location due to traffic congestion in the area
Silverwoods Park is ideally/centrally located
Silverwoods Park is too far from Bewdley
Hub station will lead to increased response times
Generally disagree with proposed closures/ hub station
Disagree with closure of Bewdley Fire Station
Silverwoods Park is accessible/benefits from good access routes
Silverwoods Park results in the least disruption to response times
Silverwoods Park is too far from North Kidderminster
Hub station will have a negative impact on rural areas
Silverwoods Park is too far from Stourport
Disagree with closure of Stourport Fire Station
Silverwoods Park is too far from Far Forest

9. Of the three organisations that responded to the open consultation questionnaire, two agreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station. This was on the grounds that the proposed site is in *a central location with good access routes to risk areas* (Staffordshire FRS Corporate Safety Plan) and that it *will not affect response times dramatically* (Salvation Army – West Midlands Emergency Response Team). Bewdley Town Council strongly disagreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station insofar as the town has many timber-framed houses and that *it can and will take up to 10 minutes to travel from Kidderminster to Bewdley*.

Stourpoint 5

10. Almost three quarters (72%) of individual respondents disagreed that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station; almost half (46%) strongly disagreed. Only 13% of all respondents agreed. The main reasons respondents gave for their agreement or disagreement can be seen below.

Stourpoint 5 is too far from Bewdley
Hub station will lead to increased response times
Generally disagree with proposed closures/ hub station
Hub station will lead to increased risk to life/property
Disagree with proposed location due to traffic congestion in the area
Stourpoint 5 is accessible/benefits from good access routes
Stourpoint 5 is too far from North Kidderminster
Disagree with closure of Bewdley Fire Station
Stourpoint 5 is ideally/centrally located
Stourpoint 5 is in an Enterprise Zone/land should be used for business and employment
Stourpoint 5 is closer to Stourport/Bewdley

11. All three organisations disagreed that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for a new hub station because it is not sufficiently central. There was concern that a hub station at Stourpoint 5 *may affect response times into the area of greater risk and demand* (Staffordshire FRS Corporate Safety Plan).

Deliberative Forums and Public Meetings

Introduction

The Programme

12. Important deliberative forums were held: one with 32 randomly selected members of the public and two with 26 members of staff who volunteered to attend. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave the relevant staff and diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively - so the

outcomes (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

13. The Fire Authority also held two public meetings, which were publicised by H&WFRS officers who undertook three public awareness raisings sessions, one in each town centre, prior to the events. Furthermore, each event was extensively publicised on Twitter and via leaflets; the Service handed out nearly 700 of the latter.
14. The meetings were held in the evenings, but attracted only 22 attendees, as shown below:

Location	Date	Numbers Attending
Wyre Forest District Council Chamber	13 th July 2016	7
Wyre Forest District Council Chamber	18 th July 2016	15

However, all participants were well-informed - mainly town or district councillors, union representatives, current or ex-firefighters and relatives of firefighters. Each meeting lasted over two hours and included rigorous discussions of the Fire Authority's proposals.

15. All the meetings began by reviewing the Fire Authority's reasons for agreeing in principle that, providing a suitable location can be found, the three current fire stations should be closed and an emergency services hub station created. The main issues summarised in the review were:

Why it is possible to close the three current fire stations and to combine their resources at a single hub station (based on decreasing risk and incident levels across Wyre Forest between 2010-11 and 2014-15);

Key benefits of a hub Station (including better joint-working between the emergency services; matching resources more closely to risk; improved on-call availability; and cost-effectiveness);

Financial challenges;

Transformation Fund award of £2.4m from Government;

Need to balance emergency cover equitably across the two counties; and

The impact of the change on attendance times.

16. Each meeting also discussed the specific site issues in detail - including all the following:

Numbers of sites investigated and criteria for site evaluations;

Reasons for selecting two 'short-listed' sites;

Site plans and general layout; and

Increases in average response times across the Wyre Forest area based on (a) comparing performance for all incidents over the last five years against

projected response times from both of the selected sites; and (b) timed fire engine runs at three of the busiest times of the day.

Main Findings – Forums with Members of Staff

First Forum Discussion

17. There were many questions about the hub proposal, covering: how the two sites were chosen and whether others were available; the extent of the influence of government on the proposal and whether it would have been pursued otherwise; the value of the Kidderminster site for redevelopment and the possibility of getting full value from a sale; and whether SARA will pay for the space it occupies in the hub.
18. There was a general feeling that once a hub is established it would not be necessary or sustainable to maintain four pumps at the hub station, partly because *half the RDS crews will never get a call!* Even so, one retained firefighter said: *I'm not against this!*
19. The forum was puzzled as to why response times from the two sites apparently differ so markedly when they are really rather close.
20. There was a popular suggestion that H&WFRS should measure its response times as many/most other FRSs do - by 'starting the clock' when the first fire engine is despatched by the Control Centre rather than when the Control Centre first receives an emergency call (which makes H&WFRS's response times longer than would be the case if the point of timing matched that of other FRSs). This may be something the Fire Authority may wish to consider in terms of reporting its performance targets and standards in a more comparative manner.
21. There were many other questions around job security, shift patterns, the size of the hub and its station ground - though these did not amount to objections to either of the proposed sites.
22. The forum felt that the distribution of risk across Wyre Forest implies that the hub station should 'move into Kidderminster', but overall the five participants readily accepted the principle of the hub and also accepted that both sites are reasonable and feasible - though there was some concern about the impact on residents around Silverwoods Park if it is sited there.

Second Forum Discussion

23. It was clear in the second discussion (with Bewdley and Stourport on-call staff) that many firefighters remain opposed to the issue of principle in relation to whether H&WFRA should establish an emergency services hub for the Wyre Forest. Participants strongly reiterated the same concerns as expressed during both the first and second stage consultations, for example:

The potential for longer response times to certain areas in future and, especially, back-up support for the Kidderminster wholetime appliance to ensure firefighter safety;

Response times being further compromised by longer turn-in times for on-call firefighters - which in themselves may lead to people being forced to leave the Service;

The possibility of reducing the number of resources at the hub in future as it is 'easier' to remove resources from a central hub than it is from smaller, individual fire stations;

On-call de-motivation: many current Bewdley and Stourport firefighters would leave the Service as a result of attending fewer incidents - exacerbating current Retained Duty System (RDS) availability problems and resulting in a loss of skill and experience;

Competencies would be difficult to maintain as a result of fewer incident attendances;

Some firefighters would have the additional expense of having to purchase and run a car to turn-in (as they can get to their current station on foot)'; and

More and better joint-working will only really be feasible between wholetime firefighters and staff from other organisations due to the infrequency with which on-call firefighters are on-station.

24. On-call recruitment was also raised as a significant issue once more. As aforementioned, it was predicted that many of the existing Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters would leave the Service following the closure of their local stations, and there was significant concern that the recruitment of new on-call firefighters would be challenging in light of existing difficulties. As such, it was suggested that H&WFRA must be open to new, innovative and creative recruitment strategies to ensure the on-call role is as attractive as possible to a wide range of people.
25. The need for a sufficiently large pool of on-call firefighters was stressed, with some suggesting that current numbers will need to be maintained to crew all four fire engines plus special appliances - again based on experience both within and outside Wyre Forest.
26. The group generally felt unable to make a judgement on the relative merits and drawbacks of the two proposed sites, citing the need for more information and answers to questions prior to doing so. As such, few comments were made on either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5, though participants noted: the congestion on Stourport Road; the lack of recruitment opportunities in the area; and, with specific reference to Silverwoods, that its residential nature may not be conducive to the siting of a noisy fire station there.
27. One alternative suggestion was made whereby H&WFRA would: *put a staff rider out there to plug the gaps at different retained stations as opposed to bringing everyone together in one location. Retained with full-time jobs are expected to drop those jobs to attend a fire, why can't officers do the same?*

28. Finally, the firefighters commented on the consultation - and particularly on: H&WFRA's decision not to hold public meetings in either Bewdley or Stourport; the lack of information in the consultation document on, for example, the 'pros and cons' of and rationale for choosing the two sites and the financial implications of the development for H&WFRA; and the 'misleading' figures used to justify the proposal.

Overall Summary

29. The first and smaller staff forum felt able to accept all the proposals, though the FBU representative who was present emphasised the union's anxieties that longer response times would endanger the public and firefighters and that on-call staff would be unable to sustain their jobs. Following their discussion, the first forum agreed with the principle of a single hub site and accepted that both sites under consideration were feasible.
30. The second staff forum was far more negative than the first. Participants remained firmly opposed to the principle of an emergency hub services station for the Wyre Forest (and reiterated many of the concerns and issues they had raised at previous meetings) – and felt unable to make a judgement on the site options without further information and answers to their operational questions.

Main Findings – Forum with Members of the Public

31. During the initial part of the forum (when participants were given a presentation outlining H&WFRA's hub concept and proposed locations), participants' questions and comments highlighted their initial concerns. These were mainly focused around:

The importance of response times and the implications of lengthening them for both first and support appliances;

How predicted response times from the new hub have been determined and the 'dangers' of relying on projections;

Whether Bewdley and Stourport firefighters will be able to reach a new hub within the required turn-out time (and the impact of not being able to do this on their ability to continue in their roles);

The (potentially underestimated) cost of the hub and the feasibility of using earmarked finances to refurbish the three current stations;

The possibility that the number of vehicles at the hub may be reduced in future (resulting in a less resilient service for the Wyre Forest);

Levels of cover during simultaneous incidents;

Other locations considered;

How the transition period will work; and

The extent to which fire engines will be able to negotiate heavy traffic in the area.

32. Furthermore, a few participants were concerned that H&WFRA has discarded the objections raised, especially by Bewdley residents, during the first two consultations in taking its decision to pursue an emergency services hub station in principle.
33. Ultimately though, most participants recognised and accepted the case for a hub station, even several from Bewdley who commented that in the event of future closures (which, they felt, would be inevitable in the light of financial constraints) their local station would likely be most at-risk - and that the hub might at least mitigate against the loss of the fire engine.
34. In terms of the two proposed locations, the vast majority of participants opted for Silverwoods Park over Stourpoint 5 on the grounds that: predicted response times are better; it is nearer Kidderminster, which has the highest call volume of the three areas; it is closer to hard-to-reach and deprived areas such as Hagley; and it is not as isolated, which was considered important in terms of both staff welfare and community interaction. Furthermore, several said that they could see little to differentiate the two locations but that they had opted for Silverwoods because they trusted the judgement of H&WFRS's officers in designating it as their preferred option.
35. The minority that preferred Stourpoint 5 did so because it: has better road links than Silverwoods; is less residential and thus less disruptive; and is not as congested traffic-wise.
36. Finally, a very small number of participants felt they could not make a definitive judgement before knowing the relative cost of the two sites.

Main Findings – Public Meetings

First Meeting

37. Although it was a public meeting, the FBU was relatively prominent in the questioning and discussions. As in the staff forums and the FBU's written submission, the Union's main concerns were that:

A single hub would lengthen response times dangerously and unacceptably - with longer attendance times for the first and support fire engines;

Current on-call staff would be disadvantaged because they could not meet required turn-out times to the hub;

Lengthening turn-out times would dangerously delay the mobilisation of support fire engines;

There is no certainty that a single hub base would improve on-call recruitment and retention; and

Creating the hub will mean that the fourth fire engine currently available will soon be lost because it will be so little used when the wholetime crews attend more incidents from the new base.

38. Many of these points were taken up in discussion, during which several questions were raised. For example, the meeting was confused about why response times from the two sites apparently differ so markedly when they are quite close - and questioned why Stourpoint 5 is even being considered given that attendances are likely to be lengthier than they would be from Silverwoods Park. On the other hand, it was also asked: *how will Silverwoods residents feel about having a fire station close by?*
39. Other questions were around: crewing numbers at the proposed hub; H&WFRS's strategies for recruiting on-call firefighters; and the meaning and implications of response time targets. Indeed, those seeking clarity on the meaning of, and risks associated with, response times suggested that H&WFRS should measure its response times as many/most other FRSs do - from when the first fire engine is despatched by the Control Centre rather than from when the Control Centre first receives an emergency call (which makes H&WFRS's response times seem longer than if its timings matched that of other FRSs). As such, and as we have said in relation to the staff forums, the reporting of response times is something the Fire Authority may wish to consider in terms of reporting its performance targets and standards in a more comparative manner.
40. Finally, some other constructive suggestions were made as follows:
- You could use smaller fire engines? Would the FBU be happy with that?*
- You could use 'staff riders' to increase the availability of the on-call fire engines when they are short.*

Second Meeting

41. The second public meeting was less critical than the first, though again there were questions, comments and concerns around: the effect of traffic and roadworks on turn-out and response times; the possibility that the number of vehicles at the hub may be reduced in future (resulting in a less resilient service for the Wyre Forest); the lack of Ambulance Service involvement currently; the differing types of incidents experienced within Wyre Forest; and, in participants' view, the 'misleading' figures used in the consultation document.
42. Other issues raised were around: the relative cost of the two sites; the possible unviability of both locations in future; implementation timescales; and the possibility of making financial savings through resource reductions rather than station closures.
43. Overall, there was some recognition that, in reality, response times to Bewdley, Stourport and other outlying areas may not be too dissimilar from the hub than they are from the

three existing stations currently given the significant role the Kidderminster wholetime appliance plays in attending incidents elsewhere. Furthermore, while not going as far as to wholeheartedly support the proposed hub, others could see the logic in accepting the Government grant on offer to develop it in light of the significant refurbishment costs that would be required otherwise - possibly necessitating the closure of one or both of Bewdley and Stourport.

Overall Summary

44. The first meeting was opposed to or sceptical about the proposals. The main concerns expressed echoed those of the FBU: the impact of longer response times and consequential increased risks.
45. The second meeting was less negative than the first. While there were concerns about H&WFRS 'putting all of its eggs in one basket', there was also recognition that the transformational grant on offer from Government represents an opportunity to mitigate against future significant refurbishment costs at the three current fire stations – and possible closures.

Written Submissions

Introduction

46. During the formal consultation process, six written submissions were received. The table below shows the breakdown of contributors by type.

Type of Correspondent	Number of respondents/signatories
District/Town/Parish Councils	3
Wyre Forest Residents	2
Representative Bodies	1
Total	6

Main Findings

47. Detailed written submissions do not lend themselves to easy summary and so readers are encouraged to consult ORS's full report for a more detailed account of the views expressed. However, this summary would be incomplete without reporting at least an overview.
48. Of the six submissions, the FBU and one resident strongly oppose the proposal for a hub station and reject both sites as unsuitable operationally - and, in addition, because Silverwoods is in a sensitive residential area. The FBU believes the longer response times would be unsafe in endangering both the public and firefighters and in jeopardising the

roles of existing on-call staff. The Union also feels a hub is unnecessary for joint emergency services working and will not improve services to the public.

49. In contrast, four submissions either strongly support or accept the hub as a good thing overall - and two of them prefer Stourport 5 as more suitable than Silverwoods. The Corporate Team at Wyre Forest District Council supports all the proposals and considers Stourport 5 to be a more appropriate site in planning terms. Rock Parish Council also supports the hub as an important opportunity and prefers Stourport 5 as a better location from which to cover Stourport and Bewdley. Kidderminster Town Council and one resident accept the hub proposal as reasonable, but (ideally) the resident would prefer two wholetime pumps or the use of larger crews on the wholetime engine.

Consultation Programme Proportional and Fair

50. H&WFRS's consultation programme was conscientious: that is, it was open, accessible and fair to members of the public, stakeholders and staff in Wyre Forest. The consultation was also proportional to the importance of the issues and conforms with good practice, both in its scale and the balance of elements included, and also in the way in which it built upon earlier listening and engagement and consultation exercises undertaken by the Service. The key good practice requirements for proper consultation programmes are that they should:

Be conducted at a formative stage, before decisions are taken;

Allow sufficient time for people to participate and respond;

Provide the public and stakeholders with enough background information to allow them to consider the issues and any proposals intelligently and critically; and

Be properly taken into consideration before decisions are finally taken.

51. Taken together, these four elements do much to ensure the 'accountability' of public authorities, particularly the fourth; but this does not mean that consultations are referenda. Properly understood, accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible consultation while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully. This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy, for consultations are not referenda, and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.
52. For the public bodies considering the outcomes of consultation, the key question is not *Which proposal has most support?* but, *Are the reasons for the popularity or unpopularity of the proposals cogent?* In this context, both H&WFRS and ORS were clear that this important

consultation programme should include both 'open' and deliberative elements in order to both: provide many people with the opportunity to take part via the open questionnaire and public meeting routes; and promote informed engagement via the deliberative forums.

53. Given people's general unawareness of how their fire and rescue services operate and manage their resources and costs, consultation with informed audiences (who have the opportunity to question and test the evidence for particular proposals – as in the deliberative forum) is especially valuable. All consultation elements are important and none should be disregarded, but the deliberative forums with the public, stakeholders and staff, and the written submissions, are particularly worthy of consideration because they explore the arguments and the reasons for people's opinions. H&WFA's consultation programme conforms to good practice by including both quantitative and qualitative methods through which people could participate and as a means for the Authority to understand the reasons for people's opinions.
54. Finally, as well as providing the public, stakeholders and staff with sufficient information to consider the proposals intelligently, H&WFRA has also conducted its consultation in a timely manner and is taking account of the outcomes before making a decision. Overall, the three-stage engagement and consultation process compare well with similar consultations undertaken by other fire and rescue services and public bodies and certainly meets the best good practice standards.

Overall Conclusions

55. Overall, the views expressed through the consultation varied between different groups. Largely opposed to the hub and both site options were the: open consultation questionnaire respondents; some of the submissions; some in the staff forums; and one public meeting. But the following were broadly supportive or could at least accept the proposals: deliberative forum (with randomly selected members of the public); some in the staff forums; most of the written submissions; and the second public meeting (which was non-committal but did not express opposition). Those supporting the proposal varied somewhat on which site is preferable.
56. The reasons for the respective support and opposition have been documented previously and are not repeated in detail here. Many of the concerns raised in the questionnaires and public meetings were reviewed in the deliberative forums, where most people's concerns were allayed through questioning and discussion. However, the open questionnaire respondents, one of the two staff forum and one of the public meeting were critical of the proposal and site options.
57. In any case, influencing public policy through consultation is not simply a 'numbers game' or 'popularity contest' in which the loudest voices or the greatest numbers automatically win the argument. Instead, consultation is to inform authorities of issues, arguments,

implications they might have overlooked; to contribute to the re-evaluation of matters already known; or to reassess priorities and principles critically. However popular proposals might be, that does not itself mean they are feasible, safe, sustainable, reasonable and value-for-money; and unpopularity does not mean the reverse.

Balance of Opinion

58. In this case, though, the outcome of the consultation process is in relative equipoise, with some support and about the same level of opposition, as the following summary of outcomes shows. Those who opposed one or other of the sites were opposed to the hub as a matter of principle (implicitly urging the Fire Authority to reverse its earlier decision in principle). In terms of the site options, there was only marginally more support for Silverwoods Park than Stourpoint 5 – and some important parties favoured Stourport 5 as the best site overall. In this context, where to site a new hub station will be a decision for the Fire Authority.

59. The balance of opinion was:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Unfavourable on siting a new emergency services hub station at either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5 (marginally more support for the former)

The open text comments suggest continued resistance to the hub concept among many respondents

STAFF FORUMS

The first (smaller) forum accepted the principle of a single hub site and accepted the feasibility of both sites

The second staff forum was firmly opposed to the principle of single hub site - and was unable to make a judgement on site options

PUBLIC FORUM

Generally favourable to the principle of a single hub site

General preference for Silverwoods Park

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The first meeting was unfavourable to the principle of a single hub site and made no comment on the two site options

The second meeting was non-committal on the hub principle and site options

SUBMISSIONS

Two were unfavourable - including the FBU

Four were favourable - including the Corporate Team at Wyre Forest District Council, Kidderminster Town Council and Rock Parish Council

There was most support for Stourpoint 5.

Need for Interpretation

60. The Fire Authority should assess this balance of opinion alongside all the evidence, for (as we have said) consultation is not a 'numbers game' in which the biggest 'side' always wins. In this context, ORS attaches particular importance to the forums and written submissions for being deliberative and thoughtful. This does not mean that the other findings should be disregarded, for they show the opinions of important groups of people who were motivated to participate; but it must be borne in mind that the open questionnaire results are not necessarily representative of the whole population, and the staff meetings were very small.
61. While ORS makes the above judgements, there is no single 'right interpretation' of the consultation elements, for professional and political judgement is needed. Ultimately, the Fire Authority will consider all the consultation elements alongside all the other evidence in order best to determine the future direction of its Fire and Rescue Service.

Project Overview

Opinion Research Services

62. Opinion Research Services (ORS) is a generic social research company that works mainly for the public sector to conduct important applied research in health, housing, local government, police and fire and rescue services across the UK. The company was established in 1988 and has worked extensively with fire and rescue services (FRSs) across the UK since 1998. In 2004 it was appointed by the Fire Services Consultation Association (FSCA) as the sole approved provider of research and consultation services, under the terms of a National Framework Agreement. The same framework contract was retendered in 2009 and ORS was reappointed once more as the sole approved provider. While working with FRSs across the UK, ORS has specialised in designing, implementing and reporting employee, stakeholder and public consultation programmes for a wide range of integrated risk management plans (IRMPs), in many cases covering controversial and sensitive issues. In addition, ORS has extensive experience of statutory consultations about education, health and housing, and many other issues, including budgetary consultations.

The Commission and its Context

63. Early in 2015, the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (H&WFRA) undertook two consultation programmes which led the Authority to propose an emergency services hub station for the Wyre Forest. The first programme was an extensive 'pre-consultation' or 'listening and engagement' process to understand people's opinions and to 'test' principles and possible operational options for the area. Later in 2015, having taken account of the initial findings and other available evidence, H&WFRA consulted very extensively on the principle of closing the three existing Wyre Forest fire stations in order to combine their resources at a single hub station.
64. Following the two extensive consultations, both carried out by ORS, the Authority approved a further phase of public consultation to be undertaken to determine public support for a Hub Station sited at either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5, both of which are about 800 metres apart on Stourport Road.
65. The consultation period lasted ten weeks, from 4th July to 9th September 2016, and ORS's role in the programme comprised:
- Drafting the consultation document;
 - Designing, implementing, analysing and reporting an open online and paper questionnaire;

Facilitating and reporting two public meetings; two forums with wholetime and retained operational staff; and one forum with members of the public drawn from all three areas of the Wyre Forest;

Analysing and summarising any written submissions received by H&WFRS during the consultation period; and

Providing an independent interpretive report of findings.

Open Questionnaire

66. The open questionnaire (with an accompanying Consultation Document) was available online and as a hard copy between 4th July and 9th September 2016. 127 questionnaires were completed; 115 were submitted online and 12 by post.
67. Although the open questionnaire is an important consultation route that is open to all, due to its very nature it cannot be distributed to or completed by a representative sample of Wyre Forest residents. As such, because the respondent profile is an imperfect reflection of the area's population, its results must be interpreted carefully. Crucially though, this does not mean that the open questionnaire findings should be discounted: they are analysed in detail in this report and must be taken into account as a demonstration of the strength of feeling of residents who were motivated to put forward their views (and in many cases concerns) about the proposed change.

Deliberative Forums and Public Meetings

The Programme

68. Important deliberative forums were held: one with 32 randomly selected members of the public and two with 26 members of staff who volunteered to attend. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave the relevant staff and diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively.

Forum with Members of Staff

69. Members of staff were invited to participate by H&WFRS in open staff meetings held at Kidderminster Fire Station and 26 attended - five at Kidderminster Fire Station on July 14th and then 21 at the same venue on July 19th. The latter session primarily comprised Bewdley and Stourport-on-Severn on-call firefighters.

Forum with Members of the Public

70. ORS convened a deliberative forum of 32 randomly selected and diverse participants at Wyre Forest District Council offices on July 20th. Members of the public were recruited by ORS (some had attended the 'listening and engagement' sessions in 2015, and the remainder were new attendees). Those who had not attended previously were recruited by

random-digit telephone dialling from ORS's Social Research Call Centre. Having been initially contacted by phone, all participants were then written to - to confirm the invitation and the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is an effective way of ensuring that the participants are independent and broadly representative of the community.

71. Overall (as shown in the table below), the 32 public forum participants were a broad cross-section of residents from the local areas and, as standard good practice, were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the forums met were readily accessible. People's special needs were taken into account in the recruitment and at the venues. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: area of residence; gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI).

CRITERIA	PUBLIC FORUM
Gender	Male: 17 Female: 15
Age	16-34: 7 35-54: 10 55+: 15
Social Grade	AB: 10 C1: 10 C2: 5 DE: 7
Ethnicity	1 not White British
Limiting Illness or Disability	5
Area of Residence	Bewdley Area: 12 Stourport Area: 11 Kidderminster Area: 9

72. All the meetings began by reviewing the Fire Authority's reasons for agreeing in principle that, providing a suitable location can be found, the three current fire stations should be closed and an emergency services hub station created. The main issues summarised in the review were:

Why it is possible to close the three current fire stations and to combine their resources at a single hub station (based on decreasing risk and incident levels across Wyre Forest between 2010-11 and 2014-15);

Key benefits of a hub Station (including better joint-working between the emergency services; matching resources more closely to risk; improved on-call availability; and cost-effectiveness);

Financial challenges;

Transformation Fund award of £2.4m from Government;

Need to balance emergency cover equitably across the two counties; and

The impact of the change on attendance times.

73. Each meeting also discussed the specific site issues in detail - including all the following:

Numbers of sites investigated and criteria for site evaluations;

Reasons for selecting two 'short-listed' sites;

Site plans and general layout; and

Increases in average response times across the Wyre Forest area based on (a) comparing performance for all incidents over the last five years against projected response times from both of the selected sites; and (b) timed fire engine runs at three of the busiest times of the day.

74. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the public forum reported here gave diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively - so the outcomes (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

Public Meetings

75. The Fire Authority held two public meetings, which were publicised by media and using posters in the local areas. The meetings were held in the evenings, but attracted only 22 attendees, as shown below:

Location	Date	Numbers Attending
Wyre Forest District Council Chamber	13 th July 2016	7
Wyre Forest District Council Chamber	18 th July 2016	15

76. While the public meetings were attended by only 22 people, they were all well-informed participants - mainly town or district councillors, union representatives, current or ex-firefighters and relatives of firefighters. Each meeting lasted over two hours and included rigorous discussions of the Fire Authority's proposals.
77. It should be noted that the low attendance levels at the public meetings were not due to a lack of publicity on the part of H&WFRS, whose officers undertook three public awareness raisings sessions, one in each town centre, prior to the events. Furthermore, each event was extensively publicised on Twitter and via leaflets; the Service handed out nearly 700 of the latter.

Written Submissions

78. During the formal consultation process, six written submissions were received. The table below shows the breakdown of contributors by type.

Type of Correspondent	Number of respondents/signatories
District/Town/Parish Councils	3
Wyre Forest Residents	2
Representative Bodies	1
Total	6

79. ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in the full report, and the main themes have been outlined in the Executive Summary.

Consultation Programme Proportional and Fair

80. H&WFRS's consultation programme was conscientious: that is, it was open, accessible and fair to members of the public, stakeholders and staff in Wyre Forest. The consultation was also proportional to the importance of the issues and conforms with good practice, both in its scale and the balance of elements included, and also in the way in which it built upon earlier listening and engagement and consultation exercises undertaken by the Service. The key good practice requirements for proper consultation programmes are that they should:

Be conducted at a formative stage, before decisions are taken;

Allow sufficient time for people to participate and respond;

Provide the public and stakeholders with enough background information to allow them to consider the issues and any proposals intelligently and critically;
and

Be properly taken into consideration before decisions are finally taken.

81. Taken together, these four elements do much to ensure the 'accountability' of public authorities, particularly the fourth; but this does not mean that consultations are referenda. Properly understood, accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible consultation while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully. This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy, for consultations are not referenda, and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.

82. For the public bodies considering the outcomes of consultation, the key question is not *Which proposal has most support?* but, *Are the reasons for the popularity or unpopularity of the proposals cogent?* In this context, both H&WFRS and ORS were clear that this important consultation programme should include both ‘open’ and deliberative elements in order to both: provide many people with the opportunity to take part via the open questionnaire and public meeting routes; and promote informed engagement via the deliberative forums.
83. Given people’s general unawareness of how their fire and rescue services operate and manage their resources and costs, consultation with informed audiences (who have the opportunity to question and test the evidence for particular proposals – as in the deliberative forum) is especially valuable. All consultation elements are important and none should be disregarded, but the deliberative forums with the public, stakeholders and staff, and the written submissions, are particularly worthy of consideration because they explore the arguments and the reasons for people’s opinions. H&WFA’s consultation programme conforms to good practice by including both quantitative and qualitative methods through which people could participate and as a means for the Authority to understand the reasons for people’s opinions.
84. Finally, as well as providing the public, stakeholders and staff with sufficient information to consider the proposals intelligently, H&WFRA has also conducted its consultation in a timely manner and is taking account of the outcomes before making a decision. Overall, the three-stage engagement and consultation process compare well with similar consultations undertaken by other fire and rescue services and public bodies and certainly meets the best good practice standards.

Open Questionnaire

Introduction

85. The open questionnaire (with an accompanying Consultation Document) was available online and as a hard copy between 4th July and 9th September 2016. 127 questionnaires were completed; 115 were submitted online and 12 by post.
86. H&WFRS printed and then distributed the consultation documents (with questionnaires, freepost envelopes and posters) to libraries, public buildings, fire stations, businesses, voluntary groups, partners and all emergency services. Copies were also available on request and an online version was available on the H&WFRS website.

Need for Interpretation

87. Although the open questionnaire is an important consultation route that is open to all, due to its very nature it cannot be distributed and completed systematically to a representative sample of Wyre Forest residents. As such, and because the respondent profile is an imperfect reflection of the area's population, the following results have to be interpreted carefully.
88. Crucially, this does not mean that the open questionnaire findings should be discounted: they are analysed in detail in this report and must be taken into account as a demonstration of the strength of feeling of residents who were motivated to put forward their views (and in many cases concerns) about the proposed changes.
89. It is also important to note that the views reported below are those expressed by open questionnaire respondents. In some cases, these views will not be supported by the available evidence - and while ORS has not sought to highlight or correct those that make incorrect statements or assumptions, this should be borne in mind when considering the findings below.

Respondent Profiles

90. Table 1 overleaf provides a breakdown of all 124 *individual* respondents to the online or postal consultation questionnaire. Three responses to the questionnaire indicated that they were from an organisation and are reported separately.

Table 1: Profile table for individual respondents to the consultation questionnaire
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic		All Responses	
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
AGE	Under 25	5	4.9%
	25 to 34	10	9.8%
	35 to 44	22	21.6%
	45 to 54	21	20.6%
	55 to 64	18	17.6%
	65 to 74	18	17.6%
	75 to 84	8	7.8%
	Total valid responses	102	100.0%
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>-</i>
GENDER	Male	48	48.0%
	Female	52	52.0%
	Total valid responses	100	100.0%
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>-</i>
ETHNICITY	White	88	93.6%
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3	3.2%
	Asian or Asian British	1	1.1%
	Any other ethnic group	2	2.1%
	Total valid responses	94	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>-</i>
DISABILITY	With disability	10	10.2%
	No disability	88	89.8%
	Total valid responses	98	100.0%
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>-</i>
EMPLOYED BY H&WFRS?	Yes	3	2.9%
	No	101	97.1%
	Total valid responses	104	100.0%
	<i>Not known</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>-</i>

Interpretation of the Data

91. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers.
92. Graphics are used in this report to make it as user friendly as possible. The pie charts show the proportions (percentages) of residents making relevant responses. Where possible, the colours of the charts have been standardised with a ‘traffic light’ system in which:

Green shades represent positive responses

Beige and purple/blue shades represent neither positive nor negative responses

Red shades represent negative responses

The bolder shades are used to highlight responses at the 'extremes', for example, very satisfied or very dissatisfied

Main Findings

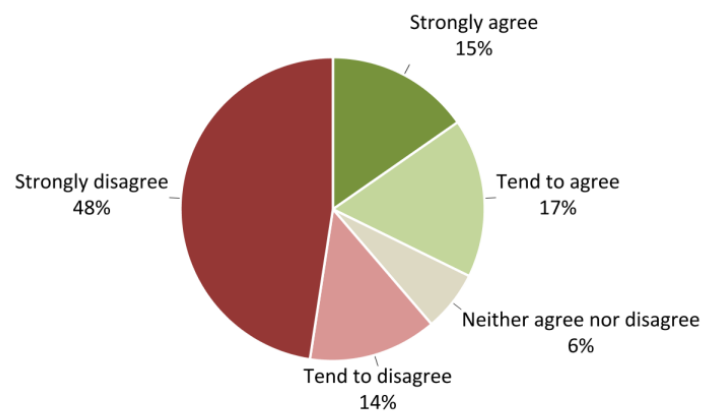
Silverwoods Park

93. Nearly a third (32%) of individual respondents agreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station. However, 6 in 10 (61%) respondents disagreed, and around half (48%) strongly disagreed.

Figure 1: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that Silverwoods Parks is an appropriate location for the new hub station.

Agree/disagree that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station?

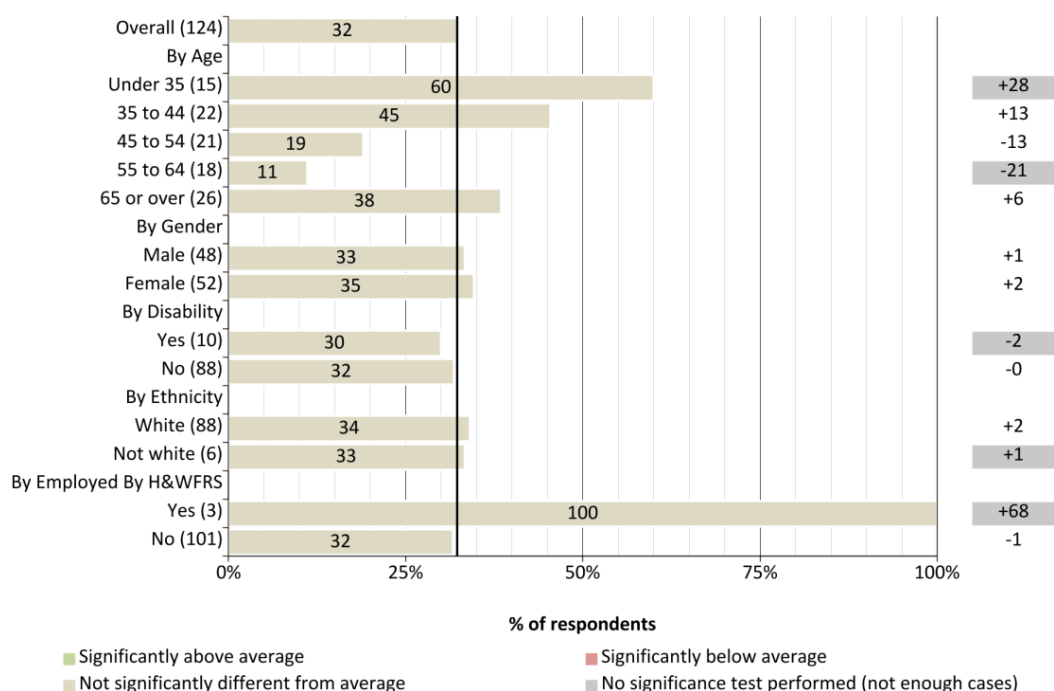
Base: All Individuals (124)



94. A demographic break down of responses to this question is presented overleaf (Figure 2). This shows that respondents under the age of 35 are particularly likely to agree that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station, while those aged 55 -64 are particularly less likely to agree.

Figure 2: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that Silverwoods Parks is an appropriate location for the new hub station: Demographic breakdown

Base: All Individuals (124)



95. Respondents were asked to explain why they agreed or disagreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station. All responses to this question have been read in full and classified (coded) using a standardised code-frame. This approach allows us to present themes that were repeatedly mentioned in a quantifiable manner. Each respondent may present a number of different points or arguments and thus in many cases the overall number of coded comments exceeds the total number of respondents. In this instance, there are 218 coded comments from 107 responses from individuals.

Figure 3: Reasons for support or opposition to Silverwoods Park as a proposed location for the new hub station

Please tell us your reasons.

Coded comment	No. of comments	Percent of individuals
Hub station will lead to increased risk to life/property	25	23%
Disagree with proposed location due to traffic congestion in the area	25	23%
Silverwoods Park is ideally/centrally located	23	21%
Silverwoods Park is too far from Bewdley	21	20%
Hub station will lead to increased response times	19	18%
Generally disagree with proposed closures/ hub station	17	16%
Disagree with closure of Bewdley Fire Station	17	16%
Silverwoods Park is accessible/benefits from good access routes	16	15%
Silverwoods Park results in the least disruption to response times	10	9%
Silverwoods Park is too far from North Kidderminster	6	6%

Hub station will have a negative impact on rural areas	6	6%
Silverwoods Park is too far from Stourport	3	3%
Disagree with closure of Stourport Fire Station	2	2%
Silverwoods Park is too far from Far Forest	2	2%
Other	26	24%

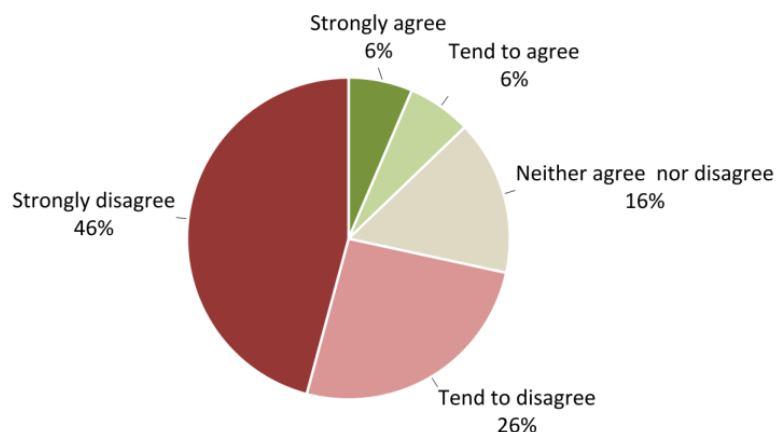
Stourpoint 5

96. Almost three quarters (72%) of respondents disagreed that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station; almost half (46%) strongly disagreed. Only 13% of all respondents agreed.

Figure 4: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station.

Agree/disagree that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station?

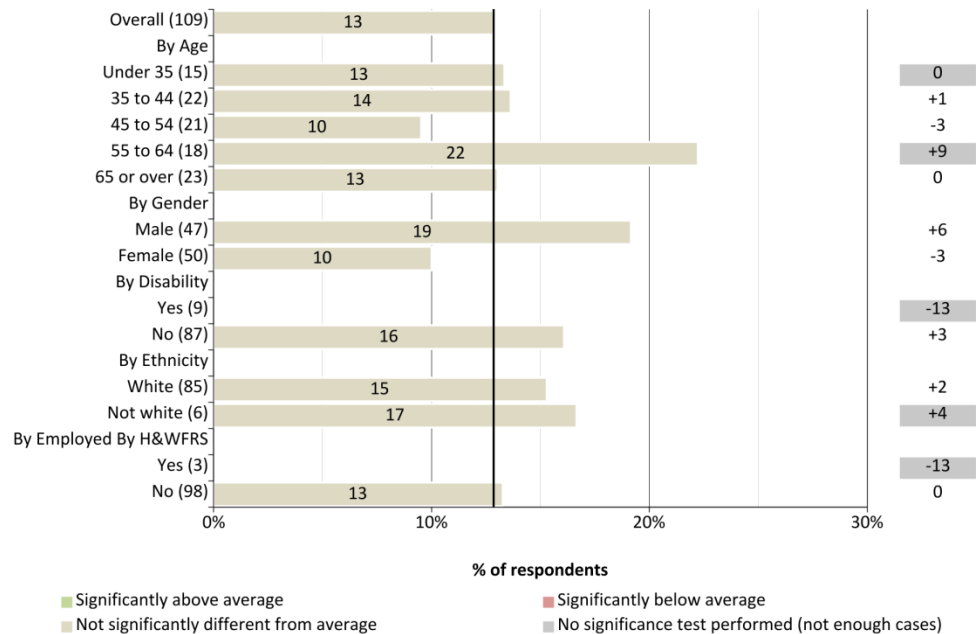
Base: All Individuals (109)



97. A demographic break down of responses to this question is presented overleaf (Figure 5). This shows that respondents aged 55 to 64 are particularly likely to agree that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station, as are male respondents. Disabled respondents are particularly less likely to agree.

Figure 5: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station: Demographic breakdown

Base: All Individuals (109)



98. Respondents were asked why they agreed or disagreed that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for the new hub station. 133 comments have been coded from 81 responses and are presented below.

Figure 6: Reasons for support or opposition to Stourpoint 5 as a proposed location for the new hub station

Please tell us your reasons.

Coded comment	No. of comments	Percent of individuals
Stourpoint 5 is too far from Bewdley	19	23%
Hub station will lead to increased response times	15	19%
Generally disagree with proposed closures/ hub station	12	15%
Hub station will lead to increased risk to life/property	9	11%
Disagree with proposed location due to traffic congestion in the area	9	11%
Stourpoint 5 is accessible/benefits from good access routes	9	11%
Stourpoint 5 is too far from North Kidderminster	8	10%
Disagree with closure of Bewdley Fire Station	8	10%
Stourpoint 5 is ideally/centrally located	7	9%
Stourpoint 5 is in an Enterprise Zone/land should be used for business and employment	4	5%
Stourpoint 5 is closer to Stourport/Bewdley	3	4%
Other	30	37%

Further Comments

99. Respondents were finally asked if there were any further comments that they would like to make about the proposals. 96 comments have been coded from 57 responses and are presented below.

Figure 7: Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Coded comment	No. of comments	Percent of individuals
Hub station will lead to increased risk to life/property	19	33%
Disagree with closure of Bewdley Fire Station	12	21%
Generally disagree with proposed closures/ hub station	8	14%
Proposals are financially motivated	6	11%
Public opinion has been disregarded	6	11%
Hub station will lead to increased response times	5	9%
Generally agree with hub station	5	9%
Suggestion: proposals should include training facilities/capabilities i.e. for the younger generation	3	5%
Hub station will have a negative impact on rural areas	1	2%
Other	31	54%

Commentary - Open Text Responses

100. Many respondents explicitly expressed their opposition to the idea of an emergency services hub for Wyre Forest regardless of where it is sited, mainly on the grounds that response times will lengthen (in some cases because of longer turn-out times for on-call firefighters:

I am worried that response times to incidents will increase...

Leaves much of the Wyre Forest with an increased time to get emergency help

Assuming that the Fire and Rescue Service is going, in part, to be reliant upon "retained" Firefighters, the time taken for them to be on station is going to be far too long. We believe that centralising the main full-time services at this point whilst still keeping the retained stations and crews within easy reach of their station in both Bewdley and Stourport is by far the best alternative to provide safe cover...

Do you really believe that firefighters from Bewdley and Stourport can arrive at the new hub fire station in five minutes as required?

101. Other issues were that: public and firefighter safety would be compromised; retaining three fire stations would also retain local firefighter knowledge; and that the three stations are needed to cater for population increases locally:

Why risk people's lives just trying to save a few quid? Keep our fire stations where they are and stop messing with this service

I do not feel that is a very good idea to close down our existing fire stations in favour of one hub. I feel that this will massively be putting lives at risk and firmly believe that all three towns...should retain their own individual fire stations

Fire and Safety should be based in each of the three towns of the Wyre Forest. In this way, we can keep our retained firefighters who know our area intimately

There is currently a body of retained firefighters in Bewdley who live within 5 minutes of the station and have built up expertise in local issues such as forest fires, river rescue and agricultural related incidents. The 5 minutes rule will mean that only those who live within 5 minutes of the new fire station will be eligible to be kept on. This is a waste of valuable resources, as I would anticipate that most will fail to meet the 5 minute criteria, given the travel distances involved and the need to observe speed limits on their way...

With proposed increases in housing in the Wyre Forest it makes no sense at all to reduce overall coverage. Money would be better spent upgrading existing facilities in order to adequately provide for increasing populations in all towns...

102. Bewdley-specific concerns were raised by many respondents, who were particularly worried about longer response times and their potential impact in the event of an incident in one of the many timber framed properties in the town. Some of the many typical comments were:

If the average attendance time for central Bewdley is currently assumed to be 8 minutes, then this can only be met from the proposed new site if full-time, on-station fire-crews are available and can travel at an average of 40mph to the fire... In reality this is unlikely to be achieved in under 10 minutes and should there be a need for retained fire-crews to attend this will be 15 minutes, nearly double the time it would take retained local firefighters in Bewdley to attend. If the case of a pub kitchen fire at, say, Pound Green or Arley is considered, then the journey time from Bewdley [would be] 13 minutes. But for a full-time fire-crew from Silverwoods or Stourpoint 5 this would take nearly 20 minutes, or 25 minutes with a retained fire-crew... I suggest that after 25 minutes the level of destruction caused by fire to most premises would be fairly catastrophic and if there were persons trapped this could lead to loss of life

As a resident of Bewdley I think that moving the Fire Station away from its present location will lead to longer response times particularly with the building of the large hotel and the water slides at the Safari Park. It already takes a long time to get into Bewdley from Kiddy at times and that is only going to get worse

If you live in Bewdley...I think you might as well say your home will be gone in the event of a fire, especially if the wholetime crew is already on a shout and retained is required...

Bewdley is an historic town with nearly 300 listed buildings... Most of these structures have little or no fire-resistance nor safe means of escape in the event of a fire... With such a high number of these buildings there is a real danger that once a fire takes hold it will spread to adjacent properties... I ask the Fire Service to consider the safety implications of the proposals and to consider that Bewdley and its area in particular is a special case requiring a higher degree of fire-fighting cover due to the historic nature of the majority of the buildings within the town. A major fire, even if accompanied by no loss of life, could prove catastrophic for Bewdley in terms of loss of its heritage value which largely forms the basis for tourism and the local economy

Everyone living in Bewdley knows that this historic Georgian town is a tinderbox. Buildings are close together, many with wooden beams and framework. A major fire would spread in seconds.

103. Indeed, only two comments were made in support of removing the current fire station at Bewdley (in order to assist the re-development of the town):

As a Bewdley resident it seems we would be better served by a hub than by the existing situation. From a town plan perspective Bewdley would benefit from the removal or re-siting of its Fire Station

As a Bewdley resident, Bewdley Fire Station is old and has seen its best; it needs replacing as part of the redevelopment of Bewdley project.

104. Wherever a new hub station is located, there was also worry (though to a lesser degree than in relation to Bewdley) about longer response times to Stourport, Far Forest and Northern Kidderminster. Furthermore, both sites were thought be too far from the specific risks associated with the Severn Valley Railway:

Delayed time to Stourport-on-Severn and outlying areas such as Rock Button, Oak Button Bridge, Far Forest

Too far from Stourport to get to for our fire people to then have to get back to save lives...could be already on scene if only have to get fire engine from current location in Stourport Fire station

It is true that it is central and can provide cover for the three towns but it is not well placed for the northern half of Kidderminster

Emergency calls to outlying areas such as Far Forest would seriously delayed, and lives could be at risk

The Hub proposal does not appear to take into account the specific risk to life and property posed by the Severn Valley Railway. If it was taken into account the hub site would be somewhere else

It's too far away from the Severn Valley Railway which is a cause of fires in the summer dry season. There is a significant risk to life and property if a brush fire were to spread to the predominantly wood buildings in the Hill Farm development...

105. In contrast to the above, though, there was some support for the hub concept, with several respondents commenting that: it is a practical approach financially (and could be replicated elsewhere in the Service); centralisation is sensible, as is the utilisation of the Transitional Grant on offer from Government; and that more joint-working between emergency services within a community facility would be of great benefit to the area:

The only way to save money is to put 3 stations into 1...if you were to start to plan a fire plan for Worcestershire and Herefordshire you would not put fire stations where they are today. This needs to be looked at to reduce future costs

Makes complete sense to centralise the services and utilise government grant that would not otherwise be available

As there is no proposal to reduce staffing levels this is an opportunity the CFA cannot and should not miss

Promoting as one service gives a stronger image of a positive force to uphold safety in Wyre Forest. [It would be a] community facility which people can feel part of.

106. As for the sites themselves, 39 comments were made explicitly in support of Silverwoods Park - chiefly because it is centrally located, accessible and has the least effect on response times. Some typical comments were:

Good access and will not affect response times dramatically

Very little disruption to response times

Response times from Silverwoods are quicker than from Stourport 5. This is crucial to ensure that all fires are responded to as immediately as possible

The site appears to be in a good location for easy access to and from the station for the retained staff turning in and for the responding appliances...

Position appears that bit more central and seems to offer better choice of route alternatives should they be needed

Ideally located by the new link road to reach the north of the town as well as close to Stourport and Sutton Park Road for Bewdley. Best location to cover all towns

Silverwoods...is an appropriate location for such use. There could be a junction off the island for emergency services access only whereas staff and visitors use the back service road. The island currently only has three junctions and the position of the fourth one could be onto plot 'L'... The suburb site allows for easy access to surrounding areas in contrast to the town sited stations

As two thirds of the incidents they attend are in the Kidderminster area it makes sense to choose the site that is slightly closer to Kidderminster.

107. On the more negative side, a couple of respondents were concerned that Silverwoods Park is located in a residential area, meaning a new fire station could be disruptive to many people:

Silverwoods is a residential area. The hub and training facility will become noisy and will be unwelcome by the residents of Silverwoods...you should look to build it between the three towns in a commercial area which has better access onto roads. This will not attract complaints from residents.

108. Stourpoint 5 tended to be preferred by many of those in Stourport and Bewdley because of its closer proximity to those towns and the better road infrastructure around it - and, regarding the point made above in relation to Silverwoods Park being in a residential area, because it is further away from domestic premises:

If you HAVE to close the three existing stations...this is the ideal location as it provides the best access to the arterial route from Kidderminster to Stourport and Bewdley

It is closer to both Stourport and Bewdley and the road infrastructure is far better

Stourpoint 5 is further removed from dwellings and will be less disruptive to residential areas. Also the likelihood of children in an area of response vehicles should be considered.

109. A few people also commented on the increased visibility of Stourpoint 5 compared to Silverwoods Park; this was considered important if H&WFRS intends the proposed hub to be a community facility:

While [Silverwoods Park] provides good access to most areas of Wyre Forest it will be somewhat 'tucked away' and out of sight for much of the community. Stourpoint 5 is a much more visible location to the passing community...

A much more visible location providing the best turn out and turn in capability for all services. This location will ensure many people in the community will see what should be a facility for the community to be proud of

Prominent position where the public will know where it is.

110. On the flip side, respondents noted that: the land may be better used for business and commercial enterprise; predicted response times from Stourpoint 5 are worse than those from Silverwoods Park; and that the lack of population in the immediate vicinity may make it difficult to recruit on-call firefighters:

The site is needed in the Enterprise Zone for further employment development

The site is currently being redeveloped for manufacturing and distribution use. The whole site has got future plans in place for Specsavers to expand. I would not like to see this central location in the South Kidderminster Enterprise Zone not used for business...

Stourport 5 has less of a modular response time, which means it can't respond to fires as quick as Silverwoods

This is the worst location; too long response times to Bewdley and Kidderminster

Nobody lives near the station, so on-call recruitment will be a massive issue.

111. Finally in terms of location, it should be noted that an issue frequently raised in relation to both sites was that the area in which they are located is often congested and thus difficult to navigate. Some of the many typical comments were:

The location is situated on a notorious busy road where traffic frequently queues. What will happen when our retained firefighters need to get there and then get the pump out?

I remain concerned that the road both potential sites are on is subject to significant congestion

Certain times of the day it will be very difficult for people to drive to the station to get on the fire engine; it takes me 30 minutes to get through Kidderminster to Stourport some days

Traffic on the Stourport Road is bad all the time. Hopefully this will be improved when the new road opens but we do not know that for sure

Response time could be compromised because of the busy route from that location

It is a very busy road and it could delay the fire engines from reaching the emergencies.

112. As for other issues, a few people raised issues around the consultation, most notably that it is a 'fait accompli' and that public concerns - especially in Bewdley - have not been heeded:

I know that many, many people in Bewdley feel the decision has already been made

This decision has already been made so the consultation is a farce just like the previous round. The people making these decisions don't care what residents think...

The consultation has been guided by the fire service and what they want. No one is listening to us the public and local Councillors...

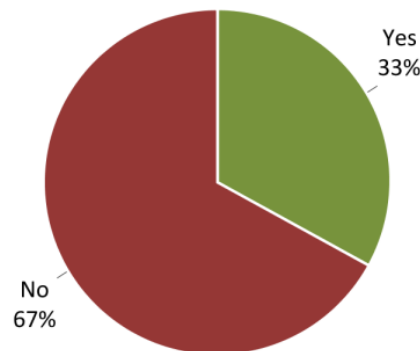
Equalities Impact

113. A third (33%) of respondents believe that there are positive or negative impacts relating to Human Rights or equalities that need to be taken into account when considering the location of the new hub station.

Figure 7: Are there any positive or negative impacts that you believe we should take into account?

As a public body, Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority has a duty to take into account human rights and also the impact of its decisions on people with protected characteristics, which under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. Are there any positive or negative impacts that you believe we should take into account?

Base: All Individuals (106)



114. Most of those who commented on equalities issues again took the opportunity to lobby for the status quo - though there were a handful of comments around the implications for pregnant women, the elderly and infirm, H&WFRS firefighters and those living near to the Severn Valley Railway:

Elderly and infirm residents already vulnerable due to location of properties and existing access. Increased response time heightens vulnerability

With a lower response rate, some vulnerable people may suffer the consequences, such as pregnant women

Rejecting this unnecessary proposal will remove the unfair bias against the retained firemen/firewomen of Bewdley who will inevitably lose their jobs if it were to proceed

The right to life of those people who live in close vicinity to the Severn Valley Railway.

Organisation Responses

115. Responses from organisations typically represent the views of many individuals and are presented separately in this report. ORS received three questionnaires that indicated they were from the following organisations:

Staffordshire FRS, Corporate Safety Plan;

Salvation Army – West Midlands Emergency Response Team; and

Bewdley Town Council.

Overview

116. Organisations were informed on the questionnaire that their views may be published and were asked to provide further details about their organisation, including what the organisation represents, the specific group or department, the area the organisation covers and how the views of members were gathered. Not all organisations supplied this information, but the names of organisations are included.
117. Results for all questions have been presented below to provide a contrast between views from organisations and individuals. As it is not appropriate to report percentages where the sample size is so small, responses from organisations have been summarised to provide an outline of their views.

Silverwoods Park

118. Of the three organisations that responded to the open consultation questionnaire, two agreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station. This was on the grounds that the proposed site is in *a central location with good access routes to risk areas* (Staffordshire FRS Corporate Safety Plan) and that it *will not affect response times dramatically* (Salvation Army – West Midlands Emergency Response Team).
119. Bewdley Town Council strongly disagreed that Silverwoods Park is an appropriate location for the new hub station insofar as its town has many timber-framed houses and that *it can and will take up to 10 minutes to travel from Kidderminster to Bewdley*.

Stourpoint 5

120. All three organisations disagreed that Stourpoint 5 is an appropriate location for a new hub station because it is not sufficiently central. There was concern that a hub station at Stourpoint 5 *may affect response times into the area of greater risk and demand* (Staffordshire FRS Corporate Safety Plan).

Equalities Impact

121. No organisations believed that there to be any positive or negative impacts relating to Human Rights or equalities.

Further Comments

122. Bewdley Town Council suggested that H&WFRS should engage in *more consultation with the public in each town and surrounding areas*.

Forum with Members of the Public

Introduction

123. A total of 32 randomly selected members of the public from across the whole Wyre Forest area attended a 2.5 hour forum that considered all the evidence relating to the two proposed hub locations while also having a more detailed review of the fire and rescue service and its resources and roles.
124. The meeting was thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues. Participants were initially given a presentation of the issues prior to group discussions during which they debated the merits and disadvantages of the two proposed hub locations. Some photographs of these discussions can be seen below.





The Discussion

125. During the initial part of the forum (when participants were given a presentation outlining H&WFRA's hub concept and proposed locations), residents' questions and comments highlighted their initial concerns. These were mainly focused around:

The importance of response times and the implications of lengthening them for both first and support appliances

What is the significance of the ten minute response time standard?

Will the longer response time increase risks in these areas? Will the incident trends start to go up again?

If there's a house fire would the first crew be able to start a rescue before the second crew arrives?

How predicted response times from the new hub have been determined and the 'dangers' of relying on projections

The traffic from Stourport into Kidderminster is worse than the other way around. Have the timed runs been done both ways?

At the moment we know what the response times are from the three stations but from the new one they are only projections aren't they?

Whether Bewdley and Stourport firefighters will be able to reach a new hub within the required turn-in time (and the impact of not being able to do this on their ability to continue in their roles)

I can't see the Bewdley crew getting into Kidderminster in six minutes...how will they ever get there in time to get on the machine?

Will the Stourport and Bewdley firefighters be able to continue in their roles?

The (potentially underestimated) cost of the hub and the feasibility of using the earmarked finances to refurbish the three current stations

We thought the cost would be a lot higher than you have anticipated

Where is the rest of the money for the hub coming from?

Have you looked at how long you might be able to maintain the other three stations for if you spend the £5.9m doing that?

The possibility that the number of vehicles at the hub may be reduced in future (resulting in a less resilient service for the Wyre Forest)

My main concern would be that you are guaranteed three fire engines at the three sites currently. If it moved to the one site couldn't the powers that be just say 'we only need two'?

We are concerned about the retention of all four fire appliances. There may be no plans at present but that does not preclude plans in future. If all four appliances are used so infrequently at the same time there could be a strong argument made to remove one

Levels of cover during simultaneous incidents

If you have a major fire I guess you have to send all your local resources to it? What happens if there's a fire in Bewdley at the same time?

Other locations considered

Has Kidderminster's existing site been considered as a location?

How the transition period will work

How will the switch over to the new location work? Will it be seamless for members of the public?

The extent to which fire engines will be able to negotiate heavy traffic in the area

Is there enough capability for the fire engines to get through the traffic around here?

126. Furthermore, a few participants were concerned that H&WFRA has discarded the objections raised, especially by Bewdley residents, during the first two consultations in taking its decision to pursue an emergency services hub station in principle - describing the situation as a 'stitch-up' that has been in the pipeline for a considerable time:

You've pushed all the petitions and objections from the previous consultations away and you're not giving the people in Bewdley what they want which is to keep their fire station...or at least a satellite station

The closure of Bewdley has been planned for a long time, as has the amalgamation of the site...it is what it is but we feel, for Bewdley, it's a stitch up.

127. Ultimately though, most participants recognised and accepted the case for a hub station, even several from Bewdley who commented that in the event of future closures (which, they felt, would be inevitable in the light of financial constraints) their local station would likely be most at-risk - and that the hub might at least mitigate against the loss of the fire engine:

We think the hub is a good idea based on the figures and response times, which won't be much affected

We recognise the case for the hub and that the role of the Fire Service has changed dramatically

In future, Bewdley Fire Station would be most likely to close of all of them and we would lose the fire engine. Although the hub is further away, it's probably got more longevity than Bewdley and will allow the fire engine to be kept.

128. In terms of the two proposed locations, the vast majority of participants opted for Silverwoods Park over Stourpoint 5 on the grounds that: predicted response times are better; it is nearer Kidderminster, which has the highest call volume of the three areas; it is closer to hard-to-reach and deprived areas such as Hagley; and it is not as isolated, which was considered important in terms of both staff welfare and community interaction:

There is little difference in response times as the sites are close together but Silverwoods is closer to Kidderminster. Hagley...it would be sensible to have the site slightly closer to there

Most incidents are in Kidderminster so it would be sensible to have the closest one to there

Silverwoods would have better access to hard-to-reach areas in Kidderminster and around. Also, Stourpoint 5 might isolate it from community; the community would have more opportunity to make use of the facility in Silverwoods

Between the two sites there's not a great deal of difference as they are very close to each other. From the point of view of the staff it would probably better to have more facilities around so that would be Silverwoods.

129. Furthermore, several said that they could see little to differentiate the two locations but that they had opted for Silverwoods because they trusted the judgement of H&WFRS's officers in designating it as their preferred option:

We thought both sites are suitable but we would go for Silverwoods

It looks like Silverwoods is the best option and we trust the Service to make the proper judgement on that.

130. The minority that preferred Stourpoint 5 did so because it: has better road links than Silverwoods; is less residential and thus less disruptive; and is not as congested traffic-wise:

Why is Silverwoods the better option when it seems like there are better road links around Stourpoint 5?

The area around Silverwoods is always clogged up with traffic which will probably get worse because it's a growing residential area

Silverwoods is a residential area as well as industrial. Are the people living there going to want a great big fire station there with all the noise etc.? Here it's always going to be industrial so it seems more suitable for that reason...

131. Finally, a very small number of participants felt they could not make a definitive judgement before knowing the relative cost of the two sites:

There's great concern about cost...we can't access sensitive information about this and we are concerned that we are not being told whole story about the relative expense of the two sites.

Meetings with Staff

Forums with Firefighters

Introduction

132. Members of staff were invited to participate by H&WFRS in open staff meetings held at Kidderminster Fire Station and 26 attended - five at Kidderminster Fire Station on July 14th and then 21 at the same venue on July 19th. The latter session primarily comprised Bewdley and Stourport-on-Severn on-call firefighters.

First Forum Discussion

133. There were many questions about the hub proposal, covering: how the two sites were chosen and whether others were available; the extent of the influence of Government on the proposal and whether it would have been pursued otherwise; the value of the Kidderminster site for redevelopment and the possibility of getting full value from a sale; and whether SARA will pay for the space it occupies in the hub.

134. There was a general feeling that once a hub is established it would not be necessary or sustainable to maintain four pumps at the hub station, partly because:

There is little need for four pumps and half the RDS crews will never get a call!

Even so, one retained firefighter said:

I'm not against this!

135. The forum was puzzled as to why response times from Silverwoods Park and Stourpoint 5 apparently differ so markedly when they are really rather close.

136. There was a popular suggestion that H&WFRS should measure its response times as many/most other FRSs do - by 'starting the clock' when the first fire engine is despatched by the Control Centre rather than when the Control Centre first receives an emergency call (which makes H&WFRS's response times longer than would be the case if the point of timing matched that of other FRSs). This may be something the Fire Authority may wish to consider in terms of reporting its performance targets and standards in a more comparative manner.

137. There were many other questions, though these did not amount to objections to either of the proposed sites - for example:

Will this secure jobs in the long run?

What will the shift patterns be?

Could the hub accommodate an ambulance as well?

Will the hub have six bays?

Will the total response area be the same as now?

How will the Silverwoods Park residents feel about having a fire station near them?

138. The forum felt that the distribution of risk across Wyre Forest implies that the hub station should 'move into Kidderminster', but overall the five participants readily accepted the principle of the hub and also accepted that both sites are reasonable and feasible.

Second Forum Discussion

139. It was clear in the second discussion (with Bewdley and Stourport on-call staff) that many firefighters remain opposed to the issue of principle in relation to whether H&WFRA should establish an emergency services hub for the Wyre Forest. Participants strongly reiterated the same concerns as expressed during both the first and second stage consultations, for example:

The potential for longer response times to certain areas in future and, especially, back-up support for the Kidderminster wholetime appliance to ensure firefighter safety

Are the response time differences deemed safe? Is it acceptable from the Service and Fire Authority point of view?

The first pump will get there but they won't be able to do anything...and people will be waiting far longer for the second pump

When you look at the second pump response time that's when it seriously drops.

Response times being further compromised by longer turn-in times for on-call firefighters - which in themselves may lead to people being forced to leave the Service

The larger pool of firefighters is all well and good but it doesn't say anything about longer turn-in times

None of us live within five minutes of the new hub...and there's even a lot of retained firefighters in Kidderminster who would struggle

Response times to the station are going to be longer because we'll have to drive and will be stuck in traffic. At the moment we are able to run to the station

If I move house and it increases my turn-in time to the hub, that would mean I'm finished as a retained firefighter wouldn't it?

The possibility of reducing the number of resources at the hub in future as it is 'easier' to remove resources from a central hub than it is from smaller, individual fire stations

So in the next five years you can't see a pump going from the Wyre Forest? What if the fourth pump only goes out five times a year?

On-call de-motivation: it was anticipated that many current Bewdley and Stourport firefighters would leave the Service as a result of attending fewer incidents - exacerbating current RDS availability problems and resulting in a loss of skill and experience

Our biggest concern is that firefighters from Bewdley and Stourport won't get there in time and it will always be too late for them. They will be demotivated and will leave...

If you recruit a person close to the hub, that's an existing staff member who lives further out being pushed out of the service

How is it beneficial for us if we only get on a truck three or four times a year?!

No-one wants to leave...in this room there's over 100 years of service and experience and that shouldn't have to be lost.

Competencies would be difficult to maintain as a result of fewer incident attendances

It could mean people can't maintain their competencies and skills as they're not going out on the truck often enough because they live too far away from the hub. How can you ensure people keep these competencies?

Some firefighters would have the additional expense of having to purchase and run a car to turn-in (as they can get to their current station on foot)

Transport to the station; some are one car families. What if the wife has the car, what happens then?

Will there be any resources available for people who currently haven't got a second car? It could be an expense that some people can't afford.

More and better joint-working will only really be feasible between wholetime firefighters and staff from other organisations due to the infrequency with which on-call staff are on station

It's the wholetime crews that tend to build the relationships with the PCSOs in places where this is happening already...it would be a lot more difficult for the retained to do that because they'll be in the stations so infrequently.

140. On-call recruitment was also raised as a significant issue once more. As aforementioned, it was predicted that many of the existing Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters would leave the Service following the closure of their local stations, and there was significant concern that the recruitment of new on-call firefighters would be challenging in light of existing difficulties:

You can't recruit now so what makes you confident that you'll be able to do it in future around the two sites? They are struggling to recruit to Kidderminster now...

141. As such, it was suggested that H&WFRA must be open to new, innovative and creative recruitment strategies to ensure the on-call role is as attractive as possible to a wide range of people:

Going forward it has to be about looking at creative, different ways of staffing retained so that it becomes more attractive to existing and future staff. It could even be about making it so attractive that people would be tempted to leave their main jobs to do it...

Increased training opportunities would be a good thing and would be a motivator to keep people in the service.

142. Also, the need for a sufficiently large pool of firefighters was stressed, with some suggesting that current numbers will need to be maintained to crew all four fire engines plus special appliances - again based on experience both within and outside Wyre Forest:

Bromsgrove have about 20 firefighters for one appliance and they still struggle

14 crew seems to be quite comfortable to keep an appliance on the run. Any lower and that puts pressure on us and people start to leave

There's a big pool of engines - including the specials - that need to be crewed, so the current pool of 29 is probably about right. While 'natural wastage' sounds good on paper in terms of getting numbers down to appropriate levels, in reality we will still need that number (and possibly even more) in future.

143. The group generally felt unable to make a judgement on the relative merits and drawbacks of the two proposed sites, citing the need for more information and answers to questions prior to doing so. As such, few comments were made on either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5, though participants noted: the congestion on Stourport Road; the lack of recruitment opportunities in the area; and, with specific reference to Silverwoods, that its residential nature may not be conducive to the siting of a noisy fire station there:

The roads around the two sites are heavily congested...they are busy all day long in my experience which will affect turn-in and response times

You will never be able to recruit enough people from that area. I used to work there; I know what it's like

The training facilities that we will have here - what will they include? This could be a problem for neighbours of the station as they are noisy and make a lot of mess in some cases with smoke etc. And any mitigating features will cost quite a lot to install.

144. Furthermore, several questions were asked around: potential savings; timeframes; the saleability of the three existing sites; and the futureproofing of the hub station:

I thought we needed to make savings in staff not buildings because they're two different budgets so how does this make those savings if we're keeping the same number of firefighters?

What timeframe are we looking at?

Are you confident about selling the existing three sites?

Would the station be future proofed to cover all eventualities in terms of shift systems?

145. One alternative suggestion was made whereby H&WFRA would: *put a staff rider out there to plug the gaps at different retained stations as opposed to bringing everyone together in one location. Retained with full-time jobs are expected to drop those jobs to attend a fire, why can't officers do the same?*

146. Finally, the firefighters commented on the consultation - and particularly on: H&WFRA's decision not to hold public meetings in either Bewdley or Stourport; the lack of information in the consultation document on, for example, the 'pros and cons' of and rationale for choosing the two sites and the financial implications of the development for the Authority; and the 'misleading' figures used to justify the proposal:

Why were there no public meetings in Stourport and Bewdley...and where do people hear about it?

There's nothing much in there about the pros and cons of the site options. Most of the people who respond to the consultation will be seeing this document as opposed to attending a meeting and getting more detail so it could have been more comprehensive

What's the rationale for the two sites? It feels like they have been plucked from anywhere without any justification, and there must be some...

There should be more information in the consultation document about how much the Service will have to contribute to the building of the Hub. At the moment it only mentions the £2.38m transformational grant

If you don't include the out of station ground and over the border incidents then the figures are misleading because they only include those on the station grounds.

Overall Summary

147. The first and smaller staff forum felt able to accept all the proposals, though the FBU representative who was present emphasised the Union's anxieties that longer response times would endanger the public and firefighters and that on-call staff would be unable to sustain their jobs. Following their discussion, the first forum agreed with the principle of a single hub site and accepted that both sites under consideration were feasible.

148. The second staff forum was far more negative than the first. Participants remained firmly opposed to the principle of an emergency hub services station for the Wyre Forest (and reiterated many of the concerns and issues they had raised at previous meetings) - and felt unable to make a judgement on the site options without further information and answers to their operational questions.

Public Meetings

Introduction

149. Although they were open meetings, both the public meetings had relatively few participants: there were only seven in the first (two firefighters, two Bewdley town councillors, two district councillors and a firefighter's spouse) and 15 in the second (a mixture of local residents, councillors and firefighters).

First Meeting

150. Although it was a public meeting, the FBU was relatively prominent in the questioning and discussions. As in the staff forums and the FBU's written submission, the Union's main concerns were that:

A single hub would lengthen response times dangerously and unacceptably - with longer attendance times for the first and support fire engines;

Current on-call staff would be disadvantaged because they could not meet required turn-out times to the hub;

Lengthening turn-out times would dangerously delay the mobilisation of support fire engines;

There is no certainty that a single hub base would improve on-call recruitment and retention; and

Creating the hub will mean that the fourth fire engine currently available will soon be lost because it will be so little used when the wholetime crews attend more incidents from the new base.

151. Many of these points were taken up in discussion, during which various questions were raised. For example, the meeting was confused about why response times from the two sites apparently differ so markedly when they are quite close - and questioned why Stourpoint 5 is even being considered given that attendances are likely to be lengthier than they would be from Silverwoods Park:

Given that the two sites are only about 800 metres apart, why do the response times differ so much?

Why are you considering Stourport 5 if it has longer response times than Silverwoods?

152. On the other hand, it was also asked: *how will Silverwoods residents feel about having a fire station close by?*

153. Other questions were around: crewing numbers at the proposed hub; H&WFRS's strategies for recruiting on-call firefighters; and the implications of response time targets:

Will the wholetime engine have a six-person crew or will it be only four?

How do you plan to recruit retained crews since it's not an attractive role?

What is the real impact of an increased response time on deaths and casualties?

What about the 25% of times you don't achieve your response target? How long do they take and how does that performance compare with other FRSs?

154. Those seeking clarity on the meaning of, and risks associated with, response times suggested (like some in the staff forums) that H&WFRS should measure its response times as many/most other FRSs do - from when the first fire engine is despatched by the Control Centre rather than from when the Control Centre first receives an emergency call (which makes H&WFRS's response times seem longer than if its timings matched that of other FRSs). As one participant said:

There should be a single standardised system for measuring and comparing response times properly!

155. As such, and as we have said in relation to the staff forums, the reporting of response times is something the Fire Authority may wish to consider in terms of reporting its performance targets and standards in a more comparative manner.

156. Finally, some other constructive suggestions were made as follows:

You could use smaller fire engines? Would the FBU be happy with that?

You could use 'staff riders' to increase the availability of the on-call fire engines when they are short.

Second Meeting

157. The second public meeting was less critical than the first, though again there were questions, comments and concerns around:

The effect of traffic and roadworks on turn-out and response times

One of my concerns would be how will the retained firefighters get to the station on time in normal traffic conditions

Worcestershire is riddled with roadworks. Does this have an effect on turnout and response times?

The possibility that the number of vehicles at the hub may be reduced in future (resulting in a less resilient service for the Wyre Forest)

The four fire engines will relocate to the hub but how long do you envisage all four being available at the hub? Five years, ten years, indefinitely?

The lack of Ambulance Service involvement currently, whether a new hub would be 'future proofed' to be able to cater for this in future and whether this might represent a waste of resources if the Service never comes on board

Do you intend to build in room for the ambulance service in future? If you do and they never do come on board won't that be money wasted?

The differing types of incidents experienced within Wyre Forest

We have the river, Severn Valley Railway etc. here in Wyre Forest. What are the statistics for those types of incidents?

The figures used in the consultation document

The figures aren't true. That's not the total number of incidents Bewdley is dealing with. It's the number on its own patch and not the total number...because it goes out to other areas.

158. Other issues raised were around: the relative cost of the two sites; the possible unviability of both locations in future; implementation timescales; and the possibility of making financial savings through resource reductions rather than station closures:

Could there be a scenario whereby neither of the locations are viable in future?

Is there anything else that could be done in future...could some of the savings be made through resourcing levels instead of closing the stations?

159. Overall, there was some recognition that, in reality, response times to Bewdley, Stourport and other outlying areas may not be too dissimilar from the hub than they are from the three existing stations currently given the significant role the Kidderminster wholetime appliance plays in attending incidents elsewhere:

If an appliance didn't turn out from the local station it would be at the higher end of the current response times anyway. So the hub might put up some response times but not others compared with current times because they might be coming from further away anyway

Bewdley and Stourport have only got one fire engine each, so it's obvious that Kidderminster will be attending a lot of incidents in those two areas to make up the response.

Furthermore, while not going as far as to wholeheartedly support the proposed hub, others could see the logic in accepting the Government grant on offer to develop it in light of the significant refurbishment costs that would be required otherwise – possibly necessitating the closure of one or both of Bewdley and Stourport:

We can see the positives and negatives. But if we don't do it, money will have to be found to refurbish the three stations in future. So on the one hand I'm not willing to say 'yes, this is a brilliant idea', but I'm reluctant to reject the money on offer as this could

end up with the Service having to close one or two of Bewdley and Stourport because it has to put all the money available into refurbishing Kidderminster.

Overall Summary

160. The first meeting was opposed to or sceptical about the proposals. The main concerns expressed echoed those of the FBU: the impact of longer response times and consequential increased risks.
161. The second meeting was less negative than the first. While there were concerns about H&WFRS 'putting all of its eggs in one basket', there was also recognition that the transformational grant on offer from Government represents an opportunity to mitigate against future significant refurbishment costs at the three current fire stations and possible closures.

Written Submissions

Written Submissions

162. During the formal consultation process, six written submissions were received, as shown in the table below.

Type of Correspondent	Number of respondents/signatories
District/Town/Parish Councils	3
Wyre Forest Residents	2
Representative Bodies	1
Total	6

163. ORS has read the submissions and summarised them in this chapter; none have been disregarded even if they are not expressed in a 'formal' way.

Overall Summary

164. Of the six submissions, the FBU and one resident strongly oppose the proposal for a hub station and reject both sites as unsuitable operationally - and, in addition, because Silverwoods Park is in a sensitive residential area. The FBU believes the longer response times would be unsafe in endangering both the public and firefighters and in jeopardising the roles of existing on-call staff. The Union also feels a hub is unnecessary for joint emergency services working and will not improve services to the public.
165. In contrast, four submissions either strongly support or accept the hub as a good thing overall - and two of them prefer Stourport 5 as more suitable than Silverwoods. The Corporate Team at Wyre Forest District Council supports all the proposals and considers Stourport 5 to be a more appropriate site in planning terms. Rock Parish Council also supports the hub as an important opportunity and prefers Stourport 5 as a better location from which to cover Stourport and Bewdley. Kidderminster Town Council and one resident accept the hub proposal as reasonable, but (ideally) the resident would prefer two wholetime pumps or the use of larger crews on the wholetime engine.
166. The submissions are summarised more fully below. It is important to note that the following section is a report of the views expressed by submission contributors. In some cases, the views may not be supported by the available evidence; but it is not ORS's role to highlight or correct them.

Summaries of Written Submissions

DISTRICT, TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

Corporate Leadership Team, Wyre Forest District Council

Wyre Forest District Council's Corporate Leadership Team (henceforth the CLT) welcomes H&WFRA's decision in principle to invest in an emergency services hub station for Wyre Forest because:

It would be a multi-million pound investment in rationalising the public sector estate in Wyre Forest;

There is a need for further housing development on sustainable brownfield sites;

It provides an opportunity to redevelop prominent town centre sites in Bewdley, Stourport and Kidderminster; and

The concept is innovative and would better meet modern requirements in Wyre Forest.

Both of the two possible locations are 're-development sites' within the Local Development Order (LDO) for the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park, but planning permission for a station would be required since it is not one of the Order's designated uses.

While average response times might increase, both locations would mean shorter response times for some parts of Kidderminster. But why are modelled response times to Stourport from Stourpoint 5 worse than from Silverwoods Park when Stourpoint 5 is nearly a mile closer to Stourport?

There are two reasons for preferring the Stourport 5 site:

Health and Safety Executive advice for developments near hazardous installations (PADHI) is relevant to the Silverwoods Park site since an incident at the Ashland Chemicals site could put the hub out of action when the first response to any incident would be expected to come from there; and

Completing the redevelopment of Stourpoint 5 would be more advantageous since there is likely to be other market interest for the Silverwoods Park site, which would be preferable in terms of employment opportunities.

Kidderminster Town Council

Kidderminster Town Council notes that development of a Wyre Forest emergency services hub station will authorise a new system of fire cover in Wyre Forest which could result in response times to some incidents being two minutes and 30 seconds more than is now the case. It accepts that changes will be made and that a new hub will be built. It also accepts that Bewdley Fire Station will close and that the building will be demolished as part of the deal that has provided the town with a very large Health and GP Centre.

The Council does have concerns though, mainly around: longer response times (especially at peak periods); turn-in times for on-call firefighters; and traffic congestion around the two proposed sites.

Rock Parish Council

Rock Parish Council (henceforth RPC) believes that decisions should aim to achieve the best possible outcomes for everyone, but especially for those whose well-being and life are threatened. It would be counter-productive to not make the best use of the available government funding and it is untenable to retain the old infrastructure with its high maintenance costs - so the opportunity for a hub station should be seized providing there is real joined-up thinking and organisation of the services under its roof, and it is not just a place for disparate organisations!

H&WFRS's statistics show that incidents are more likely to happen in Kidderminster than in Stourport or Bewdley, but the incident and risk levels should have been calculated per-head-of-population.

The Council says that compared with incidents in Kidderminster, those in Stourport, and especially Bewdley, are more likely to have longer response times from the proposed hub - but that average times data is distorted by the larger number of incidents closer to the hub. Furthermore, Bewdley Fire Station has responded to incidents to the north of the town and the proposed new hub would probably lead to a significant lengthening of this time.

The use of the A451 for an increasing number of facilities has increased congestion and RPC is concerned that further developments mean that emergency response vehicles will be delayed at certain times of day.

Although Stourpoint 5 would have higher average response times than Silverwoods Park, RPC argues that it would be better for Stourport and Bewdley.

RPC complains that the consultation document does not include feedback from the first consultation. It supports the use of new technology, particularly drone equipment to survey and report incidents quickly without jeopardising the safety of firefighters.

REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Fire Brigades Union

The Hub in Principle

The FBU of Hereford and Worcester (henceforth H&WFBU) believes the fire and rescue service should be fully funded by government and not be forced into 'blue light' collaboration with other emergency services.

H&WFBU does not wholly oppose a 'blue light' hub in Kidderminster, but it rejects the closure of Stourport and Bewdley fire stations because the closures would lengthen response times by 2 minutes and 30 seconds in parts of the Wyre Forest. Since Wyre Forest

fire appliances respond to 'life risk' incidents in roughly 10 minutes, they are in the right locations.

H&WFBU says the public has not been given the full facts about the number of incidents attended by the Wyre Forest appliances - for example, the consultation document states that:

The total number of incidents in the Kidderminster area is 597 per year – but the Kidderminster crews attended 864 incidents, including those outside their area

Bewdley's on-call appliance is unavailable for 33% of time during the day, with Kidderminster on 6% and Stourport on 7% – but the true proportions are 67%, 94% and 93% respectively.

H&WFRS seems to believe that a shiny new fire station and closer working with other 'blue light' organisations is more important than responding to emergencies in a safe and timely manner.

The FBU refutes the 'so-called benefits' of a new hub in the following ways:

Inter-agency collaboration and training does not require new buildings and the closure of three stations;

The hub will not make better use of public service resources, but will weaken the service with longer response times;

It will not achieve greater resilience because response times will increase for the first pump and increase even more for two-pump pre-determined attendances;

There is no evidence that the hub would provide more sustainable on-call (retained) emergency cover than at present - partly because the hub will have only one catchment area (rather than three as now) and existing crews will no longer be able to respond quickly enough from their homes to the new location;

If crew turn-out times are increased then the first appliance to attend could have to wait for 20-30 minutes for support from the second pump; and if the wholetime pump was in Shelsley Beauchamp and an emergency occurred in Kidderminster, then the initial response time could be 20 minutes;

It will not improve the management of community risks because such management takes place already, including inter-agency cooperation and information-sharing;

Providing facilities and space for community and voluntary sector partners is not a core priority for H&WFRS when budgets are being reduced severely; and

Likewise, reducing its carbon footprint and improving environmental efficiency are not key priorities for the fire service.

Hub Location

The FBU says that neither site is appropriate for a Wyre Forest hub station because:

Attendance time increases of 1 minute 37 seconds (Silverwoods) and 2 minutes 30 seconds (Stourpoint 5) will endanger residents (and their properties) and firefighters;

The first appliance will reach fewer property fires within 10 minutes – for example, now the first pump gets to 10 of 22 building fires in Stourport within 10 minutes, but this would fall to 5.4 and 5.3 times respectively from Silverwoods and Stourport 5;

There is no evidence that H&WFRS would be able to recruit enough RDS staff to crew three RDS fire appliances; and

Silverwoods is residential area where people will dislike fire appliance mobilisations.

Overall

The hub would improve links with other services and provide better facilities and work environment with lower running costs, but its negative impacts far outweigh the positives, particularly in relation to increased response times to 'life risk' incidents.

The H&WFRS has no data on the effect of increased response times on fatalities and casualties - and the Union believes that such analysis should be done immediately.

In any case, ensuring firefighter and community safety will be more difficult if members of the public are waiting up to 2 minutes 30 seconds longer for a wholetime appliance; and if on-call crews have longer turn-out times it will mean full-time crews waiting much longer for support; both these factors will increase risks.

LOCAL RESIDENTS

Resident 1

The resident supports the multi-emergency services hub, but it would be of more strategic value if located in Kidderminster - given that most calls are generated there, and that most RTCs happen on main roads leading from Kidderminster towards Birmingham, Bridgnorth, Stourbridge and Wolverhampton. Moving to the 'old sugar beet factory' site will adversely affect response times to the north of the area, though the new relief road will improve attendance times to incidents towards Worcester.

The resident 'can only see the sense of a hub being a centre of excellence in the Wyre Forest'. The only real concern is about having only one wholetime fire engine covering over such a large area and whether sufficient firefighters would be immediately available to safely operate in a hostile environment. The resident proposed either two wholetime fire engines or the use of larger crew on the first responding machine.

Resident 2

The resident objects to the proposed hub and rejects the 'ridiculous' argument that it will impact on response times only two or three times a month. They say that 'anyone who has ever tried to travel from Kidderminster to the top end of Bewdley in the summer or worse still, get round the Gilgal and over the bridge to Arley Kings, knows that those extra minutes mean their house or life is lost'. They also comment on the 'extra danger the firefighters are facing when fighting more established, intense fires'.

Overall Conclusions

Introduction

167. Overall, the views expressed through the consultation varied between different groups. Largely opposed to the hub and both site options were the: open consultation questionnaire respondents; some of the submissions; some in the staff forums; and one public meeting. But the following were broadly supportive or could at least accept the proposals: deliberative forum (with randomly selected members of the public); some in the staff forums; most of the written submissions; and the second public meeting (which was non-committal but did not express opposition). Those supporting the proposal varied somewhat on which site is preferable.
168. The reasons for the respective support and opposition have been documented previously in this report and are not repeated in detail here. Many of the concerns raised in the questionnaires and public meetings were reviewed in the deliberative forums, where most people's concerns were allayed through questioning and discussion. However, the open questionnaire respondents, one of the two staff forum and one of the public meeting were critical of the proposal and site options.
169. In any case, influencing public policy through consultation is not simply a 'numbers game' or 'popularity contest' in which the loudest voices or the greatest numbers automatically win the argument. Instead, consultation is to inform authorities of issues, arguments, implications they might have overlooked; to contribute to the re-evaluation of matters already known; or to reassess priorities and principles critically. However popular proposals might be, that does not itself mean they are feasible, safe, sustainable, reasonable and value-for-money; and unpopularity does not mean the reverse.

Balance of Opinion

170. In this case, though, the outcome of the consultation process is in relative equipoise, with some support and about the same level of opposition, as the following summary of outcomes shows. Those who opposed one or other of the sites were opposed to the hub as a matter of principle (implicitly urging the Fire Authority to reverse its earlier decision in principle). In terms of the site options, there was only marginally more support for Silverwoods Park than Stourpoint 5 – and some important parties favoured Stourport 5 as the best site overall. In this context, where to site a new hub station will be a decision for the Fire Authority.

171. The balance of opinion was:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Unfavourable on siting a new emergency services hub station at either Silverwoods Park or Stourpoint 5 (marginally more support for the former)

The open text comments suggest continued resistance to the hub concept among many respondents

STAFF FORUMS

The first (smaller) forum accepted the principle of a single hub site and accepted the feasibility of both sites

The second staff forum was firmly opposed to the principle of single hub site - and was unable to make a judgement on site options

PUBLIC FORUM

Generally favourable to the principle of a single hub site

General preference for Silverwoods Park

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The first meeting was unfavourable to the principle of a single hub site and made no comment on the two site options

The second meeting was non-committal on the hub principle and site options

SUBMISSIONS

Two were unfavourable - including the FBU

Four were favourable - including the Corporate Team at Wyre Forest District Council, Kidderminster Town Council and Rock Parish Council

There was most support for Stourpoint 5.

Need for Interpretation

172. The Fire Authority should assess this balance of opinion alongside all the evidence, for (as we have said) consultation is not a 'numbers game' in which the biggest 'side' always wins. In this context, ORS attaches particular importance to the forums and written submissions for being deliberative and thoughtful. This does not mean that the other findings should be disregarded, for they show the opinions of important groups of people who were motivated to participate; but it must be borne in mind that the open questionnaire results are not necessarily representative of the whole population, and the staff meetings were very small.

173. While ORS makes the above judgements, there is no single 'right interpretation' of the consultation elements, for professional and political judgement is needed. Ultimately, the

Fire Authority will consider all the consultation elements alongside all the other evidence in order best to determine the future direction of its Fire and Rescue Service.



This project was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252:2012.

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

10. Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Authority of recent key developments and activities.
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Recommendation

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the report be noted.

Large fire at wax recycling plant in Bromsgrove

2. At 18:30 on Monday 19 September, the Service was called to a fire at a wax recycling plant on the Saxon Industrial Estate in Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove. On arrival crews were faced with a large building which was fully involved in fire. The fire was also threatening to spread to adjacent units.
3. In addition to a severe fire crews were faced with other significant hazards including gas cylinders and a running fuel fire. At its height a total of 15 fire appliances (65 firefighters), including specialist foam, water, aerial, environmental and command units, fought the fire.
4. In spite of difficult conditions and an extremely intense fire, crews worked hard and managed to contain the fire to the recycling plant and prevent significant damage to surrounding businesses.
5. Several workers from neighbouring units were safely evacuated and thankfully nobody has been hurt at the incident. Fire crews remained on site, working with colleagues from the Police, Ambulance, Environment Agency and Public Health England, to resolve the incident.

Worcestershire Awards and Medals Ceremony

6. On 16 September, firefighters and Fire Service support staff from across the county received awards at the annual Worcestershire Medals and Awards Ceremony. The event, which was held at Worcester Guildhall, honoured staff for their outstanding service and commitment to the Fire Service.
7. During the ceremony, accolades were presented to employees by Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire Viscount Cobham, High Sheriff of Worcestershire Sir Nicholas Lechmere Bt, Chairman of the FRA Cllr Derek Prodger MBE, and Chief Fire Officer Nathan Travis.

8. A separate awards ceremony for the Herefordshire area will follow on 18 November at Hereford Town Hall.

National Challenges

9. The National UK Rescue Organisation Challenge's competition, this year which was hosted by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, featured six award categories including extrication that saw casualties freed from road traffic collision scenarios, water rescue, trauma, urban search and rescue, animal rescue and rope rescue.
10. Kidderminster and Hereford duo, Jayne Collins and Simon Griffiths gave an outstanding performance to win the Trauma Challenge, which consisted of being assessed on their scene safety, initial patient contact, assessment of injuries and condition, treatment of casualty and patient handover. The Extrication Team from Ross-on-Wye finished in second place after being tested on a complicated two car, two casualty scenario and our Animal Rescue Team from Bromyard and Pershore also took second place.
11. Broadway and Worcester on-call (RDS) competed in the National Breathing Apparatus competition at the Fire Service College on 8 October 2016. The outcome of the competition will be reported at the meeting on 11 October 2016.
12. Participating in such activities really helps teams to develop their key skills and confidence in a rescue environment but more importantly, such enhanced skills and teamwork supports both firefighter and public safety.

Service Exercise

13. On 1 October 2016 crews from across both counties joined Warwickshire and West Mercia Police Alliance, West Midlands Ambulance Service and other agencies at the annual Service Exercise at The Fire Service College, Moreton in Marsh. The exercise was designed to examine the Service's response to a large scale road traffic collision on the motorway network, resulting in over 100 casualties with multiple entrapments across all lanes.
14. All Members were invited to the exercise which provided an excellent opportunity to observe multi-agency response and co-ordination at a large scale incident.

Station Open Days

15. During the summer months visitors flocked to various open days at fire stations throughout the two counties where the public had the opportunity to observe a plethora of activities and demonstrations for all ages to enjoy, with a range of vehicles and equipment on show. These events provide a useful opportunity to show the public the varied work undertaken by the Service but also provides an opportunity for the emergency services and volunteer agencies to come together to promote safety awareness in a number of key areas.

Safety Campaigns

16. The Service recently supported the following national safety campaigns:
 - Drowning Prevention Week, an initiative of the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) which ran from 18 to 26 June 2016
 - Gas Safety Week (19 - 25 September) which provided an opportunity for the whole industry come together to bring gas safety to the forefront of people's minds.
17. The Service also undertook local campaigns on Business Fire Safety, Chimney Fire Safety and were involved in Dying to Drive at Leominster, Peterchurch and Worcester Fire Stations.

Contact Officer

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Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Monday, 04 July 2016,10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Ms L R Duffy, Ms K S Guthrie, Mrs A T Hingley, Professor J W Raine, Mr G J Vickery, Mr S D Williams, Mr G C Yarranton

Substitutes: none

Absent: Mr Al Hardman

Apologies for Absence: Mr S C Cross, Mr R I Matthews

43 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 13 April 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 Internal Audit Annual Report 2015/2016

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented a report detailing the achievement of the Internal Audit objectives, as set out in the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16. The audit opinion and commentary on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment concluded that arrangements during 2015/16 effectively managed the principle risks and could be relied upon to meet corporate objectives. It was confirmed that there were sound systems of internal control in place and there were no high priority recommendations reported to the Committee. All audits undertaken had resulted in an assurance level of either 'significant' or 'moderate'.

RESOLVED that the Audit Plan for all relevant audits delivered in 2015/16 which provided an assurance level of 'significant' be noted.

45 Internal Audit Plan 2016/17

The Internal Auditor provided the draft Audit Plan for 2016/17 highlighting the timetable of scheduled audits to be undertaken during the year, the determination of which is measured on risk. Out turns from work will be brought to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

The Auditor drew Members' attention to an additional forward planing measure which identified and scheduled audit reviews through future years.

RESOLVED that the draft Internal Audit Plan 2016/17 be approved.

46 Strategic Risk Register

The Authority's arrangements for dealing with risk management had been the subject of an internal Audit Review in March 2016. The Audit had given an assurance level of 'moderate' that the Service had a sound system of internal control with the need for minor improvement in certain processes. Members were informed that significant progress had already been made in these areas and that the main issues had already been largely addressed.

Members were advised that a new methodology to record and monitor risk had been introduced and that the Senior Management Board were now considering the risk agenda on a quarterly basis. Some Members were concerned that they only had a single opportunity to input into the Strategic Risk Register and it was agreed that the Chairman of the Audit and Standards Committee would sit in on these quarterly discussions.

Members felt that the Authority would benefit from a workshop early 2017 covering the Strategic Risk Register in more detail.

RESOLVED that;

i. the Strategic Risk Register be approved; and

ii. the actions taken following recommendations made in the recent audit by Worcestershire Shared Service (March 2016) be noted.

47 Health and Safety Audit

Members were updated on the substantial progress against the twelve recommendations made from the CFWA West Midlands Regional Health and Safety Audit undertaken in January 2015. Officers emphasised that measures were fully embedded across the Service and that the four

remaining open recommendations will be continually monitored via the Health and Safety Committee until completion.

Members congratulated Officers on progress against the plan and requested further information relating to Health and Safety and wider community engagement.

RESOLVED that;

i. the substantial progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Health and Safety Audit undertaken by CFOA West Midlands Region in 2015 be noted; and

ii. the discharge of the remaining four recommendations from the audit be overseen by the Health and Safety Committee.

48 Provisional Annual Statement of Accounts 2015/2016

A draft of the Annual Statement of Accounts was presented for discussion and noting. The Treasurer gave a detailed presentation of the content of the Accounts. It was confirmed that the accounts had been signed off on 24 June 2016 and were now open for public inspection. Members would not be asked to approve the Statement of Accounts until after completion of the audit which was due to commence w/c 13 July 2016 and be completed by September 2016.

RESOLVED that the Treasurer bring back a further report following completion of the Audit.

49 Annual Governance Statement 2015/2016

Members were given a summary of the governance arrangements for 2015/16 and advised that under the New Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 there was now a requirement to publish a draft Annual Governance Statement with unaudited accounts for public inspection. It was confirmed that following a review undertaken against the CIPFA framework there were no areas of concern to report and no areas where immediate action was required. The Annual Governance Statement will be audited by internal and external auditors and a final draft will be presented in September for approval

RESOLVED that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2015/16 be approved.

The Meeting ended at: 11:51

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Policy and Resources Committee

Wednesday, 21 September 2016, 10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Mr R C Adams, Mr B A Baker, Mr A Fry, Ms R E Jenkins, Mrs F M Oborski MBE, Mr R J Phillips, Mr D W Prodger MBE, Mr C B Taylor, Mr J W R Thomas, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall

Substitutes: none

Absent: none

Apologies for Absence: Mrs E Eyre BEM, Mr J L V Kenyon

58 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 21 March 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

59 2016/17 Budget Monitoring - 1st Quarter

Members were informed of the current position on budgets and expenditure for 2016/17 and noted the forecast revenue underspend of £0.656m.

RESOLVED that the forecast revenue underspend of £0.656m (2.1%) be noted.

60 Revision to Medium Term Financial Plan

Members were informed of the efficiencies made by the Authority and asked to consider amendments to the Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED that the Fire Authority be recommended to approve amendments to the Medium Term Financial Plan, resulting in a revised budget gap of £1.657m by 2019/20.

61 Treasury Management Activities 2015/16

Members were asked to review the Treasury Management Activities for 2015/16 and noted that the monitoring of the Prudential Indicators had demonstrated that the Authority had complied with its Treasury Management targets.

RESOLVED that the Committee agree the Prudential Indicators were within the limits set by the Authority in February 2016 and that there are no matters that require further attention.

62 Quarterly Performance Report Q1

Members were provided with a summary of the Service's Quarter 1 performance against a comprehensive set of Performance Indicators agreed by the Senior Management Board.

There was particular discussion around various aspects relating to false alarm calls and was noted that the number of malicious fire calls was extremely low.

In relation to retained availability, Members requested that future reports include information about the number of calls each station has attended.

[Councillor Adams entered the meeting at 10.58am].

RESOLVED that Members note the following headlines drawn from Appendix 1 of the report relating to performance in Quarter 1, 2016-17:

i) a total of 1,678 incidents were attended in Q1, an increase of 7.3% (114 incidents) over the same Quarter of 2015-16, and 4.0% (67 incidents) higher than the average for the last five years. However, the overall 5 year trend remained relatively consistent;

ii) the majority of the increase in Q1 is accounted for by a rise in the numbers of Special Service and False Alarm incidents, while the

number of Fire incidents was down:

a. Special Services: an increase of 19.9% (65 incidents) is mainly accounted for by increases in the number of animal assistance (13 incidents), flooding (11) Road Traffic Collisions (9) and water rescues (6).

b. False Alarms: an increase of 11.2% (81 incidents) is mainly because of automatic activations at a number of sheltered housing, nursing homes and hospitals and 13 incidents following the installation of a new alarm system at a block of flats in Kidderminster;

c. Fires: a decrease of 6.2% (32 incidents) over the previous year is largely accounted for by a fall in the number of Secondary Fires (down by 46 incidents) with fewer outdoor fires in a wetter than usual late spring/early summer period;

iii) the number of Fires and Special Service incidents continues to show a five-year downward trend, and False Alarms show a slight upward trend. While the figures are relatively consistent over the last five years, trends will continue to be analysed and monitored;

iv) overall Staff Sickness levels are 1.31 days lost per head, which remains within tolerance levels for Quarter 1 and below the five-year average of 1.63 days;

v) the Service attended 60.9% of Building Fires within 10 minutes in Q1 compared with 62.3% in the same period in 2015-16. The average time for the first fire appliance attendance at all building fires remained below 10 minutes (09:48); and

vi) the overall availability of the first On-Call (Retained) fire appliance remains high at 94.4%, a slight decrease of 0.5% in Q1 compared to the same period in 2015-16.

63 Fleet Strategy 2016 - 2021

Members were asked to approve the revised Fleet Strategy 2016-2021. Members noted that the Fleet Strategy would be reviewed annually and the Committee would receive further updates at the January meeting

each year, aligned to the budget setting processes.

Councillor Phillips, as Chairman of the Task and Finish Group that considered fleet issues earlier in the year, noted that the strategy was in accordance with the Task and Finish Group's findings.

RESOLVED that the new Fleet Strategy 2016-2021 be approved.

64 Evesham Fire Station Update

Members were advised of unforeseen additional work required to deliver the new Evesham fire station due to there being more contaminated material to deal with and an increased cost of doing so. Members noted the total cost of the project to the Fire Authority was now estimated at approximately £694,000 but that this still compared favourably to the alternative cost of works that would otherwise have been necessary to the existing fire station.

RESOLVED that:

i) the additional costs of this scheme be noted and the budget allocation be adjusted accordingly; and

ii) that a further report be presented to the Committee when the final costs are known.

65 Proposed New Hereford Fire Station ('One Herefordshire Hub')

Members were updated on developments in relation to the proposed new fire station in Hereford and proposals for a joint use building with Police and Herefordshire Council, to be known as the 'One Herefordshire Hub'. Members expressed their concerns over the delay in a new fire station and the consequential need to undertake remedial work on the existing fire station.

RESOLVED that:

(1) the development of a multi-agency facility, to include a new Fire Station, on land at Edgar Street, Hereford in conjunction with the Police & Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Herefordshire Council (and/or others) be approved, subject to:

(i) the cost to this Authority not exceeding the provision within the existing capital programme; and
(ii) the estimated running costs being no more expensive than a stand-alone fire station;

(2) officers be authorised to incur all necessary expenditure to progress the above development up to tender stage, on such terms as may be agreed by the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Treasurer, Head of Legal Services and Chairman of the Authority; and

(3) a further report be brought to this Committee for approval once discussions have taken place with regard to:

(i) the apportionment of all costs and fees between the relevant partners;
(ii) the future ownership structure; and
(iii) land swap of the existing Hereford Fire Station site (if appropriate)

(4) Remedial work to be undertaken on the existing fire station should the need arise.

66 Proposed Hereford Slipway - Feasibility

This item was included in the agenda following a request from Councillor Kenyon at the previous Fire Authority meeting in June.

Members were provided with context to determine the need to proceed with a feasibility study to explore the potential of an additional slipway in Hereford to launch water rescue boats. Following discussion, Members agreed that costs would not be viable unless the work was being undertaken in partnership with others, at a shared cost and as a joint facility.

RESOLVED that officers be authorised to contribute towards the costs of a feasibility study into the provision of a slipway at Hereford if satisfied that there are sufficient other interested parties willing to contribute for such a scheme to be potentially viable.

67 Employment Monitoring Data 2015-16

Members noted the progress against the Public Sector Equality Duty, prior to the publication of the Employment Monitoring Data 2015-16 on the Service website. Members remarked that the document was excellent, providing data in a very clear manner.

RESOLVED that the following areas be noted:

- i) Progress has been made in increasing the diversity profile of Retained Duty System (RDS) staff with an increase in representation from female and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) RDS groups;**
- ii) Targeted recruitment campaigns to increase the representation of local communities within the workforce are ongoing;**
- iii) There has been progress in reducing formal disciplinary, harassment and bullying case work, and it should be noted that this has coincided with the Training Centre reporting an increased number of staff who have completed Equality and Diversity training.**

68 Update from the Health and Safety Committee

Members were provided with an update on the activities and items of significance from the Service's Health and Safety Committee.

RESOLVED that the following activities and items of significance from Quarter 4 2015-16 be noted:

- i) a total of 29 Health and Safety events were reported, a decrease in comparison to the previous quarter where 38 events were reported;**
- ii) the Health & Safety Committee is exploring a number of opportunities to share best practice and to collaboratively develop health and safety policies and procedures with other fire and rescue services; and**
- iii) the Health & Safety department is undertaking a review of the health and safety management systems with regards to the Service's fleet.**

69 Update from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group

Members were provided with an update from the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group.

RESOLVED that the following areas be noted:

i) Positive progress against the Service's current equality objectives was reported to the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group Meeting on 27 June 2016;

ii) There is a proposed realignment of equality and diversity replacing the Advisory Group with an Organisational Development Board led by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer in order to better support embedding equality and diversity across the Service;

iii) Excellent progress has been made in equality and diversity training, and there are plans to introduce an e-learning package;

iv) A Service representative attended the recent Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Annual General Meeting and Development Day on 26 and 27 May 2016;

v) Service representatives attended the MIND Blue Light Regional Conference;

vi) A Service representative attended the Women in the Fire Service UK Annual Conference.

70 Update from the Joint Consultative Committee

Members were informed of the activities of the Joint Consultative Committee. It was noted in the meeting that there was an error in paragraph 6 (fourth bullet) which should have read that there will be full consultation with Representative Bodies and their members with regard to electronic payslips.

RESOLVED that the following items currently under discussion by

the Joint Consultative Committee be noted:

- (i) A review of the Joint Protocol for Industrial Relations SPI**
- (ii) Relocation of Service Headquarters (SHQ) to Hindlip**
- (iii) Wyre Forest Hub**
- (iv) Job Evaluation**
- (v) Introduction of electronic payslips**

The Meeting ended at: 11:49

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman