

## **Report of Area Commander, Head of Operations**

### **8. Removal of Incident Response Unit for Mass Decontamination**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To report that following a national review, it has been determined that 22 National Resilience Incident Response Units (IRU) provided for mass decontamination across the County, including the one currently stationed within Hereford & Worcester, are no longer required and will no longer be funded by Government.
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#### **Recommendation**

***It is recommended that the Committee:***

- i) notes the removal of the Incident Response Unit from the National Resilience Asset Register, and subsequent reduction in Section 31 Grant funding to support this vehicle; and***
- ii) notes the intention to remove the vehicle from Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service after 31 March 2016.***

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. At the very inception of the National Resilience (NR) programme over a decade ago the first capability to be introduced into Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) were Incident Response Units (IRUs). These are large, curtain-sided vehicles with demountable fork lifts on the rear. IRUs are capable of transporting a large amount of equipment across the region and country for the purposes of mass decontamination of large numbers of contaminated casualties. The planning assumptions the IRUs were implemented to address were primarily for an incident where large numbers of people were contaminated by some form of harmful agent, thus requiring decontamination on a large scale prior to being able to receive medical treatment. FRSs carry out mass decontamination on behalf of the Department of Health.
3. The Service used to hold two of these vehicles. It is important to stress that these vehicles, although stationed within Hereford & Worcester, were intended to meet national resilience requirements and not as a result of any assessment of local threat levels. In 2013, the Authority agreed to the redeployment of the vehicle formerly located at Droitwich as part of the restructure of the Urban Search and Rescue team into Droitwich Fire Station.

4. The remaining IRU is stationed at Hereford Fire Station. The Service receives circa £35k per annum within the Section 31 grant funding, to facilitate the training of staff who operate and support this vehicle. This element of the funding will cease on 31 March 2016. Furthermore, following a transfer of assets process undertaken some years ago, the Authority now owns this vehicle and equipment, so there may be some value in the residual asset.
5. In addition to the vehicle's national role in mass decontamination the Service can utilise the vehicle and equipment for local level incidents of a smaller nature, such as when hazardous materials are spilled and firefighters dealing with such an incident require decontaminating.

### **Current Position**

6. On 4 December 2015 the Chief Fire Officer received a letter from CFOA National Resilience and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) informing the Authority that with effect from 31 December 2015 the IRU held at Hereford Fire Station would no longer be called upon as a national asset. Following a national review of the capability and a revised threat assessment twenty two IRUs across the UK are being decommissioned.
7. The IRU is currently funded until the end of March 2016, and it has been requested that it remains in storage (within HWFRS) and viable as an asset until that time. It is expected that guidance will be issued in early 2016 to advise on the disposal arrangements and any associated subsequent funding post March 2016.
8. During the period to March 2016 the vehicle will also be removed from operational service for local incidents within the Service. The local decontamination capability it currently provides will be replaced with a smaller, more bespoke, capability which will remain at Hereford Fire Station on an existing alternative vehicle. It is not viable or practical to retain such a large vehicle solely for local incidents and the cost of training and upkeep of the vehicle and equipment would be entirely disproportionate to the local needs. A large number of other IRUs are still available across the UK and in neighbouring FRSSs, should there ever be a need for such a capability to decontaminate large numbers of people. The operational use of these vehicles, both locally and nationally, has been extremely low in the last decade.
9. The loss of the IRU will result in a significant reduction in the amount of training needed. This will not only reduce the need for skills such as fork lift operating at Hereford Fire Station, but will also reduce the training requirements on a number of neighbouring Retained stations that are needed to support an IRU.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

10. It is envisaged that the IRU will remain in situ at Hereford Fire Station until at least 31 March 2016 after which approval should be given for the vehicle and equipment to be disposed of. Due to the nature of the vehicle and the equipment this will need to be carefully controlled.

11. The loss of the remaining IRU at Hereford Fire Station will not cause any significant operational issues within the Service and the local decontamination capability can easily be provided at minimal cost for Hereford Fire Station.
12. All HWFRS firefighters will continue to train and hold the necessary skills to deal with the variety of incidents that involve hazardous materials, and be able to effectively decontaminate themselves and the public. Where mass decontamination is required, then IRUs can be deployed from within the West Midlands region and other neighbouring FRSs.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	There are some minor equipment costs associated with this paper that can be met within existing budgets and capacity.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The Asset Management Strategy supports 'Our Strategy' on the foundations of 'Buildings and Infrastructure'.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	All risks and changes associated with this paper can be met locally and do not pose any significant threat.
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Consultation is not required in this matter.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No – this will be considered at the appropriate time.

## Supporting Information

None

## Background Papers

Letter to CFO dated 4 December 2015 re. CBRNe Capability Review – Mass Decontamination outcomes

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