



HEREFORD & WORCESTER Fire Authority

Full Authority

AGENDA

Wednesday, 17 February 2016

10:30

Conference Suites

**Headquarters, 2 Kings Court, Charles Hastings Way,
Worcester, WR5 1JR**

ACTION ON DISCOVERING A FIRE

- 1 Break the glass at the nearest **FIRE ALARM POINT**.
(This will alert Control and other Personnel)
- 2 Tackle the fire with the appliances available – **IF SAFE TO DO SO**.
- 3 Proceed to the Assembly Point for a Roll Call –

CAR PARK OF THE OFFICE BUILDING ADJACENT TO THE CYCLE SHED TO THE LEFT OF THE ENTRANCE BARRIER TO 2 KINGS COURT.

- 4 Never re-enter the building – **GET OUT STAY OUT**.

ACTION ON HEARING THE ALARM

- 1 Proceed immediately to the Assembly Point

CAR PARK OF THE OFFICE BUILDING ADJACENT TO THE CYCLE SHED TO THE LEFT OF THE ENTRANCE BARRIER TO 2 KINGS COURT.

- 2 Close all doors en route. The senior person present will ensure all personnel have left the room.
- 3 Never re-enter the building – **GET OUT STAY OUT**.

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Toilets – please ask at reception.

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
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

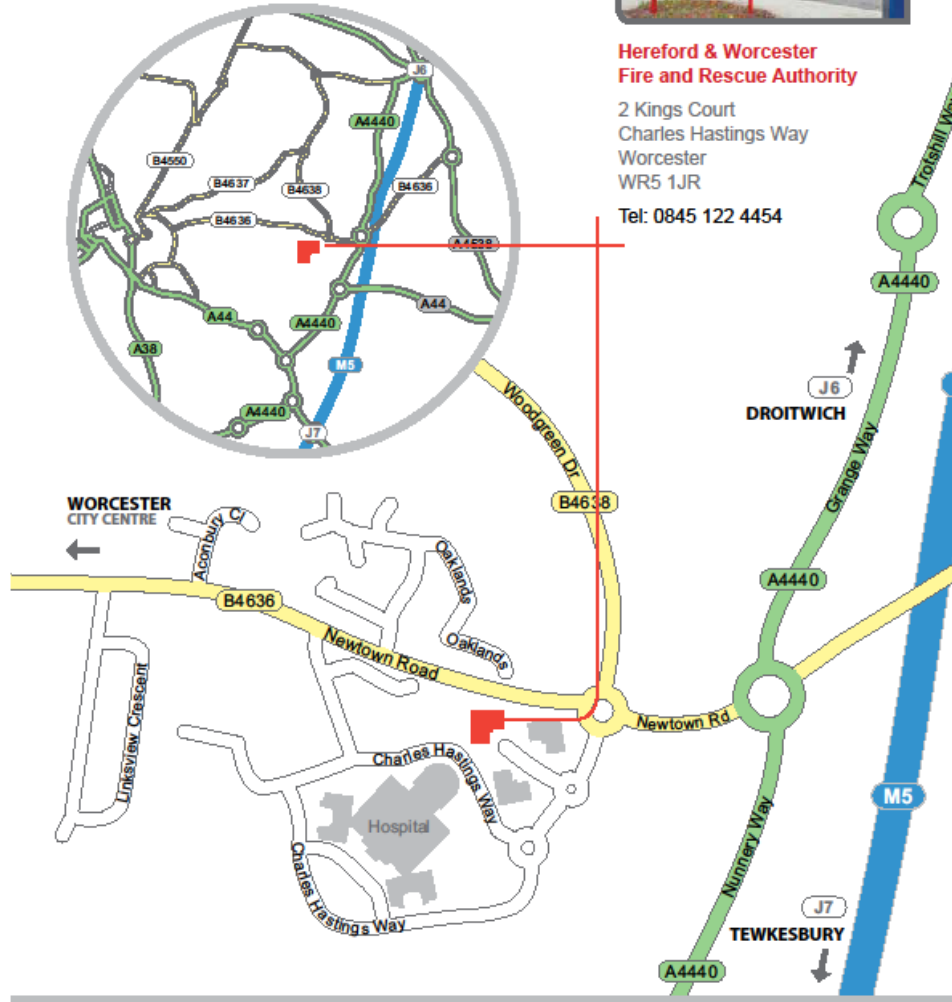
Service Headquarters



**Hereford & Worcester
Fire and Rescue Authority**

2 Kings Court
Charles Hastings Way
Worcester
WR5 1JR

Tel: 0845 122 4454





Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Full Authority

Wednesday, 17 February 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, Mr A Fry, Mr W P Gretton, Ms K S Guthrie, 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 December 2015.	8 - 11
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 no later than 2 clear working days before the meeting (in this case 15 February 2016). Further details about public participation are available on the website. Enquiries can also be made through the telephone numbers/email listed below.

6 Presentation on National Inter-agency Liaison Officer (NILO)

A short presentation will be provided at the meeting by Head of Operations Jon Pryce.

7 Appointment of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

12 - 14

Report to follow.

8 Budget and Precept 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Plan

15 - 46

1. To determine the Revenue and Capital Budgets and the Council Tax Requirement for 2016/17.
2. To approve the Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2016/17.
3. To identify potential future resources, their consequential impact on future year budgets and the future Council Tax Requirement.

9	Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Consultation Responses	47 - 154
	To receive the outcome of the public consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed Wyre Forest Blue-Light Hub, seek approval to undertake further work to identify a preferred site and recommend further consultation in relation to that preferred site prior to a final decision on whether to proceed with the development.	
	Appendices 1 and 2 are separate enclosures. Members are asked to bring these documents with them to the meeting.	
10	Pay Policy Statement	155 - 164
	To bring to the attention of the Authority the requirement for the Service to publish its annual Pay Policy Statement for year 2016/17.	
11	Members' Allowances Scheme 2016/17	165 - 169
	To consider whether to make any alterations to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2016/17 in light of the very small change in the Consumer Price Index to December 2015.	
12	Chief Fire Officer's Service Report	170 - 172
	To inform the Authority of recent key developments and activities.	
13	Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee	173 - 175
	To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2016.	
14	Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee	176 - 180
	To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2016.	
15	Minutes of the Appointments Committee	181 - 184
	To receive the minutes of the meetings held on 16 December 2015 and 27 January 2016.	



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Full Authority

Wednesday, 16 December 2015,10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Mr R C Adams, Ms L R Duffy, Mr W P Gretton, Ms K S Guthrie, Mrs A T Hingley, Mr D W Prodger MBE, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr A Fry, Ms R E Jenkins, Mr S C Cross, Professor J W Raine, Mr J L V Kenyon, Mr R M Udall, Mr G J Vickery, Mr R I Matthews, Mrs F M Oborski MBE, Mr G C Yarranton, Mr J W R Thomas, Mr A Amos, Mr B A Baker, Mrs E Eyre, Mr R J Phillips

Substitutes: none

Absent: none

Apologies for Absence: Ms P Agar, Mr S D Williams

56 Declarations of Interest (if any)

No interests were declared.

57 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 8 October 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

58 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman updated Members on the events he had recently attended:

- The large scale Service Exercise Odin on 11 October at the Fire Service College which highlighted the skills and energy of fire crews and emphasised how critical it was to work in collaboration with other emergency services.
- The Annual Combined Fire Authorities Conference on 22 October which provided a useful opportunity for all Chairs and Chief Fire

Officers of Combined Fire Authorities to meet.

- The Royal opening of Worcester Fire Station which was officially opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester on 19 November.
- The Hereford Medal Ceremony that took place on 20 November where county-based firefighters and fire service support staff were honoured and recognised for their outstanding service and commitment to the Service.
- The Carol Service at Pershore Abbey on 9 December where the Fire Service Choir gave an outstanding performance. The Chairman recommended that Members should attend in future years.

The Chairman also announced that a Budget Seminar for all Members would be held on 18 January following Audit and Standards Committee.

59 Public Participation

None

60 Fire Safety Presentation

Members were given an overview of community risk context and activity. The presentation covered aspects of technical fire safety, community safety and fire prevention, road safety, partnership working and signposting. The presentation emphasised the evolving agenda as the service continues to develop its capabilities.

Officers responded to a number of Members questions following the presentation.

61 Chief Fire Officers' Service Report

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority of recent key developments and activities. During the discussions the following issues were raised:

- Some Members were concerned that the pilot scheme to enable Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to train as retained (on-call) firefighters in Herefordshire would leave rural parts of the county exposed and lacking police cover.

- The Chief Fire Officer reassured Members that this was a complementary community safety role for the PCSOs and as it was a pilot project at this stage it would be closely monitored.
- The new Worcester Fire Station was officially opened on 19th November 2015 by His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester. Following a query from a Member, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he had met with the Chairman and agreed to approach the Lord Lieutenant to investigate the availability of a member of the royal family to support the opening. The Duke of Gloucester was put forward as he was involved in an event at the University of Worcester on the same day.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

62 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee

The Chairman of the Committee reported the proceedings of the meeting held on 16 November 2015 and highlighted that the Committee had approved the Authority's policy on Sky Lanterns at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 16 November 2015 be received and noted.

63 Fire Authority Meeting Dates 2016/17

The Head of Legal Services presented the Authority meeting dates for 2016/17.

RESOLVED that the dates for 2016/17 Authority and Committee meetings be noted.

64 Exclusion of Public and Press

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the following item due to the likelihood that it discloses information relating to an individual.

65 Retirement of Chief Fire Officer

The Authority considered a request from the Chief Fire Officer for permission to retire with effect from 31 March 2016. The Head of Legal Services explained that although the rules surrounding the retirement of members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme 1992 were clear, leading

Counsel had confirmed that the Chief Fire Officer was eligible to retire and that there would be no legal or tax implications for the Authority should permission be granted.

RESOLVED that permission for the Chief Fire Officer to retire with effect from 31 March 2016 be given.

Members expressed their thanks and extended good wishes to the Chief Fire Officer for the future.

The Meeting ended at: 12:20

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman

Report of Head of Legal Services

7. Appointment of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

Purpose of report

1. To update members on progress towards the recruitment of a Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive and to recommend the appointment of an interim Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive.
-

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) Nathan Travis, Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Oxfordshire FRS, be seconded as Interim Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive for a period of six months with effect from 1st April 2016;*
- ii) the secondment to be on the same terms and conditions as the current Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive together with reimbursement of any reasonable expenses and such additional terms as may be agreed with the employing authority by the Head of Legal Services, in consultation with the Chairman; and*
- iii) the interim Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive undertake a review of the terms and conditions of the role, so as to enable the Appointments Committee to recommence recruitment for a permanent appointment as soon as possible.*

Introduction and Background

2. At the Authority's meeting on 16th December 2015, the current Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive was given permission to retire with effect from 31st March 2016. The Appointments Committee met immediately following that meeting and agreed the person specification and form of advertisement for the resultant vacancy. The vacancy was advertised on 17th December 2015 with a closing date of 18th January 2016 and every effort was made to bring this to the attention of potential candidates.
3. The Appointments Committee met on 27th January to review the applications but concluded there were insufficient breadth of candidates, either in number or range of experience, to take forward to interview. Limited feedback had also been sought as to why more candidates had not applied and this was also considered by the Committee. The Chief Fire Officer was asked to explore the possibility of seconding a suitably experienced officer from another Fire & Rescue Service to act as interim Chief Fire Officer/Chief

Executive whilst the role and terms & conditions of appointment were reviewed, prior to a further round of recruitment.

4. Following a recommendation from the Chief Fire Officer, members of the Appointments Committee have met with Nathan Travis who is currently the Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Oxfordshire and whose Authority would be willing to second him to this Service for a period of six months. Mr Travis is an experienced officer who is considered to be well qualified to take on the interim role pending a further recruitment process.

Conclusion/Summary

5. There were no suitable candidates in response to the advert for the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive post. The appointments Committee has concluded that the terms and conditions of the post should be reviewed prior to a further advertisement and that an interim appointment, by way of a secondment from another Service, should be made in the meantime.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	There will be some additional costs associated with the secondment of an Officer from another Service but these will be contained within existing budgets
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	An key part of the Authority's strategy is that we will ensure we have the right people, with the right skills and training to carry out the right job at the right time
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None identified
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?)	Full consideration to equalities and diversity was given during the unsuccessful recruitment process, with support from Worcestershire County Council HR Department.

Supporting Information

Background papers –

Minutes of Fire Authority – 16th December 2015

Minutes of Appointments Committee – 16th December 2015 & 27th January 2016

Contact Officer

Nigel Snape, Head of Legal Services

(01905 368242)

Email: Nsnape@hwfire.org.uk

Report of the Treasurer and the Chief Fire Officer

8. Budget and Precept 2016-17 and Medium Term Financial Plan

Purpose of report

1. To determine the Revenue and Capital Budgets and the Council Tax Requirement for 2016/17.
2. To approve the Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2016/17.
3. To identify potential future resources, their consequential impact on future year budgets and the future Council Tax Requirement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) the Capital Budget and Programme (Appendix 1) be approved;*
- ii) the Revenue Budget (Appendix 4) be approved;*
- iii) the Authority calculates that in relation to the year 2016/17:*
 - a) the aggregate expenditure it will incur will be £33,029,000.00;*
 - b) the aggregate income it will receive will be £11,351,465.00;*
 - c) the net amount transferred from financial reserves will be £826,718.00;*
 - d) the net amount of its Council Tax Requirement will be £20,850,817.00;*
 - e) the basic amount of Council Tax will be £78.00 (Band D);*
 - f) the precept demands on the individual Billing Authorities are:*

• Bromsgrove	£2,761,523.41
• Herefordshire	£5,215,987.40
• Malvern Hills	£2,291,066.68
• Redditch	£1,961,230.14
• Worcester	£2,390,105.15
• Wychavon	£3,678,250.39
• Wyre Forest	£2,552,653.83
- iv) the Medium Term Financial Plan (Appendix 6) be approved; and*
- v) the Statement of Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (Appendix 7) be approved.*

Introduction and Background

4. In February 2015 the Authority approved a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which identified a cumulative budget gap of £0.300m in 2016/17 rising to £3.346m by 2019/20.
5. This budget gap was based on a set of assumptions made before the General Election and in particular before the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) undertaken by the newly elected government.
6. The 2016/17 position, which becomes the budget, and future years' projections are now updated based on the latest available information.
7. Final information is now available on resources:
 - a. Council Tax-bases – from Billing Authorities;
 - b. Band D Council Tax level – recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee;
 - c. Council Tax increase referendum threshold – from government;
 - d. Collection Fund surpluses - from Billing Authorities;
 - e. Estimated Retained Business Rates yield - from Billing Authorities; and
 - f. Grant – at the time of publication of this report the Provisional grant settlement had not been formally confirmed. If the final position is different to that in the provisional data then an update will be provided at the Authority meeting.
8. The Policy and Resources Committee considered draft budget proposals on 27 January 2016 based on the provisional information then available. The Committee recommended to the Fire Authority that:
 - a. the 2016/17 precept increase is set at £1.50 per year at Band D; and
 - b. the assumptions now laid out in paragraph 46 are accepted; and future years' planning should assume an annual precept increase of 1.96%.

Review of Available Resources

9. The latest projection of future resources can be split between formula grant, other grants, Council Tax precept and Retained Business Rates.

Formula Grant

10. As part of the 2016/17 Settlement the government has given indicative grant figures for the whole of the CSR period to 2019/20. In order to have these future allocations confirmed an Authority is required to submit some form of Efficiency Plan, although details have not yet been issued.
11. The grant figure for 2016/17 is £0.140m (1.9%) lower than expected, although by 2019/20 grant is potentially £0.045m greater than forecast.

12. Although this suggests that overall the grant position is in line with the MTFP projection, there is a significant difference in impact between the broadly equal annual reductions' forecast and the heavily front-loaded actual position.
13. The extent of this position is shown in the table below:
- | | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | OVERALL |
|------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| MTFP | -11.1% | -11.5% | -12.0% | -12.6% | -39.4% |
| Settlement | -12.7% | -17.7% | -10.0% | -5.5% | -38.9% |
14. The result of this is that there is a one off loss of resource of around £1.0m. Members will recall that at the end of 2014/15 the Authority prudently set aside £1.2m partly to guard against any adverse impact of the CSR. The Policy & Resources Committee have endorsed the Treasurer's recommendation to utilise some of this reserve to return the overall grant position to that of the previous MTFP.
15. Although the overall loss of grant of nearly 40% is higher than the 30% average for fire authorities (and results from the government cutting grant proportionate to overall expenditure), on an adjusted like for like basis this Authority has received the lowest overall impact on pre-Austerity spending levels. This was covered in detail at Policy & Resources Committee on 27th January and at the seminar for all Members on 18th January.

Other Grants

16. Members will be aware that the Authority receives grant in respect of national New Dimensions functions and the Firelink radio scheme.
17. Although the grant for the former was cut by 10% in 2015/16, there has been no communication about further, future changes, although grant has not yet been confirmed. The MTFP therefore assumes the continuation of 2015/16 levels, less the known removal of the Incident Response Unit (IRU) element.
18. The Authority is aware that the Firelink grant will be eliminated when the replacement and promised significantly cheaper national radio scheme goes live. Signing of national contracts now makes it easier to forecast the timing of the loss of this element.

Precept Assumptions

19. The level of income from precept is determined by the Band D tax and the total tax-base.
20. The actual level of tax-base has again risen significantly by 1.9% in 2016/17 as a result of :
- Improvement in the estimate of actual collection from tax-payers who had previously not paid any Council Tax.
 - Changes to Council Tax support schemes increasing the amount of Council Tax payable.
 - A review of (and reduction in) the granting of single person discounts.
 - New properties.

21. This increase provides the Authority with £0.284m more income than was previously forecast, as well as a one off £0.286m surplus on the Collection Funds.
22. Although the previously approved MTFP had prudently assumed an annual 0.5% increase in the tax-base, this is the third consecutive year that the increase has exceeded 1.8% and a review of this assumption is necessary.
23. As the Treasurers of the Billing and Precepting Authorities have worked together and shared information it is considered reasonable for this Authority to assume a future annual increase averaging 1.3% based on these individual projections.
24. Although the annual net Collection Fund out-turn has ranged from a net deficit of £0.002m to a net surplus of £0.286m since 2004/05, there have been significant annual variations, both surplus and deficit, from individual Authorities and it would be imprudent to fund core expenditure from this source. The Collection Fund is therefore assumed to be neutral in future years.
25. Although the Authority is free to increase the precept by any level it feels is appropriate, any increase above the threshold set by government (2% for 2016/17), requires the Authority to hold a referendum on the increase. The Authority has previously concluded that a referendum is not preferable given the percentage increase necessary merely to fund the cost of the referendum.
26. Following discussion, the Policy and Resources Committee has recommended that the Authority increase the Band D tax by £1.50 (1.96%) in 2016/17 and that a planning assumption of annual increases of 1.96% thereafter be made.
27. This figure would be below the level (2.0%) that would require the Authority to conduct a referendum on the level of increase in 2016/17.

Retained Business Rates

28. Within the grant settlement the government made an initial assumption about the level of business rates to be retained by each local authority and then makes assumptions about how this will change each year.
29. Each year however, the Billing Authorities provide an estimate (the NNDR1) of the amount they believe is collectable (including any grant payable by government to compensate for some nationally determined rate reliefs) and this should give a more accurate figure of resources available.
30. There is, however, a significant difference between these figures as the following table shows:

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Baseline Change		1.9%	1.9%	0.8%
NNDR1 change		-1.2%	4.8%	-6.6%
NNDR1 as % of Baseline	102.8%	99.5%	102.4%	94.8%

31. The unexpected volatility (which is largely due to appeals) means that the yield in 2016/17, and later years, is significantly less than anticipated in the previous MTFP.
32. In respect of the budget for this year, the shortfall can be covered by using the remainder of the NNDR reserve (£0.045m) and the one off council tax collection fund surpluses referred to at paragraph 21.
33. For planning purposes it is assumed that the yield will rise at least as much as the government's inflation target (i.e. 2% per year), but the 2016/17 reduction means that this is a worse position than government is assuming.
34. This volatility issue is relevant to all tiers of local government and the Treasurer will continue to liaise with the Treasurers of District and County Councils to better understand the position to improve future forecasting.
35. This difference is partly due to the fact that the Billing Authorities in the Worcestershire Pool did not declare any 2013/14 deficits in their 2014/15 estimates, and these are now coming through in 2015/16.
36. It is suggested that if the forecast changes significantly, then a further updated MTFP is brought to the Policy and Resources Committee earlier than the normal cycle of finance reports.

Expenditure Requirement

37. The expenditure requirement has continued to be refined and the key assumptions around pay, inflation and interest rates are outlined in the paragraphs below.
38. There are now a number of changes in respect of these expenditure forecasts, which are outlined below.
39. Ending of the contracted out rates of Employers National Insurance. Although it was included in the current MTFP the first year is 2016/17 not 2017/18 as previously included by error. This has a £0.380m impact in 2016/17 only as it was included in future years already.
40. Fire Control equipment maintenance costs increasing by £0.090m per year as a result of the extension of the contract and increasing age of equipment. This is offset to an extent by £0.080m per year of unrelated additional income.
41. The "Apprentice levy" on employers introduced in the Chancellors Autumn Statement adds an additional annual cost of £0.070m per year from 2017/18.
42. The budget for 2015/16 contained a provision for general inflation. Once again it has not been necessary to allocate this in total as the general level of inflation remains low and budget holders continue to restrain budgets. It is therefore possible to remove this un-allocated amount from the base budget saving £0.125m per year.

43. As this is the third consecutive year that this has been possible it is now considered prudent to reduce the future inflation provision, although this reduction has been restricted to two years only. There may be additional future savings if the current reduction in oil prices is sustained in the medium term.
44. Although the Chancellor has again made clear the government's policy on public sector pay increases, i.e. a maximum of 1% per year, it is not entirely clear how this will translate to the fire sector as pay awards are negotiated independently of central government.
45. Whilst the 2015 award was held at 1%, it is considered prudent to provide above this for future years, particularly as the changes to National Insurance rates effective from April 2016 mean that net pay will drop by an average of just over 1%. Clearly if the pay award is limited to 1% the resultant savings will again flow through to reduce future budget gaps.
46. The relevant assumptions are summarised below in tabular form for ease of reference:
- | | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Pay Awards | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| General Inflation | 2% | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| Long Term Borrowing Rates | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% |
47. The initial approval for the provision of Day Crewing Plus cover for the second pumps at Hereford and Worcester fire stations was for a trial period of two years ending in March 2017 and is subject to a review.
48. However, in anticipation of the Authorities probable desire to continue this arrangement (subject to finance being available), the Policy and Resources Committee have recommended that continued provision is made for this beyond 2016/17. As a consequence, the saving shown in the previous MTFP has now been removed.
49. As a consequence, the saving shown in the previous MTFP has now been removed.
50. In addition a review of the capital financing costs has identified savings from experience of the actual progress of capital expenditure in relation to the budget.

Capital Programme

51. The Capital Programme, using prudent financing assumptions and based on the agreed Asset Management Plan and Fleet Strategy, and with the usual annual provision of £0.600m for minor buildings and IT schemes etc. is included as Appendix 1. The revenue consequences of the schemes, including financing costs, are included in the revenue budget projections in Appendices 3, 4, and 6, and the Statement of Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy at Appendix 7.

52. Although budget provision has been given for specific schemes within the proposed Major Buildings block, as individual contracts are still subject to tender etc., individual allocations are not shown in order that the information does not compromise the Authority's negotiating position.

Excess Staff Costs

53. Following the implementation of the agreed CRMP staff reductions there will be a surplus of uniformed staff in post above that approved for the wholetime establishment.
54. As part of the MTFP the Authority approved the use of the budget reduction reserve to try to meet the Authority's desire not to instigate compulsory redundancies of uniformed staff.
55. In addition Senior Officers have identified and pursued options for staff to be temporarily seconded to neighbouring Services to reduce cost pressures.
56. Taking all these factors into account the previous MTFP forecast that £1.023m of this reserve would remain unused at the end of the MTFP period. This coincided with staff resources being back in equilibrium.
57. Since then there have been a number of changes to the profile of staff costs
- a. The estimate of net costs of seconded staff are reduced
 - b. There are additional officers seconded
 - c. Some seconded staff have permanently transferred to other Services
 - d. Staff have left for other reasons that were not predictable
- which reduce the overall demand on this reserve to the extent that it is now expected that £1.826m will now remain.
58. In addition there have been a number of staff expressing an interest in the Voluntary Redundancy scheme. If all these are completed this would have a further significant impact on the need to use this reserve.

2016/17 Budget and Precept

59. In accordance with previous practice, and to provide a continuous record of year on year budget changes, Appendix 3 tracks the changes from the approved 2015/16 budget to that proposed for 2016/17. Appendix 4 allocates this proposed budget to the relevant approved budget heads.
60. The net budget (after planned use of reserves) of £31.816m, with the expected resources, gives rise to a gross Council Tax requirement of £21.137m, reducing to £20.851m after Collection Fund surpluses. This gives a Band D precept of £78.00, an increase of £1.50 per year, or less than 3 pence per week. Full details of this calculation are laid out in Appendix 5.

Budget Risks

61. Setting a net budget at £31.816m still presents risks, for example:

- Pay Award – a provision of 2% has been made in 2016/17, a variance of +/- 0.5% adds or saves £0.100m.
- General Inflation – each additional 1% costs/saves £0.100m.
- Future Council Tax Policy is also unknown; although a 1.96% increase is assumed in the MTFP a reduction by 1.0% would reduce resources by around £0.212m per year.

62. In addition, following the changes in local government finance, the Authority now bears an income risk in relation to the level of income from Business Rates and the costs of Council Tax support. As yet (and particularly in respect of Retained Business Rates as explained above) there is insufficient experience of the new regime to quantify this risk with any accuracy.

Future Years : The Budget Gap 2017/18 to 2019/20

63. The MTFP approved in February 2015 identified cumulative budget gaps of £1.627m in 2017/18 rising to £3.346m by 2019/20.
64. The changes detailed in Appendices 3 and 6 including the forecast changes to resources and expenditure have resulted in the 2017/18 budget gap reducing to £0.698m and that for 2019/20 is reduced to £2.485m. Details are shown in Appendix 6.
65. Officers of the Authority have already commenced reviews necessary to identify options to close these gaps for the Authority to consider in the future.

Revenue Reserves Strategy

66. The table below shows the projected position in relation to balances compared to the budget requirement over the MTFP period. The budget requirement figure is based on the projection of future resources (see Appendix 6) available rather than the budget need as this will be the determinant of future budget requirements. As the level of funding is determined by the decision on Council Tax increase, both sets of details are shown, although there is no material difference between levels.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Balances at 1 April	1.838	1.538	1.538	1.538
Approved Use	(0.300)			
Proposed re-phasing	0.150	0.150		
General Balances at 31 Mar	1.688	1.538	1.538	1.538
Indicative Budget Requirement	31.816	30.942	30.958	31.300
% of Budget Requirement	5.3%	5.0%	5.0%	4.9%

67. No addition to balances in 2015/16 is shown; as the Policy and Resources Committee has yet to recommend how to deploy the managed in-year underspending (£0.792m at Quarter 2). Given that the level of general balances is adequate it may choose to boost the Budget Reduction Reserve.

68. The improved overall position in 2016/17 has meant that the Policy and Resources Committee have recommended the re-phasing of the already approved use of £0.300m of balances to support expenditure in 2017/18 rather than 2016/17 as originally planned.
69. Although there is no guidance as to the exact level of balances that it is reasonable for any Authority to hold, a level of around £1.5m or 5% is considered to be prudent. The Authority has to be mindful of the opportunity to quickly replenish balances if they are called upon and this becomes much harder in a financial regime where central government controls grant, business rate levels and council tax levels.
70. It is still worth quoting Rob Whiteman (Chief Executive of CIPFA) in an open letter to Melanie Dawes (the then new Permanent Secretary to DCLG) in 2014: *“For the avoidance of doubt, CIPFA’s guidance to chief finance officers is clear that at a time of increasing financial risk, a council making cuts should also increase reserves to reflect the greater volatility of its budget.”*
71. Whilst this level of balances is desirable, there is an opportunity cost of holding balances. They could be used to finance one off expenditure or temporarily reduce the Council Tax precept. The risk is, however, that any unforeseen expenditure could not be met.

Investment of Surplus Funds

72. In accordance with the Authority’s Treasury Management Strategy, surplus funds are invested by Worcestershire County Council alongside their own funds.
73. Given the continuing uncertainty in financial markets, the Treasurer advises that investment should continue to be focussed on security. As a consequence surplus funds continue to generate low returns which are factored into the budget.
74. Since October 2008 the Authority has adopted a policy of avoiding new long term borrowing, where working capital balances permit. The Authority will only extend long term borrowing when cash-flow requirements dictate that it is necessary, and only to finance long term assets

Prudential Code Indicators

75. Since 1 April 2004, the Local Authority capital finance system has been one of self-regulation based on a Prudential Code drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
76. The key objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure, within a clear framework, that the capital investment plans of Local Authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable or, in exceptional cases, to demonstrate that there is a danger of not ensuring this, so that the Local Authority concerned can take timely remedial action.

77. A further key objective is to ensure that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in a manner that supports prudence, affordability and sustainability. The Prudential Code also has the objective of being consistent with and supporting, local strategic planning, local asset management planning and proper option appraisal.
78. To demonstrate that Authorities have fulfilled these objectives, the Prudential Code sets out indicators that must be used and the factors that must be taken into account. The Code does not include suggested indicative limits or ratios. These are for a Local Authority to set itself, subject only to any controls under Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2003 (Government Reserve Powers).
79. The prudential indicators required by the Code are designed to support and record local decision making. They are not designed to be comparative performance indicators and use of them in this way would likely to be misleading and counter-productive. In particular, Local Authorities had widely differing debt positions at the start of the prudential system and the differences are likely to increase over time as a result of the exercise of local choices. The system is specifically designed to support such local decision making in a manner that is publicly accountable.
80. In setting or revising the prudential indicators, the Authority is required to have regard to the following matters:
- affordability, e.g. implications for Council Tax;
 - prudence and sustainability, e.g. implications for external borrowing;
 - value for money, e.g. options appraisal;
 - stewardship of assets, e.g. asset management planning;
 - service objectives, e.g. strategic planning for the Authority; and
 - practicality, e.g. achievability of the forward plan.
81. The Treasurer has prepared the prudential indicators having considered the matters above, and they are set out in detail in Appendix 7.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)

82. Minimum Revenue Provision is the amount set aside in the revenue budget to meet the future repayment of borrowing incurred to pay for capital investment.
83. The Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 require that an Authority sets its own prudent level of MRP, by adopting a policy in advance of the year to which it relates.
84. For ease of reference both the prudential indicators (paragraphs 75 to 81 above) and the proposed minimum revenue provision are set out in the “Statement of Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy” at Appendix 7.

Business Consultation

85. In accordance with established practice, statutory consultation with business rate-payers has been initiated by correspondence with appropriate

representatives of business(the Chamber of Commerce, the local branches of the Confederation of Small Businesses and the National Farmers' Union). To date no responses have been received.

Budget Calculations: Personal Assurance Statement by the Treasurer

86. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Treasurer to report to the Authority when it is setting the budget and precept (Council Tax). The Authority is required to take this report into account when making its budget and precept (Council Tax) decision. The report of the Treasurer must deal with the robustness of the estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides.
87. The Treasurer states that to the best of his knowledge and belief these budget calculations are robust and have full regard to:
- the Fire Authority budget policy;
 - the need to protect the Fire Authority's financial standing and to manage risk;
 - the current year's financial performance;
 - the financial policies of the Government;
 - the Fire Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan and Planning framework;
 - capital programme obligations;
 - Treasury Management best practice;
 - the strengths of the Fire Authority's financial control procedures including audit consideration;
 - the extent of the Authority's balances and reserves; and
 - the prevailing economic climate and future prospects.

Equality and Diversity Impact

88. The immediate impact on recruitment activities means that progress against equality and diversity targets for the recruitment of wholetime female and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) firefighters will not be achievable. However, retained recruitment will continue to be based on need and in this area the Service will continue to do all it can to address our diversity targets.
89. It is no longer a requirement to report such targets at government level, but employment levels continue to be monitored to ensure that although limited positive progress can be made in this period, any recruitment that does take place happens in an environment of good equalities practice.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Yes – whole report
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	Yes – Resourcing for the Future
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	No
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Yes – consultation with Business Rate-Payers as required by legislation
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No

Supporting Information

Appendix 1	Capital Programme
Appendix 2	Personnel Budget
Appendix 3	Revenue Budget Changes 2015/16 to 2016/17
Appendix 4	Revenue Budget Allocation 2016/17
Appendix 5	Council Tax Requirement Calculation 2016/17
Appendix 6	Medium Term Financial Forecasts 2017/18 to 2019/20
Appendix 7	Statement of Prudential Code Indicators and Medium Revenue Provision Policy.

Background Papers

Policy and Resources Committee 27 January 2016: Budget 2016/17 and MTFP

Contact Officer

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Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Capital Programme

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	PRIOR YEARS ACTUAL £m	Revised BUDGET 2015/16 £m	BUDGET 2016/17 £m	PROGRAMME 2017/18 £m	2018/19 £m	2019/20 £m	2020/21 £m	TOTAL £m
Vehicle Programme								
1 Routine - Pumps		0.539	1.761	1.150	1.150	1.150	1.640	7.390
2 Routine - 4WD						0.050		0.050
3 Routine - Off-Road							0.015	0.015
4 Water Rescue Vehicle						0.065		0.065
5 Command Unit			0.350					0.350
6 Routine - Water Carrier				0.190	0.190			0.380
7 Routine - RAVs					0.230			0.230
8 USAR Dog Van		0.027	0.002					0.029
9 USAR ISV		0.030	0.051					0.081
10 Boats				0.040				0.040
11 Response Cars			0.614		0.225	0.400		1.239
12 Response Cars		0.103	0.045	0.120	0.040			0.308
13		0.699	2.823	1.500	1.835	1.665	1.655	10.177
Major Building Schemes								
14 Malvern Fire Station	2.019	0.083						2.102
15 Worcester Fire Station	3.563	0.785	0.195					4.543
16 Evesham Fire Station	0.055	0.102	3.599					3.756
17 DCP Works		0.532	0.018					0.550
18 Other Schemes (Note 1)	1.762		2.730	2.050	4.140	2.247		12.929
19	7.399	1.502	6.542	2.050	4.140	2.247	0.000	23.880
Other Schemes								
20 Control Resilience Project	1.911	0.043	0.333					2.287
21 Minor Property, IT/Comms & Equipment		0.223	1.220	0.600	0.600	0.600	0.600	3.243
22		0.266	1.553	0.600	0.600	0.600	0.600	5.530
23 Annual Total		2.467	10.918	4.150	6.575	4.512	2.255	39.587

Note 1 : Individual scheme sums approved by Fire Authority, but not currently disclosed as contracts subject to tender etc.

Note 2 : Excludes impact of any slippage from 2015/16

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Personnel Budget

	Wholetime Firefighters FTE	On-Call Retained Firefighters H/C	Control Room Staff FTE	Non- Uniformed Support FTE	TOTAL
Included in Budget 2014/15	283.0	383.0	25.0	114.3	805.3
CRMP	(44.0)				(44.0)
Flexi-Officer Review	(4.0)				(4.0)
Ops Logistics Review	(1.0)			(0.0)	(1.0)
CFS/TFS Review	(3.0)			(2.0)	(5.0)
FireControl Review			(6.5)		(6.5)
IT Posts 20/20 - Capitalised				2.0	2.0
Procurement Assistant				1.0	1.0
Planned transfer to JPV in 2015/16				(9.7)	(9.7)
Included in Budget 2015/16	231.0	383.0	18.5	105.5	738.0

	Wholetime Firefighters FTE	On-Call Retained Firefighters H/C	Control Room Staff FTE	Non- Uniformed Support FTE	TOTAL
Included in Budget 2015/16	231.0	383.0	18.5	105.5	738.0
additional TUPE Transfer to PPL				(2.1)	(2.1)
P&I Review	1.0				1.0
Included in Budget 2016/17	232.0	383.0	18.5	103.4	736.9

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Revenue Budget

Col.	1	3	4	5	6	7
		Core	Excess Staff	Second Income	Bud Red Reserve	NET
Line		£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
1	2015/16 Budget	32.275	0.960	(1.630)	0.670	32.275
2	Saving from 2015 Pay award provision	(0.275)				(0.275)
3	Saving from 2015/16 Inflation provision	(0.125)				(0.125)
	<u>Cost Pressures</u>					
4	Pay Awards	0.444				0.444
5	General Inflation Contingency	0.200				0.200
6	LGPS Revaluation	0.010				0.010
7	Capital Programme	0.035				0.035
8	NI Contracting Out Abolition - phasing	0.380				0.380
9	Fire Control Maintenance	0.090				0.090
10	Income	(0.080)				(0.080)
	<u>Savings</u>					
11	CRMP Implementation - phasing	(0.895)				(0.895)
12	Droitwich/USAR phasing	(0.121)				(0.121)
13	JPV - Business Case Savings	(0.036)				(0.036)
14	JPV - One Off Costs Savings	(0.096)				(0.096)
15	one off costs Implementation of 2015 Pension Scheme	(0.020)				(0.020)
16	Flexi-Duty Officer Review	(0.119)				(0.119)
		31.667	0.960	(1.630)	0.670	31.667
17	2016/17 Projected Core Expenditure Need					
18	Excess Staff		0.211			0.211
19	Secondment Income			1.389		1.389
20	Use of Budget Reduction Reserve				(1.301)	(1.301)
21		31.667	1.171	(0.241)	(0.631)	31.966
22	Use of General Balances					(0.150)
23	2016/17 Budget					31.816

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Revenue Budget Allocation

Col Line	(1) 2015/16 Original Budget £m	(2) In Year Realloc -ation £m	(3) Reverse Use of Reserves £m	(4) PPL Full Year £m	(5) 2015/16 Revised Core £m	(6) Amend- ments £m	(7) 2016/17 Proposed Allocation £m
1 WT FF Pay	12.806	0.087			12.893	(0.899)	11.994
2 RDS FF Pay	3.351	0.025			3.376	0.067	3.443
3 Control Pay	0.702	0.004			0.706	0.016	0.722
4 Support Pay	3.009	0.249		(0.143)	3.115	0.071	3.186
5 Other Employee Costs	0.061				0.061		0.061
6 Unfunded Pensions	0.966	0.009			0.975		0.975
7 Strategic Management	0.104	0.004			0.108		0.108
8 New Dimensions	0.100	0.009			0.109		0.109
9 TFS	0.016				0.016		0.016
10 CFS	0.169	0.005			0.174		0.174
11 Training Dept.	0.569	0.006			0.575		0.575
12 Fleet	0.590	(0.032)			0.558		0.558
13 Ops Logistics	1.511	0.052			1.563		1.563
14 Ops Policy	0.084	(0.006)			0.078		0.078
15 Personnel	0.298	0.049			0.347	(0.020)	0.327
16 P&I	0.100	(0.012)			0.088		0.088
17 FRA Costs	0.059				0.059		0.059
18 ICT	1.078	0.036	(0.012)		1.102	0.090	1.192
19 Facilities Mngt	2.329	(0.340)	(0.158)	(0.006)	1.825	(0.036)	1.789
20 PPL Charges		0.229		0.149	0.378		0.378
21 PPL on-off Costs		0.096			0.096	(0.096)	0.000
22 Insurances	0.291				0.291		0.291
23 Finance (FRS)	0.111	(0.009)			0.102	(0.080)	0.022
24 Finance SLA	0.098				0.098		0.098
25 Capital Financing	3.154				3.154	0.035	3.189
26 Legal Services	0.023	0.005			0.028		0.028
27	31.579	0.466	(0.170)	0.000	31.875	(0.852)	31.023
28 Pay Award Provision 15/16	0.436	(0.161)			0.275	(0.275)	0.000
29 Pay Award Provision 16/17					0.000	0.444	0.444
30 Inflation Contingency 15/16	0.260	(0.135)			0.125	(0.125)	0.000
31 Inflation Contingency 16/17					0.000	0.200	0.200
32 Core Budget	32.275	0.170	(0.170)	0.000	32.275	(0.608)	31.667
33 Excess Staff (net)	0.603	0.357			0.960	0.211	1.171
34 Secondment Income	(1.273)	(0.357)			(1.630)	1.389	(0.241)
35	31.605	0.170	(0.170)	0.000	31.605	0.992	32.597
36 Use of Devpt.Contingency	0.000	(0.170)	0.170		0.000		0.000
37 To/(from) Budget Reduction Reserve	0.670				0.670	(1.301)	(0.631)
38 To/(from) General Balances	0.000				0.000	(0.150)	(0.150)
39 Net Budget	32.275	(0.000)	0.000	0.000	32.275	(0.459)	31.816

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016-17

Council Tax Requirement Calculation

	2015/16 Total	2016/17 Expenditure	2016/17 Income	2016/17 Reserves	2016/17 Total
Core Budget	£32,275,000.00	£31,858,000.00	(£191,000.00)		£31,667,000.00
Net Cost Excess Staff	£603,000.00	£1,171,000.00			£1,171,000.00
Secondment Income	(£1,273,000.00)		(£241,000.00)		(£241,000.00)
To/(From) Budget Reduction Reserve	£670,000.00			(£631,000.00)	(£631,000.00)
To/(From) General Balances				(£150,000.00)	(£150,000.00)
NET BUDGET	£32,275,000.00	£33,029,000.00	(£432,000.00)	(£781,000.00)	£31,816,000.00
Less: New Dimensions/Firelink etc. Grants					
S31: Fire Revenue Grant (Firelink/New Dimensions)	(£1,132,279.00)		(£1,085,279.00)		(£1,085,279.00)
Less: Formula/Support Grants:					
Revenue Support Grant	(£5,555,416.00)		(£4,464,270.00)		(£4,464,270.00)
Business Rate Top Up Grant	(£2,821,117.00)		(£2,844,626.00)		(£2,844,626.00)
Less: Retained Share of Business Rates (1%)					
Baseline	(£2,341,149.00)		(£2,360,659.00)		(£2,360,659.00)
Local Forecasts	£152,653.00		£256,479.00		£256,479.00
S31: Business Rate Initiatives	(£208,852.00)		(£134,808.00)		(£134,808.00)
Collection Fund Loss Reserve	(£84,282.00)			(£45,718.00)	(£45,718.00)
GROSS PRECEPT	£20,284,558.00	£33,029,000.00	(£11,065,163.00)	(£826,718.00)	£21,137,119.00
Less: Collection Fund Deficits/(Surpluses)					
Bromsgrove	(£43,086.00)		(£57,602.00)		(£57,602.00)
Herefordshire	(£72,529.00)		(£70,027.00)		(£70,027.00)
Malvern Hills	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00
Redditch	(£19,386.00)		(£36,585.00)		(£36,585.00)
Worcester	(£15,196.00)		(£28,186.00)		(£28,186.00)
Wychavon	(£46,008.00)		(£61,307.00)		(£61,307.00)
Wyre Forest	(£26,049.00)		(£32,595.00)		(£32,595.00)
COUNCIL TAX REQUIREMENT	£20,062,304.00	£33,029,000.00	(£11,351,465.00)	(£826,718.00)	£20,850,817.00
<u>Tax-base : Band D Equivalent</u>					
Bromsgrove	34,907.84				35,404.87
Herefordshire	65,848.29				66,873.00
Malvern Hills	28,939.72				29,373.25
Redditch	24,846.71				25,144.49
Worcester	30,023.00				30,643.00
Wychavon	45,884.27				47,158.02
Wyre Forest	31,814.00				32,727.00
	262,263.83				267,323.63
Precept - Band D Equivalent	£76.496648				£77.998406
Band D (rounded to 2 decimal places)	£ 76.50				£ 78.00
<u>Total Precept on Billing Authorities</u>					
Bromsgrove	£2,670,332.76				£2,761,523.41
Herefordshire	£5,037,173.49				£5,215,987.40
Malvern Hills	£2,213,791.59				£2,291,066.68
Redditch	£1,900,690.04				£1,961,230.14
Worcester	£2,296,658.88				£2,390,105.15
Wychavon	£3,509,992.87				£3,678,250.39
Wyre Forest	£2,433,664.37				£2,552,653.83
	£20,062,304.00				£20,850,817.00
check	£0.00				£0.00
Equivalent to Tax at Band (Ratio to Band D)					
A 6/9	£ 51.0000				£ 52.0000
B 7/9	£ 59.5000				£ 60.6700
C 8/9	£ 68.0000				£ 69.3300
D 9/9	£ 76.5000				£ 78.0000
E 11/9	£ 93.5000				£ 95.3300
F 13/9	£ 110.5000				£ 112.6700
G 15/9	£ 127.5000				£ 130.0000
H 18/9	£ 153.0000				£ 156.0000

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016-17

Medium Term Financial Forecasts

Col Row	1	2 2017/18 Forecast £m	3 2018/19 Forecast £m	4 2019/20 Forecast £m
1	2015/16 CORE BUDGET	31.667	31.667	31.667
	<u>Cost Pressures</u>			
2	Pay Awards	0.454	0.908	1.362
3	General Inflation Contingency	0.200	0.500	0.800
4	LGPS Revaluation	0.020	0.040	0.060
5	Capital Programme	0.036	(0.031)	0.030
6	"Apprentice" Levy	0.070	0.070	0.070
7		32.447	33.154	33.989
	<u>Savings</u>			
8	FDS Review	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
9	JPV Savings	(0.042)	(0.074)	(0.143)
10	ESMCP Provision		(0.020)	(0.020)
11	Other	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
12	CORE BUDGET FORECAST	32.364	33.019	33.785
	<u>One-Off Costs</u>			
13	Excess Staff	1.037	0.589	0.096
14	GROSS BUDGET FORECAST	33.401	33.608	33.881
15	to/(from) Budget Reduction Reserve	(1.037)	(0.589)	(0.096)
16	to/(from) CSR Phasing Reserve	(0.574)	(0.386)	
17	to/(from) General Balances	(0.150)		
18	BUDGET REQUIREMENT FORECAST	31.640	32.633	33.785
		2017/18 Forecast £m	2018/19 Forecast £m	2019/20 Forecast £m
17	Assumed Business Rate increase	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
18	Indicative Grant Reductions	-17.70%	-10.00%	-5.50%
19	Assumed Tax-base Increase	1.35%	1.27%	1.25%
20	Assumed Band D Tax Increase	1.96%	1.96%	1.96%
21	Consolidated Revenue Support Grant	(6.014)	(5.413)	(5.118)
22	Fire Revenue Grant	(1.097)	(0.967)	(0.837)
23	Retained Business Rates	(2.283)	(2.329)	(2.375)
24	Council Tax Precept	(21.548)	(22.249)	(22.970)
25	PROJECTED RESOURCES	(30.942)	(30.958)	(31.300)
		2017/18 Forecast £m	2018/19 Forecast £m	2019/20 Forecast £m
27	BUDGET GAP	0.698	1.675	2.485

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority
Statement of Prudential Indicators
and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy

Introduction : Prudential Indicators

The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (Prudential Code) has been developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to provide a code of practice to underpin the new system of capital finance embodied in Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003. Since 1 April 2004, Local Authorities are no longer subject to government controlled borrowing approvals and are free to determine their own level of capital investment controlled by self-regulation.

The key objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure that capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Prudential Code supports a system of self-regulation that is achieved by the setting and monitoring of a suite of Prudential Indicators that directly relate to each other. The indicators establish parameters within which the Fire Authority should operate to ensure the objectives of the Prudential Code are met.

Introduction : Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy

This is the amount charged every year to provide for the repayment of long term loans used to finance capital assets.

Under provisions of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Amendment) Regulations 2008, the FRA is required to “determine an amount of MRP which is considered to be prudent”.

The Fire Authority has a statutory requirement to determine an MRP policy prior to the start of the financial year.

In considering a prudent MRP policy the Fire Authority needs to take into account the statutory guidance provided by CLG, and the issue of affordability. The guidance states that “provision for the borrowing which financed the acquisition of an asset should be made over a period bearing some relation to that over which the asset continues to provide a service” – the “Asset Life” method.

Prudential Indicators

The Prudential Indicators for which the Fire Authority is required to set limits are as follows:

1. Net Borrowing and the Capital Financing Requirement

This Prudential Indicator provides an overarching requirement that all the indicators operate within and is described in the Prudential Code as follows:

“In order to ensure that over the medium term net borrowing will only be for a capital purpose, the local authority should ensure that net external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of capital financing requirement in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current and next two financial years”.

The Treasurer reports that the Fire Authority had no difficulty meeting this requirement since 2002/03, nor are any difficulties envisaged for the current or future years. This view takes into account all plans and commitments included in the 2016/17 Budget and MTFP.

2 Capital Expenditure

The actual amount of capital expenditure that was incurred since 2014/15, and the estimates of capital expenditure to be incurred for the current and future years that are proposed in the 2016/17 Budget and MTFP are as follows:

	2014/15 Actual £000	2015/16 Estimate £000	2016/17 Estimate £000	2017/18 Estimate £000	2018/19 Estimate £000	2019/20 Estimate £000
Capital Expenditure	4,809	2,467	10,918	4,150	6,575	4,512
Leased Assets	313	52	-	425	150	34
	5,122	2,519	10,918	4,575	6,725	4,546

2. Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

Financing Costs include the amount of interest payable in respect of borrowing or other long term liabilities and the amount the Fire Authority is required to set aside to repay debt, less interest and investments income.

The actual Net Revenue Stream is the ‘amount to be met from government grants and local taxation’ taken from the annual Statement of Accounts, and

the estimated figure is the Fire and Rescue Authority's budget net of any transfers to or from the balances.

The prediction of the Net Revenue Stream in this Prudential Indicator for future years assumes increases in the Fire Authority's funding from government and the local taxpayer consistent with expectations in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is indicative only and in no way meant to influence the actual future years funding or in particular the funding from Precepts.

The indicator only requires that the costs associated with capital expenditure are measured in this way. However the Fire Authority has used, and may continue to use Operational Leasing as a cost effective method of acquiring vehicles. In the spirit of the Prudential Code these costs are included for comparative purposes.

The rise in this ratio is partially due to the fact that capital expenditure prior to the formation of the FRA is not charged to the Fire Authority; (In other words, the Fire Authority inherited all its assets without any cost. Thus, as investment is made in vehicles, for example the increased costs are in the Fire Authority accounts but the savings are elsewhere); and partly due to inflation between original purchase and replacement purchase e.g. over 15 years for a fire appliance.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	Actual	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Financing Costs	1,756	2,723	2,939	2,975	2,908	2,969
Net Revenue Stream	31,366	31,143	30,731	29,845	29,991	30,463
Ratio	5.60%	8.74%	9.56%	9.97%	9.70%	9.75%

3. Capital Financing Requirement

The capital financing requirement (CFR) is a measure of the extent to which the Fire Authority needs to borrow to support capital expenditure. It does not necessarily relate to the actual amount of borrowing at any one point in time. The Fire Authority arranges its treasury management activity via a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) which has an integrated treasury management strategy where there is no distinction between revenue and capital cash flows and the day to day position of external borrowing and investments can change constantly.

The capital financing requirement concerns only those transactions arising from capital spending, whereas the amount of external borrowing is a

consequence of all revenue and capital cash transactions combined together following recommended treasury management practice.

Estimates of the end of year capital financing requirement are shown below

	2014/15 Actual £000	2015/16 Estimate £000	2016/17 Estimate £000	2017/18 Estimate £000	2018/19 Estimate £000	2019/20 Estimate £000
CFR at 31st March	17,859	17,151	21,351	23,538	27,214	28,964

4. **Authorised Limit**

The Authorised Limit represents an upper limit of borrowing that could be afforded in the short term but may not be sustainable. This limit includes a risk assessment of exceptional events taking into account the demands of revenue and capital cash flows. The Authorised Limit gauges events that may occur over and above those transactions which have been included in the Operational Boundary.

These limits are higher than set in previous years to reflect the decisions taken by the Fire Authority to switch from leasing to more cost effective borrowing for the acquisition of operational vehicles.

The Fire Authority should note that the Authorised Limit represents the limit specified in section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003 (Duty to determine affordable borrowing limit).

The following Authorised Limits for external debt, excluding temporary investments are recommended:

	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000	2018/19 £000	2019/20 £000
Authorised Limit				
External Borrowing	26,000	29,000	32,000	34,000

5. Operational Boundary

The Operational Boundary represents an estimate of the most likely, prudent, but not worst case scenario and provides a parameter against which day to day treasury management activity can be monitored.

The Treasurer reports that procedures are in place to monitor the Operational Boundary on a daily basis, via the SLA with WCC and that sufficient authorisation is in place to take whatever action is necessary to ensure that, in line with the Treasury Management Strategy, the cash flows of the Fire Authority are managed prudently.

Occasionally, the Operational Boundary may be exceeded (but still not breach the Authorised Limit) following variations in cash flow. Such an occurrence would follow controlled treasury management action and may not have a significant impact on the prudential indicators when viewed all together.

Both the Authorised Limit and the Operational Boundary include an element relating to debt restructuring where, for the short term only, external borrowing may be made in advance of the repayment of loans. In this circumstance External Borrowing is increased temporarily until the replaced loans are repaid. The converse can also apply where loans are repaid in advance of borrowings.

The following limits (shown overleaf) for each year's Operational Boundary, excluding temporary investments are recommended:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Operational Boundary	£000	£000	£000	£000
External Borrowing	24,000	26,000	30,000	32,000

6. Actual External Debt

The Fire Authority's actual external debt as at 31 March 2015 was £13.971 million; comprising £13.971 million External Borrowing and £0 (zero) Other Long Term Liabilities. During 2015/16 £0.834 million of external debt is scheduled for repayment.

7. The Incremental Impact of Capital Investment Decisions on the Council Tax

This indicator identifies specifically the additional cost to the taxpayer of the **new** capital investment proposed in the 2016-17 – 2019/20 Capital Programme. As the indicator deals only with new investment the impact of the previously approved programme was included in the equivalent report provided to the Authority in Feb 2015.

The incremental impact identifies transactions that will occur **over and above** what has already been provided for in the 2015/16 revenue budget and projected in the MTFP and assumes the funding available in 2015/16 will be carried forward in the future year's base budgets.

The incremental impact has been calculated using forward estimates of funding consistent with expectations in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The impact on the revenue budget, and therefore the Council Tax, is felt by a combination of the following: debt costs of the new borrowing, the amount set aside from revenue to repay the principal element of external borrowing (Minimum Revenue Provision) and the revenue impact of a capital project

It should be noted that borrowing itself does not fund capital expenditure since the loans have to be repaid eventually. The actual funding comes from the Minimum Revenue Provision which is statutorily charged to revenue each year.

The estimate of the incremental impact of the capital investment detailed in the 2017/18 Budget on the Council Tax is as follows:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Incremental Impact on Band D	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -

PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR TREASURY MANAGEMENT

8. Treasury Management Code of Practice

The Fire Authority has adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA): Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services.

The Treasury Management function is carried out on behalf of the Authority by Worcestershire County Council, who have also adopted the Treasury Management Code of Practice.

9. Fixed Interest Rate Exposures

It is recommended that the Fire Authority sets an upper limit on its fixed interest rate exposures as follows.

Upper limits for net principal sums outstanding at fixed rates

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Fixed Interest Rate Exposure	£000	£000	£000	£000
Upper Limit	26,000	29,000	32,000	34,000

This represents the position that all of the Fire Authority's authorised external borrowing may be at a fixed rate at any one time.

10. Variable Interest Rate Exposures

It is recommended that the Fire Authority sets an upper limit on its variable interest rate exposures as follows.

Upper limits for net principal sums outstanding at variable rates

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Variable Interest Rate Exposure	£000	£000	£000	£000
Upper Limit	7,000	7,000	8,000	9,000

This is the maximum external borrowing judged prudent by the Treasurer that the Fire Authority should expose to variable rates.

11. Maturity Structure of Borrowing

It is recommended that the upper and lower limits for the maturity structure of borrowings are as follows:

Amount of projected borrowing that is fixed rate maturing in each period as a percentage of total projected borrowing that is fixed rate.

Period of Maturity	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
	%	%
Under 12 months	25	0
12 months and within 24 months	25	0
24 months and within 5 years	50	0
5 years and within 10 years	75	0
10 years and above	95	25

12. Investments for longer than 364 days

It is recommended that the upper limits of total principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days are £5 million for each year.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy

To continue the policy previously adopted i.e.:

1. Vehicle Expenditure before 2008/09 – MRP on a proxy Asset Life basis using original cost, less cumulative MRP, over the remaining useful life of the individual vehicle types.
2. Expenditure before 2008/09, (other than vehicles) - MRP on a proxy Asset Life basis using original cost, less cumulative MRP over average asset life as above
3. All expenditure from 2008/09 onwards - MRP using an Asset life basis:-
 - Buildings over 50 years – per depreciation policy;
 - IT equipment over 5 years - reflecting average life
 - Other Equipment over 7 years – reflecting actual average usage within the FRS;
 - Vehicles – on actual estimated life of each vehicle type

This means that after a specified time (depending on the life expectancy of the individual asset) there will be no further charge to the Revenue Account for MRP in relation to these assets. For a significant proportion of pre-2008/09 assets this point had been reached by 2014/15.

Item 8 - Budget and Precept 2016/17 and Medium term Financial Plan

Since the Authority papers were despatched, the final grant settlement has now been received and is more generous than the provisional one, in two ways:

- The Rural Services Delivery Grant is now confirmed as being additional to Revenue Support Grant rather than as previously an element within it
- A new Transitional Grant payable to Authorities where grant cuts are front loaded. Sixteen of 29 fire authorities have received payments and as a proportion of the overall settlement H&W receives the highest sum at 1.2% (compared to 0.6% average).

As a consequence the Authority now has £0.222m of additional resources in 2016/17 (and smaller additional sums in future years). Given that a balanced budget was already proposed with the expected resources this enables a further re-phasing of the use of balances, without changing the Precept decision for 2016/17.

This also results in a significant reduction in the 2017/18 budget gap from £0.698m to £0.299m.

A revised set of Appendices (numbered 8 to 11) is attached which will replace the existing Appendices 3 to 6.

It will also be necessary to make minor changes to the table on Revenue Reserves at paragraph 66 to:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Balances at 1 April	1.838	1.838	1.538	1.538
Approved Use	(0.300)			
Proposed re-phasing	0.300	(0.300)		
General Balances at 31 Mar	1.838	1.538	1.538	1.538
Indicative Budget Requirement	31.992	31.172	31.025	31.388
% of Budget Requirement	5.7%	4.9%	5.0%	4.9%

and the Prudential Code Indicators table at Paragraph 2 of Appendix 7 to:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	Actual	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Financing Costs	1,756	2,723	2,939	2,975	2,908	2,969
Net Revenue Stream	31,366	31,059	30,907	30,075	30,058	30,551
Ratio	5.60%	8.77%	9.51%	9.89%	9.67%	9.72%

An amended set of Recommendations is therefore proposed:

It is recommended that:

i) the Capital Budget and Programme (Appendix 1) be approved;

ii) the Revenue Budget (Appendix 9) be approved;

iii) the Authority calculates that in relation to the year 2016/17:

- a) the aggregate expenditure it will incur will be £33,055,000.00;***
- b) the aggregate income it will receive will be £11,572,980.00;***
- c) the net amount transferred from financial reserves will be £631,000.00;***
- d) the net amount of its Council Tax Requirement will be £20,851,020.00;***
- e) the basic amount of Council Tax will be £78.00 (Band D);***
- f) the precept demands on the individual Billing Authorities are:***
 - Bromsgrove £2,761,550.31***
 - Herefordshire £5,216,038.18***
 - Malvern Hills £2,291,088.98***
 - Redditch £1,961,249.23***
 - Worcester £2,390,128.42***
 - Wychavon £3,678,286.20***
 - Wyre Forest £2,552,678.68***

iv) the Medium Term Financial Plan (Appendix 11) be approved; and

v) the Statement of Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (Appendix 7 – with amendment above) be approved.

10 February 2016

Martin Reohorn, Treasurer
(01905 368205)
Email: mreohorn@hwfire.org.uk

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Revenue Budget

Col.	1	3	4	5	6	7
		Core	Excess Staff	Second Income	Bud Red Reserve	NET
Line		£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
1	2015/16 Budget	32.275	0.960	(1.630)	0.670	32.275
2	Saving from 2015 Pay award provision	(0.275)				(0.275)
3	Saving from 2015/16 Inflation provision	(0.125)				(0.125)
	<u>Cost Pressures</u>					
4	Pay Awards	0.444				0.444
5	General Inflation Contingency	0.200				0.200
6	LGPS Revaluation	0.010				0.010
7	Capital Programme	0.035				0.035
8	NI Contracting Out Abolition - phasing	0.380				0.380
9	Fire Control Maintenance	0.090				0.090
10	Income	(0.080)				(0.080)
11	Unallocated Budget	0.026				0.026
	<u>Savings</u>					
12	CRMP Implementation - phasing	(0.895)				(0.895)
13	Droitwich/USAR phasing	(0.121)				(0.121)
14	JPV - Business Case Savings	(0.036)				(0.036)
15	JPV - One Off Costs Savings	(0.096)				(0.096)
16	One off costs Implementation of 2015 Pension Scheme	(0.020)				(0.020)
17	Flexi-Duty Officer Review	(0.119)				(0.119)
		31.693	0.960	(1.630)	0.670	31.693
18	2016/17 Projected Core Expenditure Need					
19	Excess Staff		0.211			0.211
20	Secondment Income			1.389		1.389
21	Use of Budget Reduction Reserve				(1.301)	(1.301)
22	2016/17 Budget	31.693	1.171	(0.241)	(0.631)	31.992

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016/17

Revenue Budget Allocation

Col Line	(1) 2015/16 Original Budget £m	(2) In Year Realloc -ation £m	(3) Reverse Use of Reserves £m	(4) PPL Full Year £m	(5) 2015/16 Revised Core £m	(6) Amend- ments £m	(7) 2016/17 Proposed Allocation £m
1 WT FF Pay	12.806	0.087			12.893	(0.899)	11.994
2 RDS FF Pay	3.351	0.025			3.376	0.067	3.443
3 Control Pay	0.702	0.004			0.706	0.016	0.722
4 Support Pay	3.009	0.249		(0.143)	3.115	0.071	3.186
5 Other Employee Costs	0.061				0.061		0.061
6 Unfunded Pensions	0.966	0.009			0.975		0.975
7 Strategic Management	0.104	0.004			0.108		0.108
8 New Dimensions	0.100	0.009			0.109		0.109
9 TFS	0.016				0.016		0.016
10 CFS	0.169	0.005			0.174		0.174
11 Training Dept.	0.569	0.006			0.575		0.575
12 Fleet	0.590	(0.032)			0.558		0.558
13 Ops Logistics	1.511	0.052			1.563		1.563
14 Ops Policy	0.084	(0.006)			0.078		0.078
15 Personnel	0.298	0.049			0.347	(0.020)	0.327
16 P&I	0.100	(0.012)			0.088		0.088
17 FRA Costs	0.059				0.059		0.059
18 ICT	1.078	0.036	(0.012)		1.102	0.090	1.192
19 Facilities Mngt	2.329	(0.340)	(0.158)	(0.006)	1.825	(0.036)	1.789
20 PPL Charges		0.229		0.149	0.378		0.378
21 PPL on-off Costs		0.096			0.096	(0.096)	0.000
22 Insurances	0.291				0.291		0.291
23 Finance (FRS)	0.111	(0.009)			0.102	(0.080)	0.022
24 Finance SLA	0.098				0.098		0.098
25 Capital Financing	3.154				3.154	0.035	3.189
26 Legal Services	0.023	0.005			0.028		0.028
27 Unallocated Budget	0.000				0.000	0.026	0.026
28	31.579	0.466	(0.170)	0.000	31.875	(0.826)	31.049
29 Pay Award Provision 15/16	0.436	(0.161)			0.275	(0.275)	0.000
30 Pay Award Provision 16/17					0.000	0.444	0.444
31 Inflation Contingency 15/16	0.260	(0.135)			0.125	(0.125)	0.000
32 Inflation Contingency 16/17					0.000	0.200	0.200
33 Core Budget	32.275	0.170	(0.170)	0.000	32.275	(0.582)	31.693
34 Excess Staff (net)	0.603	0.357			0.960	0.211	1.171
35 Secondment Income	(1.273)	(0.357)			(1.630)	1.389	(0.241)
36	31.605	0.170	(0.170)	0.000	31.605	1.018	32.623
37 Use of Devpt.Contingency	0.000	(0.170)	0.170		0.000		0.000
38 To/(from) Budget Reduction Reserve	0.670				0.670	(1.301)	(0.631)
39 Net Budget	32.275	(0.000)	0.000	0.000	32.275	(0.283)	31.992

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016-17

Council Tax Requirement Calculation

	2015/16 Total	2016/17 Expenditure	2016/17 Income	2016/17 Reserves	2016/17 Total
Core Budget	£32,275,000.00	£31,884,000.00	(£191,000.00)		£31,693,000.00
Net Cost Excess Staff	£603,000.00	£1,171,000.00			£1,171,000.00
Secondment Income	(£1,273,000.00)		(£241,000.00)		(£241,000.00)
To/(From) Budget Reduction Reserve	£670,000.00			(£631,000.00)	(£631,000.00)
NET BUDGET	£32,275,000.00	£33,055,000.00	(£432,000.00)	(£631,000.00)	£31,992,000.00
Less: Formula/Support Grants:					
Revenue Support Grant	(£5,555,416.00)		(£4,464,270.00)		(£4,464,270.00)
Business Rate Top Up Grant	(£2,821,117.00)		(£2,844,626.00)		(£2,844,626.00)
Transition Grant	£0.00		(£113,064.00)		(£113,064.00)
Less: Other Grants					
S31: Fire Revenue Grant (Firelink/New Dimensions)	(£1,132,279.00)		(£1,085,279.00)		(£1,085,279.00)
Rural Services Delivery Grant			(£108,451.00)		(£108,451.00)
Less: Retained Share of Business Rates (1%)					
Baseline	(£2,341,149.00)		(£2,360,659.00)		(£2,360,659.00)
Local Forecasts	£152,653.00		£256,479.00		£256,479.00
S31: Business Rate Initiatives	(£208,852.00)		(£134,808.00)		(£134,808.00)
GROSS PRECEPT	£20,368,840.00	£33,055,000.00	(£11,286,678.00)	(£631,000.00)	£21,137,322.00
Less: Collection Fund Deficits/(Surpluses)					
Bromsgrove	(£43,086.00)		(£57,602.00)		(£57,602.00)
Herefordshire	(£72,529.00)		(£70,027.00)		(£70,027.00)
Malvern Hills	£0.00		£0.00		£0.00
Redditch	(£19,386.00)		(£36,585.00)		(£36,585.00)
Worcester	(£15,196.00)		(£28,186.00)		(£28,186.00)
Wychavon	(£46,008.00)		(£61,307.00)		(£61,307.00)
Wyre Forest	(£26,049.00)		(£32,595.00)		(£32,595.00)
COUNCIL TAX REQUIREMENT	£20,146,586.00	£33,055,000.00	(£11,572,980.00)	(£631,000.00)	£20,851,020.00
<u>Tax-base : Band D Equivalent</u>					
Bromsgrove	34,907.84				35,404.87
Herefordshire	65,848.29				66,873.00
Malvern Hills	28,939.72				29,373.25
Redditch	24,846.71				25,144.49
Worcester	30,023.00				30,643.00
Wychavon	45,884.27				47,158.02
Wyre Forest	31,814.00				32,727.00
	262,263.83				267,323.63
Precept - Band D Equivalent	£76.818012				£77.999165
Band D (rounded to 2 decimal places)	£ 76.82				£ 78.00
<u>Total Precept on Billing Authorities</u>					
Bromsgrove	£2,681,550.87				£2,761,550.31
Herefordshire	£5,058,334.72				£5,216,038.18
Malvern Hills	£2,223,091.75				£2,291,088.98
Redditch	£1,908,674.86				£1,961,249.23
Worcester	£2,306,307.17				£2,390,128.42
Wychavon	£3,524,738.40				£3,678,286.20
Wyre Forest	£2,443,888.23				£2,552,678.68
	£20,146,586.00				£20,851,020.00
check	£0.00				£0.00
Equivalent to Tax at Band (Ratio to Band D)					
A 6/9	£ 51.2100				£ 52.0000
B 7/9	£ 59.7500				£ 60.6700
C 8/9	£ 68.2800				£ 69.3300
D 9/9	£ 76.8200				£ 78.0000
E 11/9	£ 93.8900				£ 95.3300
F 13/9	£ 110.9600				£ 112.6700
G 15/9	£ 128.0300				£ 130.0000
H 18/9	£ 153.6400				£ 156.0000

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority 2016-17

Medium Term Financial Forecasts

Col Row	1	2 2017/18 Forecast £m	3 2018/19 Forecast £m	4 2019/20 Forecast £m
1	2015/16 CORE BUDGET	31.693	31.693	31.693
	<u>Cost Pressures</u>			
2	Pay Awards	0.454	0.908	1.362
3	General Inflation Contingency	0.200	0.500	0.800
4	LGPS Revaluation	0.020	0.040	0.060
5	Capital Programme	0.036	(0.031)	0.030
6	"Apprentice" Levy	0.070	0.070	0.070
7		32.473	33.180	34.015
	<u>Savings</u>			
8	FDS Review	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
9	JPV Savings	(0.042)	(0.074)	(0.143)
10	ESMCP Provision		(0.020)	(0.020)
11	Other	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
12	CORE BUDGET FORECAST	32.390	33.045	33.811
	<u>One-Off Costs</u>			
13	Excess Staff	1.037	0.589	0.096
14	GROSS BUDGET FORECAST	33.427	33.634	33.907
15	to/(from) Budget Reduction Reserve	(1.037)	(0.589)	(0.096)
16	to/(from) CSR Phasing Reserve	(0.574)	(0.386)	
17	to/(from) General Balances	(0.300)		
18	to/(from) NNDR Reserve	(0.045)		
19	BUDGET REQUIREMENT FORECAST	31.471	32.659	33.811
		2017/18 Forecast £m	2018/19 Forecast £m	2019/20 Forecast £m
20	Assumed Business Rate increase	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
21	Indicative Grant Reductions	-17.70%	-10.00%	-5.50%
22	Assumed Tax-base Increase	1.35%	1.27%	1.25%
23	Assumed Band D Tax Increase	1.96%	1.96%	1.96%
24	Consolidated Revenue Support Grant	(6.014)	(5.413)	(5.118)
25	Transitional Grant	(0.142)		
26	Fire Revenue Grant	(1.097)	(0.967)	(0.837)
27	Rural Services Delivery Grant	(0.088)	(0.067)	(0.088)
28	Retained Business Rates	(2.283)	(2.329)	(2.375)
29	Council Tax Precept	(21.548)	(22.249)	(22.970)
30	PROJECTED RESOURCES	(31.172)	(31.025)	(31.388)
		2017/18 Forecast £m	2018/19 Forecast £m	2019/20 Forecast £m
31	BUDGET GAP	0.299	1.634	2.423

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

9. Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station – Consultation Responses

Purpose of report

1. To receive the outcome of the public consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed Wyre Forest Blue-Light Hub, seek approval to undertake further work to identify a preferred site and recommend further public consultation in relation to that preferred site prior to a final decision on whether to proceed with the development.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- i) the report from ORS, which sets out the feedback from formal public consultation exercises in respect of the proposal to create a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub, be noted;***
- ii) a further report be brought to the next meeting of the Authority with a recommendation as to the preferred location for a potential Hub having regard to land availability, impact on attendance times, cost and the Hub's impact on local residents, businesses, and the environment;***
- iii) Subject to (ii) above, a further phase of consultation be undertaken on the preferred location prior to a final decision by the Authority on whether to proceed with the Wyre Forest Hub.***

Introduction and Background

2. With the support of a £2.38 million award from the Government's Transformation Fund, officers developed a proposal to create a new purpose-built, multi-agency 'Blue Light' Hub to serve the Wyre Forest area to replace the three current fire stations.
3. On 17 June 2015, the Fire Authority authorised formal public consultation on the principle of the proposal. The consultation process was facilitated by an independent social research specialist, Opinion Research Services (ORS), and included public meetings in Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport as well as nine deliberative forums; seven with affected fire station personnel, one stakeholder forum and one forum of randomly-selected members of the local public.

4. A public consultation document with details of the proposal and a questionnaire seeking views on the proposal was prepared and made available online and distributed to public venues in the Wyre Forest area. The consultation ran for 12 weeks between 1 September and 27 November 2015. Responses to the consultation were analysed by ORS; their report is attached as Appendix 1 and they will also be present at the meeting to present their findings.

Summary of Consultation Responses

5. The consultation returned 192 completed questionnaires, 10 written submissions and one petition in addition to the public meetings and forums. The ORS report provides a summary of the outcomes of each method of consultation, including the balance of opinion between support and opposition. This is illustrated in the following table.

Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Favourable on the principles of closer blue light collaboration and the creation of a single hub site ■ Unfavourable on the proposal to close three fire stations
Staff Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Most Kidderminster wholetime and on-call (RDS) crews were favourable or did not object ■ Bewdley and Stourport RDS crews and one Kidderminster wholetime crew were unfavourable
Public Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overwhelmingly favourable
Stakeholder Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overwhelmingly favourable
Public Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overwhelmingly unfavourable
Petition (gathered by Stourport RDS crew members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Unfavourable (with 2,350 signatures)
Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Six unfavourable – including the FBU ■ Two favourable – including the Corporate Leadership Team, Wyre Forest District Council ■ One alternative suggestion and another making more general comments

6. In addition to comments on the proposals, a separate alternative proposal was also submitted. It proposed to retain Kidderminster fire station and replace Bewdley and Stourport fire stations with a new community response station at Blackstone (between Bewdley and Stourport). However, the

proposal would not meet the strict terms of the government's Transformation Fund and nor would it address the long term maintenance issues surrounding Kidderminster Fire Station.

7. The ORS report concludes that overall there was an even balance between the level of support and the level of opposition to the proposals. The report comments that while **“the opposition by questionnaire respondents, attendees at public meetings, petition signatories and some staff members numerically outweigh the public, stakeholder and other staff forum participants” . . . “the questionnaire supported the general principles for a hub station and the forums had the benefit of being in-depth deliberative meetings that could review the evidence.”**
8. The report adds further that **“influencing public policy through consultation is not simply a ‘numbers game’ or ‘popularity contest’ in which the loudest voices or the greatest number 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 opposite.”**
9. In this respect, the report comments that the Fire Authority will need to assess the balance of opinion alongside all the evidence and with the benefit of professional and political judgement in order best to determine the future direction.
10. Finally, the report makes it clear that the consultation was about the principle of establishing a hub station while closing the current fire stations, and notes that many respondents felt unable to form a definitive view without knowing the proposed location of any hub. Therefore, ORS recommend that should the Fire Authority decide to progress the creation of a hub station through a three-into-one merger of the existing stations, a further phase of consultation should be carried out once a suitable site has been chosen, and prior to making a final decision.
11. To ensure the consultation programme conforms to good practice and provides sufficient information to allow the proposal to be considered appropriately by local residents, key stakeholders and affected fire service personnel the project has incurred costs through the engagement of specialist data modelling, opinion research and printing companies, which amount to circa £74,000 to date and are contained in existing budgets.

Proposed action

12. The consultation has been valuable in highlighting the key issues in respect of the proposals and in identifying the relative levels of support for the principles of working more closely with other emergency services and creating a single hub station.

13. The outcomes are not unexpected: it is understandable that the public meetings found a considerable level of concern amongst communities in affected areas, and that the more in-depth consideration of the details of proposals in the forums provided a greater level of assurance and support. It is appreciated, however, that the evidence supporting the creation of a hub station would be better understood once a suitable site location has been chosen.
14. Therefore, officers propose to undertake further analysis to identify the preferred site(s) having regard to response times, the availability of on-call firefighters, impact on the local area, cost and availability. Officers will then report back to the Fire Authority on 16th June 2016 for approval of a preferred site, prior to the second phase of public consultation. Following consultation, the Fire Authority will be recommended to make a final decision on the chosen site.
15. By its nature this is a commercially sensitive process involving contract negotiations, site investigations and other planning matters. Officers would seek to secure an 'exclusivity agreement' with the chosen site's current landowner/s to ensure that the preferred location remains available at an agreed price while the second phase of formal public consultation is conducted.
16. The further costs of undertaking site analysis and undertaking additional consultation are estimated at £23k which would be contained in existing budgets. This would be in addition to the costs incurred to date (paragraph 11 above) and would be incurred 'at risk' if the Authority subsequently decides not to proceed with the Hub proposal. However, it must be remembered the the overall project value is in excess of £5m and with a high degree of sensitivity and therefore it is considered essential to get this phase of the project correct.

Conclusion/Summary

17. Following the completion of the first phase of consultation on the principle of creating a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station, there is a good understanding of opinions for and against the proposal and the reasons underlying these views.
18. It is now proposed that a second phase of consultation should be carried out following identification of a preferred location, which will also aim to address any outstanding issues or concerns raised in the first phase. The results of the second phase of consultation on the preferred location will be reported to the Fire Authority at a future meeting.

Corporate Considerations

<p>Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)</p>	<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 £74,000. The cost of undertaking site analysis/selection and further public consultation is estimated at a further £23,000. If the project is found not to be viable and does not proceed, or if the bid funding is withdrawn for any reason, then under the funding terms and conditions would be abortive and would need to be absorbed from other areas of the Fire Authority budget.</p>
<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>	<p>The project is directly linked to delivering 'Our Strategy' (Resourcing the Future and Buildings and Infrastructure).</p>
<p>Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>A Risk Management log is included within the project documentation.</p>
<p>Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)</p>	<p>Listening and Engagement forums have been held with key stakeholders and an extensive formal public consultation programme was carried out between 1 September 2015 and 27 November 2015.</p>
<p>Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)</p>	<p>An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed in August 2015 prior to the first phase of public consultation. An updated Assessment will be completed following selection of the preferred site location for the proposed Hub Station.</p>

Supporting Information

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

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment for the Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station

Background papers

Fire Authority Report 17 June 2015: Item 14, Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub

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

Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Consultation document

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

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Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station



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&WFA) 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 forums and meetings. The forum participants were especially patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions about challenging topics, with some controversial aspects in some cases. 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 Mark Preece and Jean Cole 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 answer participants' questions fully and frankly, 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 usefully to thinking about H&WFRS's development in difficult times. 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

Introduction

1. On the basis of its previous experience, ORS was commissioned by Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority (H&WFA) to consult the public, stakeholders and Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service (H&WFRS) staff about a proposal to create a joint Emergency Services Hub Station for the Wyre Forest area by relocating the current Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn (henceforth Stourport) Fire Stations into a new hub station at an appropriate location.
2. The consultation programme comprised:
 - Designing, implementing, analysing and reporting an open online and paper questionnaire;
 - Facilitating and reporting: seven forums with wholetime and retained operational staff at Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport fire stations; one stakeholder forum; and one forum with members of the public drawn from all three areas of the Wyre Forest;
 - Chairing three public meetings, one each in Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport; and
 - Analysing and summarising written submissions and petitions received by H&WFRS during the consultation period.
3. ORS worked in collaboration with H&WFRS to design the questionnaire and consultation document, and to prepare informative stimulus material for the various meetings before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings. We have also analysed and summarised the submissions and petitions commenting on H&WFA's draft proposals.

Open Questionnaire

4. The open questionnaire (with an accompanying Consultation Document) was available online and as a hard copy between 1st September and 27th November 2015. 192 questionnaires were completed; 172 were submitted online and 20 by post.
5. 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, 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

6. In total, 20 wholetime firefighters from Kidderminster Fire Station took part (in separate forums for each watch), as well as 29 retained firefighters drawn from Bewdley (9), Kidderminster (7) and Stourport (13). Eight stakeholders - from the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA), Mid Severn Valley RAYNET, West Mercia Search and Rescue (WMSAR), Age UK, the Charity Organisational & Financial Services, the Salvation Army, Emergency Planning, Worcestershire County Council and CJP Safety - attended their respective forum, and 14 randomly selected members of the public met together in the other.
7. The forums began with a concise review of the number and distribution of fire engines and stations in Wyre Forest and current crewing systems, before the proposal for an Emergency Services Hub Station for the Wyre Forest was considered in some detail, particularly with respect to:

The proposed practical arrangements;

The Transformation Fund award of £2.4m from Government;

Reasons why it is possible to combine fire stations (including falling incident levels across Wyre Forest between 2010-11 and 2014-15);

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

The possible impact of the proposal on attendance times; and

Site selection issues.

8. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse groups of people from across Wyre Forest and H&WFRS staff the opportunity to participate. Because the recruitment was inclusive and participants were diverse, we are satisfied that the outcomes of the meetings (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

Public Meetings

9. The Fire Authority held three public meetings, which were widely publicised by media and using posters in the local areas. The meetings were held in the evenings, as shown on the next page:

Location	Date	Numbers Attending
Stourport-on-Severn (Civic Centre)	15 th September 2015	75
Kidderminster (Wyre Forest District Council Chambers)	17 th September 2015	16
Bewdley (St George's Hall)	12 th October 2015	60

10. Each meeting lasted over two hours and included rigorous discussions of the Fire Authority's proposals. Participants received (and listened attentively and with interest to) a detailed presentation by senior officers of H&WFRS, which covered all of the topics and issues outlined above in paragraph 7.
11. In addition to members of the public, each of the meetings was attended by current and retired firefighters (and in some cases their families and friends), as well as union representatives. For example, in the smallest meeting of 16 at Kidderminster, there were four crew members and two union representatives; and at Stourport it seemed that about 40% or more of the attendees had close connections with the Service. At Bewdley, though, local residents were the great majority of the attendees. At each venue the firefighters and union representatives spoke influentially, in some cases reflecting and in other cases shaping the opinions of the residents present.

Written Submissions

12. During the formal consultation process, 10 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
Councillors	1
Political Groups	1
H&WFRS Staff	1
Representative Bodies	1
Neighbouring FRS	1
Total	10

13. ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in the full report, and the main themes are outlined below in this Executive Summary.

Petition

14. 2,350 people signed a petition (organised by the Stourport-on Severn firefighters) entitled 'Save our Fire Station'.

Consultation Programme Proportional and Fair

15. 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.

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.

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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) 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.

19. 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.
20. 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. Both the scale and nature of the programme compare well with similar consultations undertaken by other fire and rescue services and public bodies.

Report of Findings

21. 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.
22. This executive summary also includes ORS's conclusions about how to interpret the balance of opinion in the consultation.
23. 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

24. About seven in ten respondents (71%) agreed that H&WFRS should collaborate more closely with other 'bluelight' Emergency Services, with over two-fifths (42%) strongly agreeing. Only 16% disagreed.
25. In the open text comments, most respondents acknowledged the benefits of H&WFRS collaborating closely with other blue light services. The general feeling was that improved collaboration would lead to improved safety and effectiveness of response arising from services (and indeed the voluntary sector) working in a more integrated way. Collaborative working was also considered by many respondents to lead to greater operational efficiencies and cost savings arising from sharing resources.

26. The largest number of negative comments about service collaboration centred on the fact that blue light services are already or should already be working together in spite of not being co-located. Several participants said that modern technologies already facilitate communication and collaboration between services based at a number of sites. Also, several respondents observed that some blue light staff are seldom at their base stations, meaning that the hub would not lead to improved face-to-face communication and collaboration.
27. Over half (52%) of respondents agreed that the establishment of a Wyre Forest Emergency Service Hub that brings together Fire, Police, Ambulance and the voluntary emergency responders is a good idea in principle. Nearly four in ten respondents disagreed (38%), while one in ten (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Many people said in their text comments, though, that while they supported the idea of a hub in principle, their actual support would depend on its location.
28. Nearly six in ten (59%) respondents disagreed with the prospect of replacing the existing three fire stations with a Wyre Forest Emergency Service Hub Station (with 51% disagreeing strongly). Only just over a third (35%) of respondents agreed with the proposal. Opposition to the merger is clearly strongest in Stourport and Bewdley: while in Kidderminster a majority supported the proposal (49% for and 41% against), 85% of Bewdley respondents opposed it, and in Stourport 63% opposed it (with 36% in support).
29. By far the highest number of negative open text comments about the hub proposal were around the potential for longer response times - and several respondents complained that the proposal would cut necessary services and believed that it was principally designed to reduce costs.
30. A number of respondents used the open text comments to criticise the consultation process for inadequacies that made it hard for them to give informed opinions on the proposals. In particular, people highlighted: the limited analysis to support the proposal; the fact no costs were outlined; and, importantly, that no location was identified.
31. A few respondents made suggestions for the Fire and Rescue Service to consider in relation to the existing hub proposal, most notably: keep Kidderminster Fire Station and merge Stourport and Bewdley stations into a new building at Blackstone; and introduce three hubs, one in each of the three towns.

Forums with Firefighters

RDS Firefighters

32. Overall, the RDS at Bewdley and Stourport opposed the hub station very strongly indeed; but a majority of the RDS at Kidderminster station broadly supported the proposal.

33. The RDS firefighters at Bewdley and Stourport were mainly worried about longer response times from Kidderminster and the dangers of possible multiple incidents occurring. They referred in particular to the severe road congestion and the risks arising from the Safari Park and other developments.
34. In this context, they thought the hub would jeopardise public safety in Bewdley and Stourport without sufficient corresponding benefits. They said that joint working with the police and ambulance service could happen without a hub, and that the other parties were not necessarily committed to sharing a hub station.
35. They also deplored the loss of local services and the involvement of local people in their fire and rescue service. They felt that they would have no chance of serving from a hub station, because their turn-in times would be too slow - so they anticipated that many current Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters would leave the Service as a result of attending few incidents and not feeling an attachment to the new hub station. They said this would exacerbate current RDS availability problems and they were sceptical of how successful RDS recruitment would be around the hub station area.
36. The critics of the proposal also thought that, in future, the number of fire engines across Wyre Forest might reduce as a result of the hub. Others, supported rationalising fire cover in the Wyre Forest because it is relatively over-provided for compared to other areas.
37. While acknowledging the benefits of joint-working with other emergency services, the Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters were generally sceptical about how successful this might be; and they argued that collaboration can be achieved without a hub station. Closer collaboration with the police was considered desirable, but participants were uncertain as to how this could succeed if only PCSOs were based at the proposed new hub. Some were also worried about lack of 'buy-in' to the hub station from other organisations and the so-called 'flimsy' agreement in place between the services.
38. The Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters were convinced that the merger has been proposed for financial reasons and is a fait accompli. They questioned the amount such a development would save and said that escalating costs could easily 'wipe out' any future savings.
39. In the context of these issues, the RDS at Bewdley and Stourport resoundingly opposed the hub station while majority of the RDS at Kidderminster station broadly supported the proposal.
40. A number of firefighters said they needed to know the location of the site in order to make a properly informed final decision.

Wholetime Firefighters

41. The Kidderminster wholetime firefighters were fully aware of the financial challenges facing H&WFRS and acknowledged that a new hub station for Wyre Forest would assist in meeting these. Several also welcomed the prospect of having a modern, fit-for purpose fire station. Nonetheless, the firefighters raised a number of concerns about the proposed hub station and the proposed closure of the existing Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport stations.
42. In fact, the four Kidderminster watches varied considerably in their opinions about the hub:
- One watch supported the proposal
 - One watch opposed the proposal
 - Two watches were non-committal: they did not oppose the proposal (but nor did they support it explicitly).
43. Overall, the main concern of the wholetime watches was the importance of ensuring effective and timely back-up support for the Kidderminster wholetime appliance in order to ensure firefighter safety and effective firefighting.
44. Those who opposed the hub said that ensuring timely back-up support would be more challenging from a hub because the RDS staff would be de-motivated by attending far fewer incidents (due to losing their current one-pump 'shouts' to the Kidderminster wholetime crew) and by no longer having their 'own' station. The concerns reported above led some of the Kidderminster wholetime firefighters to question the feasibility of RDS crews within Wyre Forest at all. They suggested that two wholetime or Day Crewing Plus (DCP) crews might be preferable to ensure back-up support (though there was also some acknowledgement that this would be too costly to implement).
45. Those in opposition also particularly emphasised that the proposal would:
- Amount to a reduction in fire cover – from three stations to one;
 - Lengthen response times to Bewdley and Stourport due to distance and congestion; and
 - Lead to the loss of the third and fourth RDS pumps because they would get so few calls once the hub was established.
46. Though H&WFRS has stated that the number of fire engines across Wyre Forest will remain at the same level if the hub is developed, participants expected this number to reduce in future. While this was an important issue for some, others suggested that such a reduction would represent a better match of resources to risk in Wyre Forest, because one wholetime and one RDS appliance would be sufficient for the area.
47. There was some scepticism as to how successful joint working with other blue light services would be in practice, given the 'silo mentality' of the different organisations. Participants

were keen to see efforts being made to 'build bridges' with the Police in particular, but were uncertain how this could succeed with only PCSOs being based at the proposed new hub. Firefighters were more positive about possible opportunities for collaboration and joint working with the Ambulance Service, though.

48. Typically, the Kidderminster wholetime firefighters came to the meetings feeling concerned, sceptical, doubtful and critical about the proposal, which they connected with other (in their eyes) undesirable changes towards crews of four, Day Crewing Plus, and poor RDS availability. They would not have endorsed the proposals spontaneously, but after detailed discussion of the evidence, of the four watches, one watch supported the proposal and two did not disagree with it (the latter were non-committal).
49. Finally (and importantly), many of the staff would have liked more information about where the hub would be sited prior to making a definitive judgement.

Forum with Members of the Public

50. During the initial part of the forum, participants' questions and comments highlighted their initial concerns about:
- RDS job losses;
 - Response times (especially to Bewdley);
 - Levels of cover during simultaneous incidents;
 - Transport links in the area;
 - 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); and
 - The impact of the proposal on Police and Ambulance Service response times.
51. Overall though, following discussion and clarification, all 14 participants considered the proposal to be both reasonable and acceptable from operational and financial perspectives (and because they trusted H&WFA and H&WFRS to 'do the right thing').
52. They agreed that the data they had seen in relation to falling incident levels supports change in the Wyre Forest area. Furthermore, the fact that the Bewdley RDS is unavailable for a third of the daytime (when it is covered from Kidderminster) led them to conclude that a larger pool of firefighters at the hub would be desirable, even if it means longer response times to some areas.
53. Participants were keen that H&WFA should make public its preferred (or indeed chosen) location for the hub as soon as possible - and they urged the Service to ensure the building is completely future-proof in terms of required resources.

54. There was also some concern about RDS job losses and response times from the proposed hub into Bewdley, but some (including one west Bewdley resident) thought the hub would be better for the whole area, given the poor location of and transport links to and from the current fire stations. Several participants said that the information presented during the forums had allayed their concerns and one person declared:

I came not wanting any closures at all but I can see that the hub would be a brilliant idea. I was dead against this the last time I came to the meeting but we do need to move forward and accept change.

However, they acknowledged that it would be difficult to reassure the general public.

Stakeholder Forum

55. Stakeholders had some initial concerns about the proposal, chiefly around the potential effect of the proposal on response times, cover during simultaneous incidents and H&WFRS's 'valuable' prevention and education work. Despite these concerns, though, the general sense was:

If you were planning an emergency cover system for Wyre Forest from scratch, you would never have three fire stations here! It's unnecessary – so now you have an opportunity for change.

56. The eight stakeholders were unanimous that a hub would be desirable for the Wyre Forest insofar as it would:

Increase collaboration between the emergency services and other local partner agencies;

Increase community safety via knowledge and information sharing and joint training initiatives; and

Make financial sense in terms of savings and also income from the government grant.

57. Some stakeholders suggested that H&WFRS should go further than planned, in not only establishing the hub station but by also reducing the number of fire engines based there to reflect the reducing number of incidents.
58. The consensus was that the proposal makes sense in the context of funding reductions, reducing risk, and the benefits of a blue light hub. Overall, the eight stakeholders were extremely positive about the proposal for a three-into-one merger. They were unanimous that the changes are financially necessary and only one person doubted that they are also 'safe and feasible'.

Public Meetings

59. In each meeting, the questions and comments from the firefighters and union representatives concentrated on the following issues and observations (please note that any reference to station area data relates to that for 2014-15):

The Fire Authority's 'local risk' data about incidents within fire station areas does not reflect the full number of mobilisations of the four Wyre Forest fire engines;

The response time data are based on the attendance of only the first pump, but one fire engine cannot deal safely with all incidents;

The longer response times are dangerous and will have a '*massive effect on life risk in the area*'. In particular, it will be very difficult to provide a second support fire engine to Bewdley in a reasonable time;

Because the current on-call crews in Stourport and Bewdley will be unable to attend a central hub fire station within the time allowed, they will be excluded from their current roles - and when current on-call crews are lost, it will be difficult to replace them with sufficient new recruits from Kidderminster;

The data on the reductions in total incidents does not imply that emergency cover resources can safely be adjusted, but instead means that the '*current system is working well and should not be changed*';

Despite the long-term downward trend in incidents, in Quarter 1-3 of 2016 the numbers of fires, small fires and road traffic collisions have all increased - and it should not be assumed that risk over the next five years will follow the same pattern as the last five years;

It is desirable to co-operate with the Police, but only community safety officers will be based at the proposed hub station, and services do not have to be co-located in order to improve communications;

The fourth fire engine at the new hub station would be very quiet, which would lead to it being withdrawn altogether in the medium-term future; and

The proposal still means that up to six vehicles would be crewed by on-call firefighters, which is too many and weakens local resilience.

60. The overall judgement of the firefighters and union representatives present was that: "*the cuts are putting lives at risk in order to save money!*"
61. The members of the public present at the meetings also raised a range of issues and asked many questions – for example:

If the Kidderminster wholetime crew is committed to an incident elsewhere, then Bewdley would be covered by an on-call crew based at the Kidderminster hub

station - which would slow response times significantly beyond three minutes; so Bewdley is better served by its own on-call fire engine being on stand-by whenever the Kidderminster wholetime crew is attending an incident;

Bewdley is the only fire station on the western side of the river so the Service would be losing a strategic station if it were closed;

It is unacceptable to increase response times by three minutes, or longer in the case of the second attending fire engine;

The Safari Park increases local risks due to the number of its visitors and associated traffic flows;

There could be a loss of experienced staff if the existing on-call firefighters are unable to serve at a new hub station;

Bewdley and Stourport are being '*sacrificed for the sake of a hub station*';

Would all the current resources be transferred to the new hub station from the three existing stations?

A hub station would lead eventually to the loss of the second and third RDS pumps;

Would it be possible to recruit sufficient on-call crews in the Kidderminster area?

A hub station is unnecessary for the multi-agency delivery of effective community safety programmes: '*the local authority can tell you who's at risk; you don't need a hub to do that!*'

The creation of a hub station will save little money on an on-going basis – savings of only £250K per annum are not really significant – so '*why fix what is not broken?*'

How would the construction of the new hub station be financed? In particular, will the police pay a fair share of the costs?

Why cannot the Service just spend about £1 million refurbishing the existing three stations - in order to retain the status quo?

Would the site sales benefit the fire and rescue service or would the money be returned to the government? and

How much extra council tax would we need to pay to keep all the existing services in place?

62. There was an important comment from a member of the public in Stourport, who was sympathetic to the proposals but stressed the importance of knowing the location of any hub in order to make a properly informed assessment:

Risk is clearly the key issue and we know that fire risk is over-estimated; but we do need to know where the hub station would be located in order to assess the risks properly. And we need further consultation once the site has been chosen!

63. Despite the largely critical responses to the proposals, there were some supportive comments at the public meetings - for example:

You will have on-call firefighters in the Kidderminster hub, which is reasonable

It seems like the Bromsgrove Fire Station initiative has worked well; that's encouraging

There are financial issues; we have to recognise that and take it into account

What would be the alternative, if there is no Hub? What future would Stourport and Bewdley stations have? and

Kidderminster station is very old.

64. Nonetheless, the overall tone of the three public meetings was very critical of the proposal.

Contrast between the Forums and Public Meetings

65. The public, stakeholder and staff forums all differed very much in their tone and/or their conclusions from the three public meetings. Whereas the latter were hostile to the proposals, the forums were understanding and in many cases favourable. To clarify the contrast, many of the staff were asked for their views on why their discussions differed so markedly from the public meetings.

66. In response, some wholetime firefighters who supported the hub said that the importance of response times is often exaggerated and that the public meetings were unduly influenced by emotive 'union rhetoric' and 'misleading' information in the public domain. For example, one watch said:

As wholetime firefighters, we know that there're going to be big changes, and these are critical times; but the RDS are less understanding of the challenges facing the service and they want to protect their local stations

This is a fairly educated debate here, but elsewhere there is a lot of "union rhetoric" about "costs versus lives" which is highly emotive – so the public meeting...was less "educated" than the discussion we've had. There can be a lot of misleading and negative misinformation on social media – but this is an educated debate

67. Another watch, one that opposed the proposal, nonetheless said:

We've been getting used to the issues and we're more aware of the facts

There were retired firefighters at the meetings who don't know the current issues

The public just think we're fantastic, but they don't know how we're run.

68. All the wholetime watches, even those opposing the proposal, said that the public meetings were not well informed about the challenges facing H&WFRS.

Written Submissions

69. 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.
70. Two of the submissions (from Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council and the Corporate Leadership Team at Wyre Forest District Council) supported the proposed establishment of a hub station for Wyre Forest.
71. Of the remaining eight submissions:

Six (from Councillor Nigel Knowles, Stourport-on-Severn Town Council, the Fire Brigades Union, the Bewdley Branch Labour Party and two local residents) either outright objected to or had reservations about the proposal - mainly on the grounds that respondents do not wish to see the closure of existing fire stations to enable the hub's development;

One, from the Stourport-on-Severn Fire Station staff, proposed an alternative location for the hub (at Blackstone) and outlined the reasons why this may be feasible. This proposal was supported by the Bewdley Branch Labour Party; and

One, from the West Midlands Fire Service, comments on the information (or lack thereof) provided within H&WFRS's consultation communication materials - and on the need for prevention and protection activities within the areas where stations would be closed if the proposal is implemented. It also suggests that H&WFRS follow its lead in implementing a *"blended fleet with crewing levels of three"*.

Petitions

72. 2,350 people signed a petition (organised by the Stourport-on Severn firefighters) entitled 'Save our Fire Station'. An accompanying document stated that the signatures were collected in Stourport Town Centre - where the firefighters were assisted by local shops and members of the public in collecting them. Most of the signatures are from Stourport residents, with a small number from visitors and people with holiday homes around the town. The petition organisers believe that 10% of the town's population has taken the trouble to object to the proposal via this petition.

Alternative suggestions

73. During the various meetings several alternative proposals were made that the Fire Authority will wish to consider. For example, firefighters at Bewdley and Stourport suggested that the Fire Authority should consider:

A 'two-into-one' rather than 'three-into-one' - that is, retaining the current Kidderminster Fire Station while combining Bewdley and Stourport into a new,

smaller hub site between the two towns (also supported by several questionnaire respondents);

Money-saving changes to the wholetime service – for example, through the introduction of Day Crewing Plus (or even day crewing) at Kidderminster;

Stationing fire engines at strategic locations within communities (much like the ambulance service does); and

Closing some wholetime stations and making better use of the more cost-efficient RDS crews.

74. Some members of the public suggested that the Authority might consider:

Having two wholetime fire engines operating from the hub;

Using ‘surplus’ wholetime crew members to cover any future gaps in the on-call service;

Using on-call staff in different ways to safeguard their positions; and

Mitigating concerns about response times to Bewdley by siting the existing Bewdley landrover at the Severn Valley Railway Station to respond to incidents in the town

75. One submission, from the Stourport-on-Severn Fire Station staff (and supported by the Bewdley Branch Labour Party) proposed an alternative location for the hub at Blackstone and outlined the reasons why this may be feasible.

Overall Conclusions

Introduction

76. Overall, the views expressed through the open consultation questionnaire, public meetings and some staff forums differed considerably from those expressed in the deliberative forums with stakeholders, randomly selected members of the public, and the others with staff. The former were largely opposed to the hub and the proposed closure of three stations, whereas the latter were broadly supportive. The reasons for the respective support and opposition have been documented in this summary, and more fully later in the report, and so are not repeated in detail here; but it is interesting that many of the concerns raised in the questionnaires and public meetings were reviewed in the deliberative forums. In the forums, most people’s concerns were allayed through questioning and discussion, but in the questionnaire and public meetings they were not.
77. 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

78. In this case, though, the outcome of the consultation process are in relative equipoise, with some support and about the same level of opposition, as the following summary of outcomes shows, in terms of who was favourable or unfavourable to the proposals.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Favourable on the principles of closer blue light collaboration and the creation of a single hub site

Unfavourable on the proposal to close three fire stations

STAFF FORUMS

Most Kidderminster wholetime and RDS crews were favourable or did not object

Bewdley and Stourport RDS and one Kidderminster wholetime crew were unfavourable

PUBLIC FORUM

Overwhelmingly favourable

STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Overwhelmingly favourable

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Overwhelmingly unfavourable

PETITION (gathered by Stourport RDS crew members)

Unfavourable (with 2,350 signatures)

SUBMISSIONS

Six unfavourable – including the FBU

Two favourable – including the Corporate Leadership Team, Wyre Forest District Council

One alternative suggestion

One making more general comments.

79. Of course, the opposition by the questionnaire respondents, attendees at public meetings, petition signatories and some staff members numerically outweighs the public, stakeholder and other staff forum participants; but the questionnaire supported the general principles for a hub station and the forums had the benefit of being in-depth deliberative meetings that could review the evidence.

Need for Interpretation

80. 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 staff, public and stakeholder forums for being deliberative and thoughtful, and because they included a diverse range of affected staff and members of the public. This does not mean that the findings of the questionnaire, public meetings and petition 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 results are not necessarily representative of the whole population.
81. 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.

Further Consultation

82. The Fire Authority will be well aware that the current consultation was about the principle of establishing a hub station while closing the current fire stations, and respondents were clearly told this in all the meetings and literature. As a consequence, many said that they cannot form a definitive or final judgement without knowing the proposed location of any hub; and in any case the issue of principle is distinct from considering a specific location in practice.
83. Therefore, if the Fire Authority decides to progress the creation of a hub station through a three-into-one merger of the existing stations, then ORS recommends that it should consult further once a suitable site has been chosen – and prior to making a final decision.

Project Overview

Opinion Research Services

84. 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.
85. 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

86. On the basis of its previous experience, ORS was commissioned by Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority (H&WFA) to consult the public, stakeholders and Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service (H&WFRS) staff about a proposal to create a joint Emergency Services Hub Station for Wyre Forest by relocating the current Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport Fire Stations into a new hub station at an appropriate location.
87. The consultation programme comprised:
- Designing, implementing, analysing and reporting an open online and paper questionnaire (which was also available on paper on request);
 - Recruiting, facilitating and reporting: seven forums with wholetime and retained operational staff at Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport fire stations; one stakeholder forum; and one forum with members of the public drawn from all three areas of the Wyre Forest;
 - Chairing three public meetings, one each in Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport; and
 - Analysing and summarising written submissions and petitions received by H&WFRS during the consultation period.

88. As well as giving general advice, ORS's primary role was to design, implement/facilitate, analyse and report the open questionnaire and the deliberative forums and chair the public meetings between September and December 2015. We worked in collaboration with H&WFRS to design the questionnaire (and accompanying consultation document) and prepare informative stimulus material for the various meetings before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings. We have also analysed and summarised the submissions and petitions commenting on H&WFA's draft proposals.

H&WFRS Consultation: Listening & Engagement

89. Earlier in 2015, H&WFRS and ORS undertook a 'pre-consultation' or 'listening and engagement' process to understand people's opinions and also 'test' some general principles before bringing forward this draft proposal for formal statutory consultation. During this process, staff and members of the public were invited to deliberate about a range of issues in order to contribute to the development of possible operational options for the area. Having taken account of these meetings and all the other available evidence, H&WFA has brought forward the draft proposal consulted on here.
90. This staged approach to consultation conforms to the Gunning Principles (1985), which require that meaningful consultation should be at a 'formative stage', before authorities make decisions. The same principles also require that people should be given sufficient information and time to consider the issues in an informed manner, and also that their views should be taken conscientiously into account by the authority - in this case even before draft proposals are formulated for formal consultation.

Consultation Methods

Open Questionnaire

91. The open questionnaire (with the accompanying Consultation Document) was available online between 1st September 2015 and 27th November 2015. 192 questionnaires were completed; 172 were submitted online and 20 by post. Please see pages 31 and 32 in the following chapter for a full respondent profile.

Deliberative Forums

The Forums

92. The consultation meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage operational staff, stakeholders and members of the public to reflect in depth about the fire and rescue service, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing their ideas in detail. All the meetings lasted for two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 49 staff, eight stakeholder and 14 public participants. The programme of forum meetings is shown below.

MEETING	TIME AND DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Stakeholder Forum	8:00am – 10:00am Wednesday 16 th September 2015	8
Kidderminster Wholetime (White Watch)	6:30pm – 9:00pm Monday 2 nd November 2015	5
Kidderminster Wholetime (Red Watch)	2:30pm – 5:00pm Tuesday 3 rd November 2015	6
Bewdley RDS	6:30pm – 9:00pm Tuesday 3 rd November 2015	9
Kidderminster Wholetime (Green Watch)	2:30pm – 5:00pm Wednesday 4 th November 2015	5
Stourport RDS	6:30pm – 9:00pm Wednesday 4 th November 2015	13
Kidderminster RDS	6:30pm – 9:00pm Thursday 5 th November 2015	7
Kidderminster Wholetime (Blue Watch)	10:00am – 12:30pm Friday 6 th November 2015	4
Forum with Members of the Public	10:00am – 1:00pm Saturday 7 th November 2015	14

93. Staff and stakeholders were invited to participate by H&WFRS, whereas members of the public were recruited by ORS (some of the latter had attended the 'listening and engagement' session in May 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 or written 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 wider community.
94. Overall (as shown in the table below), 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: local authority area of residence; gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI).

CRITERIA	FORUMS
Gender	Male: 7 Female: 7
Age	16-34: 3 35-54: 4 55+: 7
Social Grade	AB: 5 C1: 6 C2: 1 DE: 2
Ethnicity	2 non-White British
Limiting Long-term Illness	2

95. 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, stakeholders and diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively. Because the meetings were inclusive, the outcomes (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

Background Information

96. The forums began, for the sake of context, with a concise review of the number and distribution of fire engines and stations in Wyre Forest and current crewing systems, before the proposal for an Emergency Services Hub Station for the Wyre Forest was considered in some detail - particularly with respect to:

The proposed practical arrangements;

The Transformation Fund award of £2.4m from Government;

Reasons why it is possible to safely combine fire stations (including falling incident levels across Wyre Forest);

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

The possible impact of the proposal on attendance times; and

Site selection.

97. Discussion was stimulated via a presentation devised by ORS and H&WFRS to inform and encourage discussion of the issues - and participants were encouraged to ask any questions they wished throughout the discussions.

Public Meetings

98. The Fire Authority held three public meetings, which were publicised by media and using posters in the local areas. The meetings were held in the evenings, as follows:

Location	Date	Numbers Attending
Stourport-on-Severn (Civic Centre)	15 th September 2015	75
Kidderminster (Wyre Forest District Council Chamber)	17 th September 2015	16
Bewdley (St George's Hall)	12 th October 2015	60

99. Each meeting lasted over two hours and included rigorous discussions of the Fire Authority's proposals. Participants received (and listened attentively and with interest to) a detailed presentation by senior officers of H&WFRS, which covered all of the topics and issues outlined above in paragraph 97.
100. In addition to members of the public, each of the meetings was attended by current H&WFRS frontline staff (and in some cases their families and friends), retired firefighters and union representatives. For example, even in the smallest meeting of 16 at Kidderminster, there were four crew members and two union representatives; at Stourport it seemed that about 40% or more of the attendees had close connections with the Service; and at the Bewdley meeting, around a quarter. Despite the meetings being 'public meetings', at each venue the firefighters and union representatives spoke prominently and influentially, in some cases reflecting and in other cases shaping the opinions of the residents present.

Written Submissions

101. During the formal consultation process, 10 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
Councillors	1
Political Groups	1
H&WFRS Staff	1
Representative Bodies	1
Neighbouring FRS	1
Total	10

102. ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in the full report.

Petition

103. 2,350 people signed a petition (organised by the Stourport-on Severn firefighters) entitled 'Save our Fire Station'.

Consultation Programme Proportional and Fair

104. H&WFRS's consultation programme was conscientious, in the sense of being open, accessible and fair to members of the public, stakeholders and staff across the two counties (and of course primarily within Wyre Forest): the consultation was 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 engagement and consultation exercises undertaken by the Service.

105. 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.

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.

106. 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 expressed in consultations 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 decisive factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.
107. 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.

108. 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 - is especially valuable. All consultation elements are important and none should be disregarded, but the deliberative forums are particularly worthy of consideration because they explore the arguments and the reasons for people's opinions. There is no doubt that H&WFRS'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.
109. As well as providing the public, stakeholders and staff with sufficient information to consider the proposals intelligently, H&WFRS has also conducted its consultation in a timely manner and is taking account of the outcomes before making a decision. Both the scale and nature of the programme compare well with similar consultations undertaken by other fire and rescue services and public bodies.

The Report

110. This report concisely reviews the sentiments and judgements of respondents and participants about the aforementioned proposal. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse the opinions in question, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. The report is an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants.

Report of Open Questionnaire

Introduction

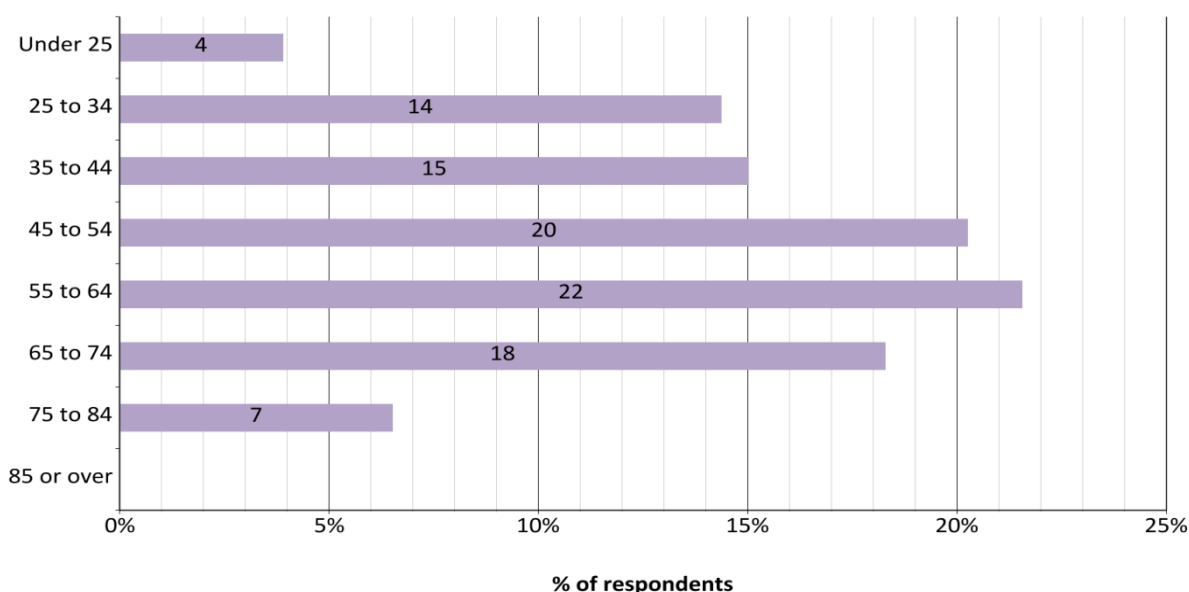
111. The open questionnaire (with an accompanying Consultation Document) was available online and as a hard copy between 1st September and 27th November 2015. 192 questionnaires were completed; 172 were submitted online and 20 by post.
112. H&WFRS printed and then distributed the consultation documents (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

113. 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.
114. 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.
115. 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

116. 97% of the 164 respondents who answered the question said they were submitting their own personal response, whereas the other 3% said they were responding on behalf of an organisation (though none noted what organisation this was). Only 4% of respondents said they work for H&WFRS (base 148 respondents).
117. 58% of respondents were male and 42% female (base 150 respondents) - and their age profile is overleaf.

Table 1: Age**Base: 150 Respondents**

118. Only 6% of respondents considered themselves to be disabled (base 148 respondents) and the overwhelming majority were White (98% of 146 base respondents).

Interpretation of the Data

119. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers.
120. 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

Views on the Proposal – Closed Questions

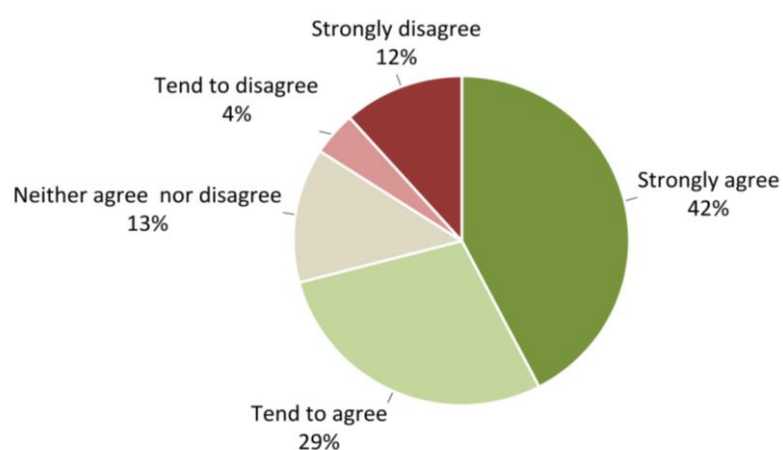
Collaboration in Principle

121. Over 7 in 10 respondents (71%) agreed that **H&WFRS should collaborate more closely with other ‘bluelight’ Emergency Services**, with over two fifths (42%) strongly agreeing. Less than one fifth (16%) disagreed.

Figure 1: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service should collaborate more closely with other ‘blue light’ Emergency Services.

Agree/disagree that H&WFRS should collaborate more closely with other ‘blue light’ Emergency Services?

Base: All Respondents (189)



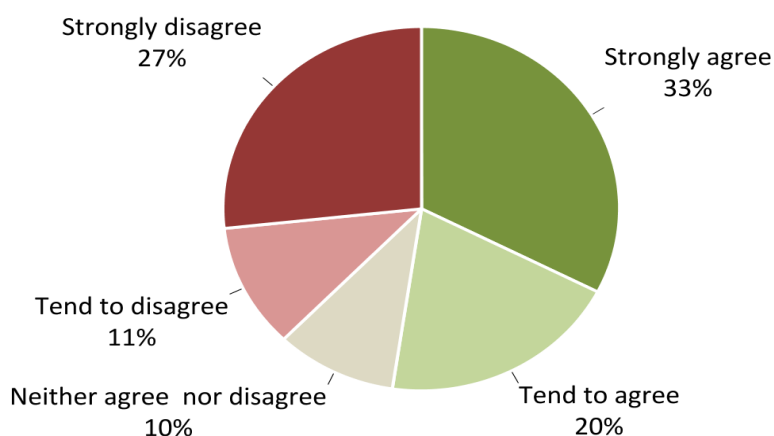
A Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub in Principle

122. Over half (52%) of respondents agreed that **the establishment of a Wyre Forest Emergency Service Hub that brings together Fire, Police, Ambulance and the voluntary emergency responders is a good idea in principle**. Over a third of respondents disagreed (38%), while 1 in 10 (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 2: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that the establishment of a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub is a good idea in Principle.

Agree/disagree that a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub that brings together Fire, Police, Ambulance and the voluntary emergency responders is a good idea in principle?

Base: All Respondents (172)

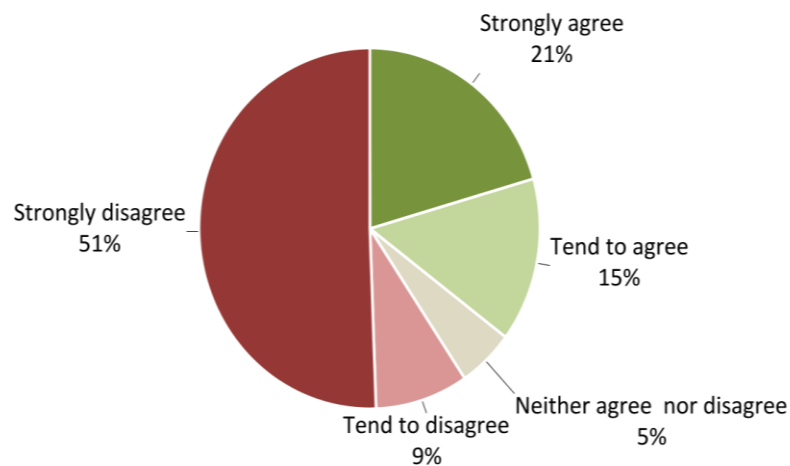


123. Over a third (35%) of respondents agreed that **replacing the existing three fire stations with a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub in a suitable location is a good idea in principle**. However, just under three fifths (59%) disagreed; 51% strongly.

Figure 3: Extent to which respondents agree/disagree that replacing the existing three fire stations with a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub in a suitable location is a good idea in principle.

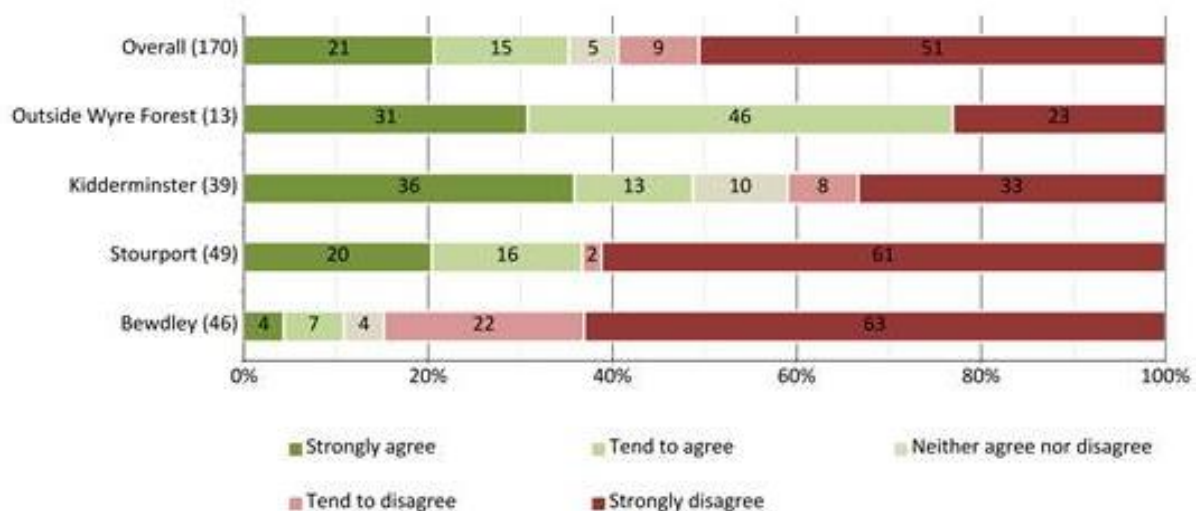
Agree/Disagree that replacing the existing three fire stations with a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub in a suitable location is a good idea in principle?

Base: All Respondents (170)



124. When analysing this question by area, it is clear that opposition to the proposal is strongest in Stourport and Bewdley. While in Kidderminster support for the proposal outweighs opposition (49% agreed whereas 41% disagreed), the reverse is true in the other two areas: 85% of Bewdley respondents opposed the proposal while only 11% supported it; and in Stourport the figures were 63% and 36% respectively.

Figure 4: Breakdown by area



Equalities Impact

125. Just over two fifths (41%) of respondents think that there are positive and negative impacts that need to be taken into account in considering this proposal.

Figure 5: Any positive or negative impacts to be taken into account?

As a public body, H&WFRS 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 Respondents (165)



Views on the Proposal – Open Text Comments

Introduction

126. Respondents were asked to give their reasons for assigning their agreement scores to the following statements:

- Q1 Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service should collaborate more closely with other 'blue light' Emergency Services.
- Q2 The establishment of a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub that brings together Fire, Police, Ambulance and the voluntary emergency responders is a good idea in principle.
- Q3 The replacement of the existing three fire stations with a Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub in a suitable location is a good idea in principle.

The written responses overlapped across the questions and so are combined in the commentary that follows.

Main Findings

Positive Comments

127. Most respondents acknowledged the benefits of the H&WFRS collaborating closely with other blue light services. Indeed, many felt that improved collaboration would lead to

improved safety and effectiveness of response arising from the services working in an integrated way, operational effectiveness and better responses. Typical comments were as follows:

Close collaboration between emergency services should enable better integrated responses to incidents

I believe closer liaison should lead to ... a joined up approach to safety and security

I would think that working more closely with other blue light services would be a benefit, and give us a better service

Inter-agency working is useful, and a better understanding of each service's goals and procedures can only be good

Good communications can only lead to better emergency services for the area

Multi agency partnerships work and shared intelligence is necessary today for a more efficient service

To ensure appropriate multi agency responses to a variety of community and citizen needs, such as RTC, house fires and so on

You're going to be working with other services on call outs. So it's only logical you work closer together and understand the limits and expectations of each other's services.

128. Many respondents who agreed that the idea of a blue light hub was good in principle felt that the hub would facilitate easier collaboration and more efficient, integrated operational responses:

A central hub for such services lends itself to providing the best platform for coordinated actions

All members in close contact to make and discuss incidents immediately and make better use of employees

The sharing of information, face-to-face is beneficial

It will enable all resources to pull together and effect a better all-round service

It would ... facilitate closer working relationships at the operational level and create opportunities to build better combined responses to critical incidents

There is so much inter-working between the blue light service; physically bringing them together makes sense

When the public call on the emergency services they don't always know which service is most appropriate, so having a hub will be better for cross communication between the services

Flexibility in crewing (covering deficiencies), strategic location, RDS cover for specials.

129. A few respondents stated that current response times would not be adversely affected by implementing the proposals whilst a few others felt that having a blue light hub would actually reduce response times:

A central base would provide similar response times to those at present - potentially quicker if the lack of available fire fighters is also considered

The scenario for staffing would provide resilience which should outweigh any time difference when comparing response times from the present three locations

It should make for a speedy response

Better response times for all involved and it should be more economical to run

Would be a great advantage ... for improved operational and response times.

130. Some suggested that voluntary staff would become more involved and be able to establish a higher profile within a hub facility:

As a volunteer I personally have seen how difficult it can be to turn up to an incident and the emergency services not have any idea who we are or what capabilities we have. By merging Kidderminster fire crews, volunteer organisation, police and ambulance ensures that we all work together and train together

Increasingly voluntary organisations provide essential services. A central hub would provide a stable platform for them to work from

... For voluntary groups to see what the full time services do.

131. Collaborative working was considered by many respondents to lead to greater operational efficiencies and cost savings arising from sharing resources. Many felt that locating all the services in one building would increase the potential for sharing back office operations and facility costs. One respondent also highlighted the potential to raise income through venue hire at the hub:

Economies arising from shared resources, meaning that the combined service would provide greater value for money. Similar combination of resources in other geographical areas has been met with a positive response

Probably improves resource usage of all services involved. Having resources waiting for other resources to arrive is not effective use

Economic savings of ground staff and buildings freeing more money for frontline services

In the longer term (it would) be cheaper to maintain and run. One purpose built site would be more efficient than each organisation maintaining two or three buildings each within the catchment area

Bringing all blue light services together will have a massive impact on running costs ... some back office duties could be shared and further savings could be made

Building and training facility construction and maintenance costs would be reduced by splitting them multiple ways. Community spaces could also generate income through room hire...

132. Cost savings from working in a modern building were also mentioned by some respondents and highlighted as a benefit of the 'hub' concept:

Buildings are now inadequate and old for the modern service required these days. Efficiency would be increased and training coordinated in one place to suit all, thus being a financial advantage

Modern fit for purpose facilities for the crews is a must

Seems a more sensible use of blue light resources, especially as our fire stations in Wyre Forest are ageing and need upgrading for training etc.

A well-resourced fire service is vitally important. If adequate cover can be provided from one station, then this will save money and be more sustainable in the long term

None of the present buildings are suitable for a 'working together with other services' option.

133. Another frequently mentioned benefit was that being based together on a hub site would increase mutual learning and understanding between services and build a mutual appreciation of operational practices. The increased potential for joint and more effective training was also mentioned:

Working closer with fellow emergency services builds greater understanding of each other's procedures

Cross skilling

Better training together will improve incidents

It encourages the use of all strengths and skills, knowledge and experience

Advantages of having modern facilities where teams that respond together can train and prepare together

Increased learning and skills by all working together where possible.

134. Other comments in support of the proposals that were raised by relatively few respondents can be summarised as:

The size of the area does not justify having three fire stations
 The positive impact on staff morale of working in a modern building
 The inadequacies of the current fire service set up
 The potential to have a building that is environmentally sustainable.

135. A high number of respondents said that whilst, in principle, they supported the idea of a 'hub', their actual support would depend on its location, which should minimise travel times to locations throughout the area:

As long as it is in a centralised area, with good access
Depends on final positioning of the hub and development of a more efficient road network into outlying areas!
It would depend on the location and the access times to the outskirts of the district. If location was correctly chosen then economies of scale would come into play
The hub needs to be located in a place that doesn't have access problems, especially for the on call fire fighters and volunteer responders who need to get there safely but quickly
The principle is fine; the challenge is the location - if it is on the road between Stourport and Kidderminster, then there are known bottlenecks at each end.

Negative Comments

136. The highest number of negative comments about service collaboration concerned the fact that the blue light services are already working together or should already be working together in spite of not being co-located. Several participants said that modern technologies already facilitate communication and collaboration between services based at a number of sites:

I don't think there has to be a central hub ... you just have to have good communications which can be done via email, radio, phone, video call etc.
The fire service already works with the rest of the emergency services
In the age of 'always on, always connected' physical co-location is becoming completely irrelevant
I feel that closer collaboration at strategic and tactical level would enhance services, but three services simply responding out of the same building will be of no benefit

Do you have to all live on the same site to do this? Can you not talk to each other anyway?

I would have expected you already did this

They already work together well when they need to

With modern communications it is possible to collaborate without shouting down the corridor. This idea has been mooted on previous occasions and has always been stoutly resisted by the populace. I suppose the 'powers that be' are merely using the idea that if you hit a nail often and long enough it will, eventually, penetrate the hardest wood.

137. Several respondents observed that some blue light staff are seldom at their base stations, meaning that the hub - an expensive facility - would not lead to improved face-to-face communication and collaboration:

At the end of day, police and ambulance will be out most of the time, voluntary sector would be there say 3 hours a week and the same for retained staff, so it is misleading to say spending all this money will make a difference; in reality it won't

Most of the services would not be there 95 percent of the time anyway, so what a waste of money. £5.9 million is almost 25 percent of the HWFRS budget. Any joint working benefits can be achieved now, without a new building.

138. By far the highest number of negative comments about the hub proposal concerned people's belief that response times to fires and road traffic collisions would lengthen. Many supported this claim by highlighting the often adverse traffic conditions in the area and increased distances involved. Typical comments included the following:

Fire appliances by their very nature, are heavier vehicles and, therefore, will take longer to reach their objective than all of the other blue light services. Fire brigades need to stay local to the area they serve

I am more concerned at the time it will take a fire engine to get to my house if they are all stationed in Kidderminster

I believe lives will be lost. There have been two major traffic accidents in Wyre Forest this weekend. Response times were excellent, because the engines were where they needed to be. However good crews are, they cannot respond as quickly if they are not based in the local area

Response time is key. Taking into consideration the traffic situation in the area, it makes sense to have separate HQs for the towns; thus giving first responders

more time to work the emergency rather than battle the traffic ... it makes no sense at all to close the existing stations

A blue light hub will potentially increase the response times for, not only the first appliance but, more importantly, additional resources at larger incidents

Attendance times to many areas will increase. Appliances from a single hub would have to cover a ridiculously large area

Wherever the hub is sited will leave two of the three towns less protected in my view. Travel times, due to the awful road infrastructure in the Wyre Forest is likely to make emergency travel more complicated from just one site

Each of the three areas of Wyre Forest have outlying areas which can be a long way from Kidderminster. I live in Arley, and emergency vehicles from Kidderminster can take an age to reach this area

I tend to agree with the principle but have reservations about fire cover on the west side of the River Severn, particularly for Bewdley during times of flooding etc.

Probable delays in reaching calls at the opposite end of the service area from one base, especially in view of the current facts that nearly every road into/out of Kidderminster is blocked by roadworks/traffic signals/road humps etc.

This will mean death to many people involved in fires and accidents because of increased attendance times for incidents.

139. Several respondents complained that the proposal would cut necessary services and believed that it was principally designed to reduce costs:

I cannot be anything other than cynical about developments like this one. They rarely deliver the efficiency claimed at the time of 'rationalization'. I'm sure the vast majority of people who have experienced such changes since the 1980s ... would agree that their experience of cuts like this are almost invariably damaging to public services

You must not put money saving above saving lives. This should be your core value!

This is clearly a cut not an improvement plan. Prices and bills go up yet we get less of service? How is that justifiable?

Utter nonsense. Very cleverly worded way of closing stations. You cannot possibly cover our area by cutting services and yet you seem determined to do so!

I believe this is an attempt by the government to merge services in order to cut costs further. Cuts to merged services can be more easily disguised

Why close Bewdley and Stourport stations to achieve it? Maybe you are trying to hide cuts in services by using this hub idea as a smoke screen?

140. A few respondents complained that the proposal, by 'putting all the eggs into one basket' would contribute to the ongoing depletion of community-based services. There were particular concerns for residents of Bewdley and Stourport in this regard:

*Again, we're back to the 'eggs in one basket', centralisation and ripping the heart and services out of communities aren't we, not a good idea, a ***** awful one*

Because the local fire stations do a fantastic service in the community and closing these stations is so wrong

Bewdley should retain its own fire and rescue service in order to answer emergencies within the shortest possible time

Local services are being directly snatched away from communities that are gradually becoming more and more vulnerable

Stourport will have no services left so we will not have any reason to pay council tax

The question pretends there is only a gain from this, but it is not a good idea, even in principle, because what it really means is that communities will lose their fire stations, police stations, etc.

All three towns need their own separate fire station, and police stations fully manned

141. Several respondents criticised the consultation process for inadequacies which made it hard for them to make informed opinions on the proposals. In particular, people highlighted: the limited analysis to support the proposal; the fact no costs were outlined; and, importantly, that no location was identified.

142. Other negative comments, mentioned by relatively fewer respondents, concerned the following:

A belief that the blue light services would prefer the status quo and that the proposals would be worrying for service personnel;

A belief that the blue light services work to different procedures, protocols and service targets that make an operational merger non-viable;

A fear that the proposed changes would result in staff cutbacks;

Concern that it will be even harder to recruit retained staff in one area than from three areas;

Concern that travel times would increase for retained staff; that existing staff would lose their jobs; and new staff would have to be recruited at a time when recruitment is already a challenge for the area;

That public money would be wasted on an unnecessary and expensive new building; and

That this proposal would result in a downgrade of services.

Alternative Suggestions

143. A few respondents made suggestions for the Fire and Rescue Service to consider in relation to the existing hub proposal:

Keep Kidderminster Fire Station and merge Stourport and Bewdley stations into a new building at Blackstone;

When considering the location for the hub take into account the archived data of each of the three stations;

Introduce three hubs – one in each of the three towns;

Designate a green way as in Worcester to ensure speedy access to incidents; and

Minimise duplication and waste of resources before considering changes of this significance.

Equalities Impact

144. Respondents were asked to provide evidence and suggest ways in which H&WFA could reduce or remove potential negative impacts and increase positive impacts for people with protected characteristics. Most of the comments in this section did not answer the question, but noted that implementation of the proposals would increase risk for all local residents. Some typical comments were:

The proposed hub could discriminate against vulnerable people, such as the aged and disabled, who would face longer waits for help to arrive which could be more life threatening compared to those who are able to climb out of windows or find other ways out of a burning building. I certainly do not feel that any of those groups are disadvantaged by the current arrangements

This will put all people at risk from fires and car crashes

People who live in rural areas will see higher response times, probably when the River Severn has flooded.

145. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the main suggestion was to keep the existing fire stations open:

Keep fire stations at Stourport and Bewdley, so that response times can be kept low

Leave things as they are

Keep stations open.

146. A relatively high number of respondents also suggested improved response times to incidents for all residents, including vulnerable people:

Age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, all pose problems for people in emergencies. Speed of response is particularly important in such cases

As long as the arrival time of a fire engine is the same in Stourport as it is in Bewdley and the other side of Kidderminster, then everyone is being treated the same

Just treat everyone the same within their communities and provide the local services that are needed by the people in the area, regardless of their 'characteristics'. We're all people and basically all the same.

147. Several suggested that the hub building should have full access – for disabled people and women, in particular:

An accessible hub will make provision for disability access to training areas as well as operational areas. Working with other organisations requires that accessibility

From reading the report, it states that the current stations do not have any disabled facilities and by building a new station can only improve the facilities for disabled members of the community

The lack of female changing facilities at some fire stations is always going to have a negative impact on efforts to recruit on call firefighters.

148. The following suggestions were also made, but by relatively fewer respondents:

Retain the three existing operations as retained stations;

Encourage local people to become retained fire service staff;

Communicate and engage directly with local communities including people with protected characteristics. Ensure that plain language is used;

Use educational facilities and community training to reduce the risk to more vulnerable members of the community;

Carefully choose the location of the hub site, taking a number of factors into account;

Take care to ensure that any changes take account of equality monitoring, *which is something that is easily achieved in the close team orientated culture at smaller community based stations;*

Ensure complete coordination of management teams;

Improve the road network to increase response times;

Recruit employees who are fully able to fulfil their roles; and

Carefully manage any changes to reduce any negative impacts on staff.

Report of Meetings with Staff

Introduction

149. This chapter is divided into two sections, to highlight and compare the opinions of wholetime firefighters at Kidderminster and retained firefighters at Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport. The views of the former are reported first, followed by the latter. It is important to note that the views reported below are those expressed by staff participants. 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.

Main Findings: Kidderminster Wholetime Firefighters

150. The Kidderminster wholetime firefighters were fully aware of the financial challenges facing H&WFRS and acknowledged that a new hub station for Wyre Forest would assist in meeting these. Several also recognised that the sometime emotive arguments put forward by firefighters in defence of local services are unlikely to 'make sense' in the financial context and that H&WFA would be sensible to proceed with its proposal in order to secure the Transformational Fund award of £2.4m:

Firefighters in Wyre Forest fully understand the financial savings that have to be made and a Hub would significantly assist. We understand that!

From the brigade point of view it is a no-brainer and our views won't make financial sense in the wider context

From the brigade point of view, we should grab the money and start building...but we don't necessarily feel like that

We should secure the £2.4million Government funding.

151. Furthermore, a few comments were made in support of having a modern, fit-for purpose facility (providing the building design is carefully considered to ensure a suitable working environment for staff):

This is a chance to have a brand new sparkling fire station that would lift morale in a positive way!

A hub building could be good if they get the planning of the building right. I've heard of some complaints where there is too little daylight and too much artificial light in a sterile environment.

152. Nonetheless, despite some positivity, the firefighters raised a number of concerns about the proposed Emergency Services Hub Station for Wyre Forest - and the associated closure of the existing Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport Fire Stations. These are outlined below.

Response Times and Back-up Support

153. Participants' chief worries centred on 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 (which could, it was felt, be compromised by longer turn-in times for supporting RDS firefighters). Some typical comments were:

I just want to make sure we have the right resources in the right place; that's what matters! I have some reservations about one station with longer response times. We are struggling to meet our response responsibilities now!

Bewdley is likely to suffer longer response times to a greater or lesser degree

The guarantee of a second pump is what really matters; we need to avoid delays in the second pump getting there

The main issue is firefighter safety not just the first response time. We have to be cautious until the back-up support arrives so it's not the first pump attendance time that matters but the time it takes to get two pumps there. A hub station could delay the turn-in time for the RDS crews for the support pumps.

Would the second RDS pump support be guaranteed?

I know that the attendance times don't make much difference in practice but it is crucial to have the back-up pump support. As wholetime we need to be absolutely sure that we can get a second RDS truck there to support us as guaranteed!

154. However, there was a sense that ensuring timely back-up support may be even more challenging in future as RDS staff become de-motivated by attending far fewer incidents (insofar as they would lose all of their current one-pump 'shouts' to the Kidderminster wholetime crew) and less committed to providing cover at a hub station than they are at their local one:

If the wholetime takes the first shout the RDS will take fewer calls, which will make it harder to keep pumps on the run

At night we only have four wholetime pumps on the run so Kidderminster is having to cover outside its area, which leaves only three RDS pumps here for the whole of Wyre Forest at night. So that system has to work. People feel more motivated working on their own local stations but that commitment

would be missing on a hub station. And we'd have to ensure that the RDS have enough calls to motivate them properly.

155. Indeed, the matter of RDS motivation was raised frequently: it was anticipated that many current Bewdley and Stourport firefighters would leave the Service as a result of attending fewer incidents and not feeling any attachment or loyalty to the new hub station - exacerbating current RDS availability problems (though one firefighter did feel that 'it will work if we monitor their availability and require proper standards'):

Most RDS want to ride fire engines to fires so checking equipment and doing HFSCs would not be worthwhile enough for them

RDS feel they have their 'own station' but they would feel different if they were required to go to Kidderminster

RDS cover is shocking, worse than it has ever been, but there is a local sense of responsibility there which keeps them on-call. If there is a central hub there will not be the same commitment to keeping every fire engine on the run.

156. On the issue of RDS availability, the wholetime firefighters were particularly critical of the extent to which this has deteriorated and the lower levels of cover now offered by RDS staff - and explained how they themselves are often sent to Bewdley and Stourport to ensure the appliances there are kept on the run:

The reliability of the RDS back-up has diminished considerably now

The RDS crews need to commit to the proper availability levels in order to make the system work

We are having to support the RDS crew at Kidderminster with wholetime firefighters to ensure the fire engine's availability...

The RDS availability figures for Kidderminster don't take account of the way we provide wholetime firefighters to give resilience cover to ensure the availability of the RDS pump.

They thus saw the need for a more robust monitoring system for RDS firefighters (to ensure they are providing the requisite levels of cover), or even a 'waiting list' that can fill any gaps when needed:

We need a better system to monitor the RDS crews...we have plenty of them but they are not on duty in practice during the working days! Why is that still happening?!

We should have reserves of people who are 'on a waiting list' to take over from those who won't or can't be available?

157. Given the predicted RDS 'exodus' from Bewdley and Stourport, the issue of future RDS recruitment was inevitably raised. Firefighters anticipated a need for selective recruitment within the required radius of the proposed hub station, but some were sceptical as to how successful this might be:

I assume there would be selective recruitment in the future, as current RDS in Bewdley and Stourport leave...?

In future you would have to recruit to the new base and use them accordingly

Recruitment and retention are big issues but the Hub won't be a panacea to keep three RDS appliances on the run

We are struggling to crew our fire engines and to recruit RDS crews in Kidderminster now. Why should it improve with a hub station?

158. The concerns reported above led some of the Kidderminster wholetime firefighters to question the feasibility of RDS crews within Wyre Forest at all. They suggested that two wholetime or Day Crewing Plus (DCP) crews - or a combination of these - might be preferable to ensure back-up support (though there was also some acknowledgement that this would be too costly to implement):

If we combined in one station with two wholetime pumps that would be much better than three RDS pumps but it's too costly

There could be an option for two DCP crews at Kidderminster in order to guarantee the back up

We need to be able to guarantee proper wholetime cover and an effective RDS back-up so we need two wholetime or one wholetime and 1 DCP.

159. On a related note, the anticipated longer response times for back-up RDS appliances led the wholetime firefighters to request that crews of five be maintained at Kidderminster to ensure that incident intervention can be commenced as safely as possible:

Can we ensure that Kidderminster continues to with crews of five rather than four if we accept this proposal because there is a current proposal to reduce from five to four?

We need a minimum of five per wholetime crew in order to cover incidents safely in the context of a longer response time that would result from the hub.

Future Reductions

160. Though H&WFRS has stated that the number of fire engines across Wyre Forest will remain at the same level if the hub is developed, participants expected this number to reduce in future as it is 'easier' to remove resources from a central hub than it is from smaller, individual fire stations:

A Hub will raise the issue of how many we should have and can crew in the medium term

There could be a natural evolution towards one wholetime and one RDS pump at the hub; that's inevitable. And it's easier to lose those resources from a hub than from three separate stations which will always want to keep their resources

The hub is bound to be a more flexible centre than three separate stations

161. While this was an issue of concern for some, others suggested that such a reduction would represent a better match of resources to risk in Wyre Forest; that is, one wholetime and one RDS appliance would be sufficient for the area:

In the short term there would be four pumps, but we don't really need that number; we could manage with just two. Are you keeping four just to appease the RDS crews? We could apply the Worcester or Redditch approach

We need to save money ultimately so while we want to keep the RDS involved, we don't want to spend too much extra money.

Indeed, the following quotation illustrates that the above may actually be feasible:

We could actually attend more incidents in Bewdley and Stourport than we do but we don't in order to protect the RDS crews who want to serve their communities and secure their incomes. We can get there as quickly as they can turn out.

Joint-working

162. One of the stated benefits of the proposed hub station is that it would improve joint-working and collaboration opportunities between the emergency services. While this was considered desirable in principle, there was some scepticism as to how successful it would be in practice, with participants reflecting on poor previous experiences of attempting to do so and the current somewhat 'silo mentality' of the different organisations:

Joint working is not workable. We've tried to do joint training before, but it's not possible due to each service getting call-outs and being unable to work together

Will there really be co-operation at the hub? Because right now we don't share data or information so how will this improve?

163. In terms of specifics, relations between the Police and H&WFRS were said to have deteriorated somewhat in recent years (it was said that impersonal bureaucratic procedures have contributed to this and that data protection has become a significant barrier to the interchange of information). Participants were keen to see efforts being made to 'build

bridges', but were uncertain as to how this could succeed with only PCSOs being based at the proposed new hub:

It would be good to return to previous better relations without data protection being such a barrier to interchange

There are a lot of bridges to be rebuilt, with the Police, especially

What's the benefit of having 20-odd PCSOs working from the base? How would that help us?

164. Firefighters were more positive about possible opportunities for collaboration and joint working with the Ambulance Service though, particularly if this would aid the development of well-regarded co-responding schemes:

Training with the Ambulance could be good, but they are so busy. Some training we've done with Ambulance students has been really good

If co-responding was a future development - and that would be a good thing - it could help to work with the Ambulance Service at a base.

Day Crewing Plus

165. Day Crewing Plus (DCP) has been referenced above and has apparently been intended for implementation at Kidderminster Fire Station. It is not a popular crewing system among the wholetime firefighters there, who sought reassurances that moving to a hub station would negate the need for it:

Would the new hub centre be a way of protecting the current shift system and avoid Day Crew Plus?

We don't want to change shifts and have DCP as part of this.

This is not to say the firefighters were wholly against reviewing shift systems though, only that they objected to the introduction of DCP at their station (or indeed at a new hub):

We could revise the duty systems to save money by other means. It's not just 2-2-4 or DCP; there are other options.

Other Issues

166. The wholetime firefighters spoke briefly of public opinion (which, in Bewdley especially, is apparently very much in favour of retaining local stations) and suggested that H&WFRS needs to carefully explain the realities of its financial situation to as many people as possible so they are aware of the need for change:

You have to convince the public it's going to be better to lose their 'fire station'

The people in Bewdley certainly want to keep their station, but one needs to explain the realities to them

Encouragingly for H&WFRS, one participant said that: *'having seen what's happened elsewhere, I think the public can accept the position'*.

167. Other reported issues were around: the potentially problematic safety and security at a *'mixed site with community facilities'*; and the inaccuracy of the incident figures being used to justify the proposed merger:

What about the attendances of second and third trucks; do they affect the incident numbers? Is it just one incident even if three or four trucks attend?

The data about reductions in incidents does not match what's on the website; we do more mobilisations.

Overall Comments

168. Typically, the Kidderminster wholetime firefighters came to the meetings feeling concerned, sceptical, doubtful and critical about the proposal, which they connected with other (in their eyes) undesirable changes towards crews of four, DCP and poor RDS availability. They certainly would not have endorsed the proposals spontaneously.

169. However, after a concise presentation and detailed discussion of the evidence, one watch in particular found nothing really to disagree with in terms of the merger, except that it could lengthen response times to some areas, would hasten the already established trend towards one wholetime and one RDS fire engine for the Wyre Forest and that *'it will mean Kidderminster will go to DCP, which is a dreadful shift'*. They also remained concerned about the need to ensure proper prompt support pumps and sufficient RDS availability when they are called to serious incidents:

We definitely need robust back-up pumps for when we go into a fire; we really need to ensure RDS availability improves.

170. Another watch, though, remained unconvinced about the merger at the end of its session: only one of the five attendees considered the proposal to be acceptable and reasonable (they said that *'listening to the discussion and if the procedures are looked at properly it's OK'*). The others objected on the many grounds outlined above, though there was some recognition that the change may be necessary on financial grounds:

We're still against the proposal because it does nothing to improve the current weaknesses of Wyre Forest emergency cover and it would worsen response times

The proposal would reduce fire cover but we have to save money. I'm against the principle so it's a necessary at best.

171. Majorities in the other two watch-based forums were unsure as to whether they could endorse the proposed merger or not insofar as while they could understand the logic and

rationale underpinning it, they still had concerns around response times, back-up support and working environments. Importantly also, they strongly desired more information about where the hub would be sited prior to making a definitive judgement. Some of their typical comments were:

It's a mainly financial basis for the decision so it's reasonable but not necessarily acceptable

A hub is better than just two closures of stations

There is no way of predicting the effect of the response times

I understand the arguments, which are good, but we have to consider the service we give to the public

I'm happy with the concept but we're concerned about the working environment and the certainty of support pumps when we're a busier station

I can see the logic, but need to know where it would be; and we could work with the Police without a hub

The location is critical; it has to support good turn-in and response times

We need to know where the site would be in order to judge properly

Response times really matter so it's important to know the location of the station in order to make up our mind

We need more information about the response times and the bigger picture in order to make judgments about these issues; more information might calm people's fears.

Comparisons with Public Meetings

172. Wholetime staff were asked for their views on why their meetings differed so markedly in tone to the public meetings reported below - and the general feeling among one watch was that the importance of response times is often exaggerated and that the public meetings were unduly influenced by emotive 'union rhetoric' and 'misleading' information in the public domain:

This is a fairly educated debate here, but elsewhere there is a lot of union rhetoric about 'costs versus lives' which is highly emotive. So the public meeting is the exception (rather than this meeting) because it was less 'educated' than the discussion we've had

There can also be a lot of misleading and negative misinformation on social media but this is an educated debate.

173. All watches also suggested that the RDS firefighters (and associates) attending the public meetings to 'have their say' are perhaps not as informed as wholetime firefighters about the

challenges facing H&WFRS - meaning the deliberative forums with the latter were conducted on a more informed basis:

This is a better informed meeting; we understand the financial position and what is happening elsewhere strategically

We've been getting used to the issues and are more aware of the facts

There were retired firefighters at the meetings who don't know the current issues

As wholetime firefighters we know that there are going to be big changes and these are critical times, but the RDS are less understanding of the challenges facing the service and they want to protect their local stations.

174. There was, though, sympathy for the motivations of RDS firefighters in attending and speaking up at the public meetings:

The RDS are protesting their own situation

The RDS are facing a serious reduction in incomes so they feel strongly...and they want to protect their local services.

Main Findings: RDS Firefighters at Three Stations

Response Times and Back-up Support

175. The RDS firefighters echoed the concerns of the Kidderminster wholetime staff around 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. Some typical comments were:

I'm worried about response times after an incident we had in Kidderminster last year when a delay in the second support vehicle getting there would have had a serious effect (Kidderminster)

The second and third appliance turn-out times will be much slower than now, which will mean a poorer back-up service for residents. The second pump is bound to be slower than now (Stourport)

We need to give the public the best service we can and we need to feel safe as firefighters. The second pump response time is important for that to be achieved (Stourport)

The effect on response times could be even worse depending on where the station is located...which will be dangerous for three or four pump incidents (Bewdley)

Response times change the seriousness of incidents, where a minute can make a huge difference (Bewdley)

My neighbours are concerned about response times going up by three minutes but it could be 15 or 20 minutes (Bewdley)

We get peak periods where the Safari Park causes a lot of congestion and slows down travel to Bewdley (Kidderminster)

The hub will be a worse form of emergency cover. (Stourport)

176. The adverse effect of longer turn-in times for supporting RDS firefighters was again frequently raised, with participants questioning whether H&WFRS has examined where those serving Bewdley and Stourport actually live and whether they would be able to attend the hub within the requisite time (which was generally considered unlikely, especially at Stourport):

Have you looked at where the RDS firefighters actually live? (Stourport)

We can get to this station in five minutes without the traffic affecting us. The turn-in time would be much longer to the hub station, mainly due to morning and evening congestion (Stourport)

We can all get to the station and have bought houses here to be near the station...but a hub would be more difficult and awkward to get to (Stourport)

It is not feasible to bring a split crew from three different locations to the central hub; it will take too long. (Stourport)

Future Reductions

177. The Kidderminster RDS firefighters agreed with their wholetime colleagues that the number of fire engines across Wyre Forest is likely to reduce in future as it is 'easier' to remove resources from a central hub than it is from smaller, individual fire stations. Again, though, most were not overly concerned about this and felt that one wholetime and one RDS appliance would be sufficient for the area:

I can't see that the Hub would really need four fire engines in the long run... (Kidderminster)

In fact, several comments were made in support of rationalising fire cover in the Wyre Forest which, it was felt, is overprovided for compared to other areas:

As a taxpayer it is hard to justify the duplication at the three stations (Kidderminster)

We have been saying for years that it is hard to justify all the fire stations. It's hard to justify mobilising Bewdley to some incidents when our wholetime crew could have got there more quickly than the Bewdley RDS. (Kidderminster)

178. Nevertheless, a couple of people supported the retention of at least some fire cover at Bewdley and Stourport to protect the public and ensure resilience across Wyre Forest - and

the firefighters from those two stations foresaw a greater need for their services in future as the Kidderminster wholetime appliance is more frequently committed over a wider area:

If there is a fire in Bewdley, then that can affect the public morale...and there is some point in keeping the skills base there (Kidderminster)

If the wholetime pump is out and there is a two-pump shout could we crew the two pumps effectively without the Bewdley and Stourport RDS? (Kidderminster)

We should be talking about the fact that the wholetime fire engine will be less available in future than it is now because it will be dealing with incidents over a wider area. (Bewdley)

RDS Recruitment

179. 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 so the issue of future recruitment was inevitably raised. Participants anticipated a need for selective recruitment within the required radius of the proposed hub station, but some were again sceptical as to how successful this might be:

We have only recruited one person in three years so how will you recruit RDS people to the new station? Last time you only had two people from Kidderminster (Bewdley)

You can recruit from three towns if we have three stations, so that's better than recruiting from just Kidderminster in future. (Bewdley)

It will make it harder to get RDS crews recruited because it would be a smaller total area for recruitment and people would not want to travel so far to the Hub. (Stourport)

It was thus suggested that: 'we could lengthen the turn-in time somewhat for the RDS to allow for a wider recruitment area'. (Bewdley)

Joint-working

180. While acknowledging the potential benefits of joint-working with other emergency services (such as 'helping us do more first aid and paramedic work in future?'), the Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters were generally sceptical about how successful this would prove to be in future - and argued strongly that such collaboration can be achieved without the need for a hub station:

How easy would it be to do joint training exercises? Would there really be joint training? (Stourport)

The other services won't spend much time at the hub in practice (Stourport)

The community think they're getting the whole package, but they're not. They're not getting a system where everyone works under the same roof! (Bewdley)

We could get more involved with other agencies even without a hub. It is misleading to treat the hub as more than it really is. The Fire Authority thinks it's a big community initiative but it won't make much difference in practice (Stourport)

You can have collaboration without creating a hub base. We are collaborating with the Police here already. (Bewdley)

181. In terms of specifics, closer collaboration with the Police was considered desirable from an operational perspective, though again participants were uncertain as to how this could succeed with only PCSOs being based at the proposed new hub:

It will be PCSOs not police officers, but that won't be so beneficial to us as if it were Police officers. We need to be closer to Police officers who we'd meet at incidents, not the PCSOs. (Stourport)

182. It was also said that: *'the wholetime could work in partnership on the hub, but that wouldn't be the case for the RDS. It won't affect us much'.* (Stourport)

183. Furthermore, allegations were made at Kidderminster about the lack of buy-in to the hub station from other organisations – and the Bewdley firefighters commented on what they saw as the 'flimsy' agreement currently in place between the various services that, they felt, could easily be broken:

I've heard on Facebook and social media that the Ambulance Service and Police don't want to do it really (Kidderminster)

The chief constable was talking about this on the radio but the local Police officers were sceptical about it. It seems like a good idea, though some see drawbacks (Kidderminster)

What commitment have the other services actually made to the project? The agreement is very flimsy; they might or might not come on board! (Bewdley)

Financial Issues

184. The Bewdley and Stourport RDS firefighters seemed convinced that the merger is being proposed mainly for financial reasons and that it is something of a fait accompli for this reason:

It seems like the decision is made...it's all about costs and cuts (Stourport)

It seems like a fait accompli anyway if the Fire Authority made the bid for the Government funding and now has to decide whether to spend it. (Bewdley)

185. In the context of this viewpoint, Bewdley participants questioned the amount such a development would save - and also felt that the possibility of escalating costs could effectively 'wipe out' any future savings:

How much will we save over 10 years with the hub? There doesn't seem to be a firm figure (Bewdley)

There's no guarantee that the new hub will save money (Bewdley)

The costs can't be calculated properly for the proposed hub! How much is land, and how much is buildings? There are no precise costs defined (Bewdley)

The £5.9 million could turn out to be a lot more! (Bewdley)

Alternatives

186. Firefighters at Bewdley and Stourport suggested that H&WFA consider the option of 'two into one' rather than 'three into one'; that is, retaining the current Kidderminster Fire Station and combining Bewdley and Stourport onto a new, smaller hub site between the two towns. This, it was felt, would significantly mitigate against lengthier response times:

Have you considered having two fire stations instead of three? That would have many advantages in terms of response times (Stourport)

Was the Fire Authority given the option of a two into one rather than a three into one? Was that considered properly? It would still be a hub on a smaller scale (Stourport)

A satellite station; say midway between Stourport and Bewdley (Bewdley)

Have two stations in the Wyre Forest...would that still meet the requirements for the Government grant funding? You could go back to the DCLG to get their permission for varying the use of the grant for a genuine merger of Stourport and Bewdley fire stations to a new site on the borders of each. (Stourport)

187. Other alternative suggestions involved changes to the wholetime service - and more specifically: the introduction of DCP (or even day crewing) at stations such as Kidderminster; stationing fire engines at strategic locations within communities (much like the Ambulance Services currently does); or even closing some wholetime stations and making better use of the more cost-efficient RDS:

We could have day crewing stations or we could base wholetime fire engines in the community (like ambulances) without them staying at their stations overnight. (Bewdley)

It would save much more money to close the Kidderminster wholetime crew and to run this Fire and Rescue Service through the RDS crews (Bewdley)

I hope we could convince the Fire Authority that there could never be any sense in closing RDS stations compared with wholetime. (Bewdley)

188. Finally, it was said that: *'the Service has to change and smaller fire engines could be a way forward like Hampshire'*. (Bewdley)

Other Issues

189. Other reported issues were around: the geography of Wyre Forest and the need to retain sufficient fire cover for such a large area; and the inaccuracy of the incident figures being used to justify the proposed merger:

Wyre Forest is massive in relation to the other towns (Stourport)

We talk about incidents which are minor in the figures, but some of them could be much more serious if they were not dealt with properly (Bewdley)

How do you calculate a life-threatening incident if you say most of them are in Kidderminster? The problem is we don't classify housing estates as risks (Bewdley)

Facts and figures infuriate me; we could have 10 house fires tonight. (Bewdley)

Overall Comments

190. Overall, four of the seven Kidderminster RDS firefighters considered the proposed merger to be both reasonable and acceptable from the 'point of view of public policy' - while the other three remained unsure about it at the end of their forum, mainly because they felt they required more information about site selection prior to making a firm judgement:

From the point of view of public policy it is definitely reasonable (Kidderminster)

Until we know where it's going to be we can't really judge (Kidderminster)

We need a good site; that is crucial (Kidderminster).

191. In contrast to the relative positivity at Kidderminster, there was universal negativity towards the proposed hub station at both Bewdley and Stourport (although one firefighter at the former said *'I have to agree with the proposal in principle'*). The main reasons for this opposition have been outlined above, but the need to consider other means of saving money within the wholetime service (for the RDS firefighters were of the view that this is primarily a financial exercise) was reiterated at the end of the session at Bewdley:

A hub will not save much money and there are bigger savings to be achieved in the wholetime service through DCP or day crewing and etc. And it is important to protect local services, the RDS and response times above all. It's about looking after our communities (Bewdley)

Report of Meeting with Members of the Public

Introduction

192. A total of 14 randomly selected members of the public from across the whole Wyre Forest area attended a 2.5 hour forum that considered all the evidence presented to the firefighters while having a more detailed review of the fire and rescue service and its resources and roles. The meeting was thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.
193. The meeting was very different in tone to the public meetings reported below, mainly because public meetings understandably tend to be attended primarily by opponents of the proposals being discussed (including fire and rescue service staff and union representatives), whereas forum participants were initially neutral and had attended primarily due to their interest in the Fire and Rescue Service and hearing more about the proposal.
194. It is important to note that the views reported below are those expressed by public participants. 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.

Main Findings

195. During the initial part of the forum (when participants were given a presentation outlining H&WFRA's proposal), participants' questions and comments highlighted their initial concerns. These were mainly focused around: RDS job losses; response times (especially to Bewdley, though some comments were made that these are currently better than expected); levels of cover during simultaneous incidents; transport links in the area; 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); and the impact of the proposal on Police and Ambulance Service response times:

How many RDS crew do you have at the moment and how many would you have on the Hub station?

Is it likely that the RDS crews could be made redundant?

Does Bewdley Fire Station get to incidents more quickly than Kidderminster?

The response time is more equal than one would expect into Bewdley

How often do you have simultaneous fires in different parts of the Wyre Forest?

Would there be any road improvements around here?

Will one hub mean that the total number of vehicles will be reduced and so our capacity to deal with bigger incidents could be reduced?

How will the Police and Ambulance Services be affected in terms of their response times?

196. Overall though, following discussion and clarification, all 14 participants considered the proposal to be both reasonable and acceptable from an operational and financial perspective (and because they trusted H&WFA and H&WFRS to 'do the right thing') - and agreed that the data they had seen in relation to falling incident levels supports change in the Wyre Forest area:

Multi-agency is a positive approach

Don't pour money into old buildings if you are then going to have to close them down shortly...get on with the project

The Fire Service would not want to endanger people

The data is very clear; it helps compared with a knee-jerk reaction

Indeed, one participant foresaw further reductions in future given the incident reductions across the whole area:

There will be a reduction in fire engines at Kidderminster in any case, even if we have a hub; we shouldn't pretend that we can keep all four engines.

197. Furthermore, the fact that Bewdley was unavailable during 2014/15, on average, for a third of the time during the day was alarming to participants, who were thus keen to see a larger, more robust pool of firefighters centred at one location - even if this means longer response times to some areas:

It is better to wait an extra five minutes for a full crew rather than get nothing at all.

198. Despite their general positivity, participants were keen that H&WFA should make public its preferred (or indeed chosen) location for the hub as soon as possible - and they urged the Service to ensure the building is completely future-proof in terms of required resources:

I like the hub in essence but need to know the location

The hub is a good idea in principle but location is important

The position of the hub is critical and it needs to be properly designed to have all the resources you intend to put there

The site needs to be large enough to accommodate all the resources you need to have there. It needs to be future proof for specialised equipment and etc.

199. There was also some lingering concern about RDS job losses and response times from the proposed hub into Bewdley (though one person with such concerns thought the hub would be better for the whole area overall given the poor location of and transport links to and from the current fire stations):

My only reservation is that I live in West Bewdley, but overall it is better for the whole area because Bewdley might close anyway and the current stations are blocked-in by their positions; so a better site might have better traffic links

People are very concerned about job losses

I'm worried about losing the skills of the RDS.

200. Some alternatives or 'tweaks' to the proposal were suggested by a few participants, namely: two wholtime fire engines operating from the hub; using surplus wholtime crew to cover any future gaps in the on-call service; using on-call staff in different ways to safeguard their positions; and, to mitigate against the aforementioned concerns about response times to Bewdley, siting the existing Bewdley land rover at the Severn Valley Railway Station to respond to incidents in the town:

With a hub could you afford to have two wholtime fire engines rather than just one with RDS support?

Could you put any excess wholtime crew on the retained fire engines to support them?

Could the RDS be part-time on the site or keep their positions in other ways?

Could you put the Bewdley land rover at the Severn Valley Railway Station? It could work from there effectively and do what it does now.

201. Several participants said that the information presented during the forums had been reassuring in allaying the concerns and dispelling the preconceptions they had about the proposal prior to coming along. Indeed, one person had attended the Listening and Engagement session earlier this year and said they had reconsidered their position since being very negative about the proposal then:

I came not wanting any closures at all but I can see that the hub would be a brilliant idea. I was dead against this the last time I came to the meeting but we do need to move forward and accept change.

However, they acknowledged that only a relatively small group of people has had the benefit of receiving these detailed explanations of the proposal and its reasoning, and that it will be somewhat more difficult to reassure those amongst the general public with such

concerns and preconceptions. In order to have the best chance of doing this, participants suggested:

You could put a broadsheet informative document in the local paper to publicise the real situation in very clear terms so people know that you know what you're talking about...

Report of Stakeholders' Meeting

Introduction

202. The Fire Authority commissioned ORS to facilitate and report a Stakeholders' Forum for which H&WFRS sent invitations to a wide variety of statutory, business and voluntary sector organisations. Many invitations were issued and eight participants - from the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA), Mid Severn Valley RAYNET, West Mercia Search and Rescue (WMSAR), Age UK, the Charity Organisational & Financial Services, the Salvation Army, Emergency Planning, Worcestershire County Council and CJP Safety - attended the forum on September 16th 2015.
203. The meeting lasted two hours and included a presentation of the Fire Authority's proposals by ORS, followed by discussion of the issues arising. The meeting was again very different in tone to the public meetings reported below, mainly because public meetings understandably tend to be attended primarily by opponents of the proposals being discussed (including fire and rescue service staff and union representatives). At the stakeholder forum, though, the participants were initially neutral and had attended primarily due to their interest in the Fire and Rescue Service.
204. It is important to note that the views reported below are those expressed by stakeholders. 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.

Main Findings

205. Stakeholders raised some initial concerns about the proposal for a Blue Light Emergency Services Hub for the Wyre Forest, chiefly around the potential effect of the proposal on response times, cover during simultaneous incidents and H&WFRS's 'valuable' prevention and education work:

How much would response times be affected by the proposals? How do you cover multiple incidents?

You need to maintain your valuable prevention work...not just prioritise fire stations and fire engines: keep up your prevention work, too!

206. Despite these concerns, though, the general sense was:

If you were planning an emergency cover system for Wyre Forest from scratch, you would never have three fire stations here - it's unnecessary - so now you have an opportunity for change!

207. The eight stakeholders thus agreed that a Blue Light Emergency Services Hub would be desirable for the Wyre Forest insofar as it: could help increase collaboration between the emergency services (and indeed other local partner agencies), leading to a decrease in community risk via knowledge and information sharing and joint training initiatives; and that it makes financial sense in terms of both savings and income via the Government grant. Some typical comments were:

Multi-agency working is a real opportunity and it could help social care. It's a good basis for extending co-operative working... There is an opportunity to think more widely

Co-location of services is operationally a good thing because risks in the community can be reduced that way

The proposals look very sensible to me. The three stations are not really viable for training, management and communications and it would be a good idea to centralise resources to improve facilities for training and inter-service co-operation

The proposals make financial sense. You avoid refurbishing the existing stations and you benefit from a government grant which would have to be returned if you do not go ahead.

208. Indeed, it was suggested that H&WFRS go further than planned in not only establishing the hub station, but also reducing the number of fire engines based there to reflect the reducing number of incidents:

Have the numbers of pumps and crews been reduced to match the reductions in risk? It would seem reasonable to reduce them somewhat.

209. It was, though, acknowledged that people are typically very attached to their local fire stations and that they worry about response times - but the general sense was that, in the current economic climate, this must be considered in the context of funding reductions and falling incident numbers, and indeed the perceived benefits of a Blue Light Hub:

People are very attached to fire stations and response times, but money is short and there have to be priorities

There is a risk [in change], but risks have to be balanced against the benefits.

210. Few comments were made on a possible location for the hub station, though one stakeholder commented that:

Regarding any location, there will always be politics and unpopularity.

Overall Comments

211. Overall, then, the eight stakeholders were extremely positive about the proposals for a three-into-one merger. They were unanimous that the changes are financially 'necessary' and only one person doubted that they are also 'safe and feasible'. The latter participant agreed readily that Wyre Forest would not have three separate fire stations if its emergency cover was being planned 'from scratch'; but they still felt that, ideally, the existing stations should be retained.

Report of Public Meetings

Introduction

212. As part of its extensive consultation programme, the Fire Authority held three public meetings, which were widely publicised by media and using posters in the local areas. The lengthy meetings were held in the evenings, as follows:

Location	Date	Numbers Attending
Stourport-on-Severn (Civic Centre)	15 th September 2015	75
Kidderminster (District Council Chamber)	17 th September 2015	16
Bewdley (St George's Hall)	12 th October 2015	60

213. Each meeting lasted over two hours and included rigorous discussions of the Fire Authority's proposals, so the issues were scrutinised in detail. Participants listened attentively and with interest to a detailed presentation by senior officers of H&WFRS, but most remained sceptical of the Fire Authority's proposals. Overall, members of the audience highlighted areas on which they required clarification while expressing their opinions freely.
214. In addition to members of the public, each of the meetings was attended by duty-shift and other firefighters (and in some cases their families and friends), as well as union representatives. For example, even in the smallest meeting of 16 at Kidderminster, there were four crew members and two union representatives; at Stourport it seemed that about 40% or more of the attendees had close connections with the Service; and at the Bewdley meeting, around a third. Despite the meetings being 'public meetings', at each venue the firefighters and union representatives spoke prominently and influentially, in some cases reflecting and in other cases shaping the opinions of the residents present.
215. It is important to note that the views reported below are those expressed by public meeting attendees. 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.

Key Issues Raised

216. In each meeting, the questions and comments from the firefighters and union representatives concentrated on the following issues and observations (please note that any reference to station area data relates to that for 2014-15):

The Fire Authority's 'local risk' data about incidents within fire station areas does not reflect the full number of mobilisations of the four Wyre Forest fire engines;

The longer response times (predicted in the presentation as being 'up to three minutes depending on the location of the new fire station') are dangerous and will have a *'massive effect on life risk in the area'*;

In particular, it will be very difficult to provide a second support fire engine to Bewdley in a reasonable time - it will *'take up to 20 minutes to get a second pump to an incident in some part of Bewdley'*;

Because the current on-call crews in Stourport and Bewdley will be unable to attend a central hub fire station within the time allowed, they will be excluded from their current roles;

When current on-call crews are lost (as above), it will be difficult to replace them with sufficient new recruits from Kidderminster;

The data on the reductions in total incidents does not imply that emergency cover resources can safely be adjusted, but instead means that the *'current system is working well and should not be changed'*;

Despite the long-term downward trend in incidents, in the first quarter of this year the numbers of fires, small fires and road traffic collisions have all increased;

It should not be assumed that risk over the next five years will follow the same pattern as the last five years;

It is desirable to co-operate with the Police, but only community safety officers will be based at the proposed hub station, and services do not have to be co-located in order to improve communications;

The fourth fire engine at the new hub station would be very quiet - which would lead to it being withdrawn altogether in the medium-term future; and

But the proposal still means that up to six vehicles would be crewed by on-call firefighters, which is too many and weakens local resilience.

217. The overall judgement of the firefighters and union representatives present was that:

The cuts are putting lives at risk in order to save money!

218. The **members of the public** present in the meetings also raised a range of issues and asked many questions – for example:

If the Kidderminster wholetime crew is committed to an incident elsewhere, then Bewdley would be covered by an on-call crew based at the Kidderminster hub station - which would slow response times significantly beyond three minutes; so Bewdley is better served by its own on-call fire engine being on stand-by whenever the Kidderminster wholetime crew is attending an incident;

Bewdley is the only fire station on the western side of the river so the Service would be losing a strategic station if it were closed;

It is unacceptable to increase response times by three minutes, or longer in the case of the second attending fire engine;

There could be a loss of experienced staff if the existing on-call firefighters are unable to serve at a new hub station;

Bewdley and Stourport are being '*sacrificed for the sake of a hub station*';

Would all the current resources be transferred to the new hub station from the three existing stations?

Would it be possible to recruit sufficient on-call crews in the Kidderminster area?

Would the new hub station be more accessible to the public than the current Kidderminster station?

How well does the shared fire station at Bromsgrove work?

How would the construction of the new hub station be financed? In particular, will the police pay a fair share of the costs?

Why cannot the Service just spend about £1 million refurbishing the existing three stations - in order to retain the status quo?

Would the site sales benefit the fire and rescue service or would the money be returned to the government? and

How much extra council tax would we need to pay to keep all the existing services in place?

219. At Bewdley, in addition to the points above, residents stressed that:

They would be unable to use any community facilities at a Kidderminster hub

A hub station is unnecessary for the multi-agency delivery of effective community safety programmes: '*the local authority can tell you who's at risk; you don't need a hub to do that!*'

Congestion will lengthen attendance times

The Safari Park increases local risks due to the number of its visitors and associated traffic flows

Bewdley firefighters are needed in case of major fires or multiple incidents in Bewdley

The response time data are based on the attendance of only the first pump, but one fire engine cannot deal safely with all incidents

Risk will increase so much that *'I'd leave Bewdley; I wouldn't feel safe in a listed building in Bewdley!'*

Bewdley firefighters would be unable to serve from the new hub - they will be redundant with a consequent loss of experience to the service

A hub station would lead eventually to the loss of the second and third RDS pumps

The creation of a hub station will save little money on an on-going basis – savings of only £250K per annum are not really significant – so *'why fix what is not broken?'*

Financial savings should be made at Headquarters instead

The hub proposal is only a way of making cuts but will lead to more deaths!

220. At Stourport, one local councillor made several points, including for example:

Road congestion is an important consideration that should be taken into account by the Fire Authority;

The Fire Authority should also take into consideration the out-of-area responsibilities of the Wyre Forest fire engines;

Bewdley on-call staff will be unable to service the new hub station; and

The creation of the hub fire station and the transfer of Police staff there might mean that the Kidderminster police station might close as a consequence.

221. Despite the largely critical responses to the proposals, there were some supportive comments - for example:

You will have on-call firefighters in the Kidderminster hub, which is reasonable

It seems like the Bromsgrove Fire Station initiative has worked well; that's encouraging

There are financial issues; we have to recognise that and take it into account

What would be the alternative, if there is no Hub? What future would Stourport and Bewdley stations have? and

Kidderminster station is very old.

222. Another member of the audience who was sympathetic to the proposals on financial grounds also made an **alternative suggestion** for consideration:

Funds are not available to maintain three fire stations so something needs to happen! But could the hub station have two full-time crews rather than one?

The Consultation Process

223. There were some criticisms of the consultation process. One comment at the smaller Kidderminster meeting was that the Consultation Document had failed to give the times scheduled for the public meetings – which is a ‘*major fault*’ because it was ‘*hard for residents to find out about the meetings.*’
224. At Stourport (where 75 attended), there were complaints that advertisements for the meeting should have been ‘*on the front page of the local papers*’; and there was a complaint that the Town Council had had only seven days’ notice of the meeting.
225. One local councillor in Stourport criticised the Fire Authority Chair for not being present ‘*to hear people’s views*’ directly; but this issue was not widely mentioned. Overall, the audiences seemed to understand that the whole Fire Authority would be receiving an independent report of all the consultation elements.
226. One person said that, because Stourport was not identified as a ‘station at risk’ in the recent Community Risk Management Plan, the proposal to close the fire station should now be subject to a wholly ‘*separate consultation process*’ rather than be considered in the context of a merger.
227. There was an important comment from a member of the public in Stourport, who was sympathetic to the proposals but stressed the importance of knowing the location of any hub in order to make a properly informed assessment:

Risk is clearly the key issue and we know that fire risk is over-estimated; but we do need to know where the hub station would be located in order to assess the risks properly. And we need further consultation once the site has been chosen!

Balance of Opinion

228. The overall tone of the three public meetings was very critical of the proposal.
229. Based on their experience, the firefighters present were confident that they would have general public support in Bewdley and Stourport. For example, on the basis of their experience in collecting petition signatures in Stourport, a firefighter declared that:

We easily got 350 signatures for our petition within only two hours!

Written Submissions

Written Submissions

230. During the formal consultation process, ten written submissions were received from professional, political, interest, voluntary and community groups as well as from individual residents. 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
Councillors	1
Political Groups	1
H&WFRS Staff	1
Representative Bodies	1
Neighbouring FRS	1
Total	10

231. ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in this chapter; none have been disregarded even if they are not expressed in a 'formal' way. It is a painstaking but necessary process to identify the main issues raised by respondents.
232. Two of the submissions (from Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council and the Corporate Leadership Team at Wyre Forest District Council) supported the proposed establishment of a hub station for Wyre Forest.
233. Of the remaining eight submissions:
- Six (from Councillor Nigel Knowles, Stourport-on-Severn Town Council, the Fire Brigades Union, the Bewdley Branch Labour Party and two local residents) either outright objected to or had reservations about the proposal - mainly on the grounds that respondents do not wish to see the closure of existing fire stations to enable the hub's development;
- One, from the Stourport-on-Severn Fire Station staff proposed an alternative location for the hub (at Blackstone) and outlined the reasons why this may be feasible. This proposal was supported by the Bewdley Branch Labour Party; and

One, from the West Midlands Fire Service, comments on the information (or lack thereof) provided within H&WFRS's consultation communication materials - as well as on the need for prevention and protection activities within the areas where stations would be closed if the proposal is implemented. It also suggests that H&WFRS follow its lead in implementing a *"blended fleet with crewing levels of three"*.

- ²³⁴. The submissions are summarised below. It is important to note that the following section is a report of the views expressed by submission contributors. 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 submissions.

Summary of Written Submissions

Support for Proposal

Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council

While Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council realises that the proposed change will adversely affect Stourport and Bewdley, it says that its parish is covered from Kidderminster and Bromsgrove, so it is unlikely to have a detrimental effect there. The Council therefore has no objections to the proposal.

Corporate Leadership Team, Wyre Forest District Council

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) at Wyre Forest District Council believes there should be greater collaboration between 'blue light' services; and that the proposed hub is a good idea in principle and should replace the existing three fire stations in the district.

The CLT outlines the Council's practical experience of rationalising its estate and services (which, it feels, offers powerful parallels for what is proposed by the Fire & Rescue Authority), the savings and additional income from which has now reached about £750,000 a year. It particularly highlights its rationalisation of leisure centre provision, whereby a new leisure centre is being built on the Silverwoods site between Kidderminster and Stourport, with the leisure centres in the two towns to be shut in summer 2016. The annual savings from this are projected to be over £500,000 a year.

With particular reference to Stourport, the CLT notes that the former Civic Centre there has been successfully transferred to the Town Council, which in turn has worked with Worcestershire County Council to relocate the library and coroner's office to the site. As a consequence the county building site in Stourport is largely vacant, and being adjacent to the fire station, is ripe for redevelopment if the Fire & Rescue Authority proceeds with its plan for an Emergency Services Hub.

The CLT suggests that, because the three main towns in Wyre Forest are each only a few miles from the other and contain well over 80% of the district's population, rationalisation of assets and service provision is more easily contemplated than in other areas. It goes on to say that, in the context of the proposal, so long as a full-time crewed engine continues to form part of the provision, the engine could reach the town centres in Stourport and Bewdley in the vast majority of cases in about the same time as it would take the retained crews in those towns to reach their present fire stations. The CLT is thus sceptical about claims from some quarters that the proposal will reduce fire cover insofar as the full-time appliance will continue to be supported by on-call appliances in Wyre Forest (and by other resources from further afield), just as now.

The CLT notes the 'compelling' evidence in the consultation paper about the significant and ongoing reduction in incident demand - and feels it would be perverse of the Fire & Rescue Authority to continue to maintain current arrangements when a rationalised, modern Emergency Services Hub would offer cost savings and income opportunities, while preserving current levels of capacity to deal with incidents.

Moreover, the CLT says the proposal offers the opportunity to redevelop three prominent town centre sites (which is essential given the pressing need for further housing development on sustainable brownfield sites).

The CLT urges the Fire & Rescue Authority to go further in its partnership working with West Mercia Police - and would encourage the relocation of Kidderminster Police Station to the Emergency Services Hub. It argues that, as the present Police Station is not in the town centre (and does not therefore allow easy public access using public transport or linked trips with shopping etc.), it does not need to be retained at its present location. Furthermore, this is again a valuable site that could be brought into use for residential purposes.

The CLT believes the multi-million pound investment in modern facilities would provide a further boost for the district - and urges the Fire & Rescue Authority not to forego the Government funding that it has fought hard to secure for this 'exciting and innovative' project that would better meet modern requirements in Wyre Forest.

Opposition to Proposal (General)

Nigel Knowles (Councillor, Franche and Habberley North)

Councillor Knowles objects to the closure of Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport Fire Stations: they should, he suggests, be retained until 2020 at the least (when the Hub, if agreed, should be open). He also feels that the Hub must be located where it will not cause traffic congestion.

Stourport-on-Severn Town Council

Stourport on Severn Town Council has the following reservations about re-locating the Wyre Forest Fire Stations onto one site:

Not a 'Hub': the concept requires the co-location of the Ambulance Service and the Police, yet the Council understands that the former has recently chosen a dispersed organisational structure (the opposite of a 'hub') and that the Police will not move from Blakebrook;

Response Times: while the 'first response' time is reckoned as being as good as present, the Council argues that the second appliance's arrival would be much slower and that in the event of a major incident there would be less equipment available for several minutes;

Extreme Circumstances: given that firefighters are advised not to enter buildings until the arrival of a second crew, the Council argues that a life-saving operation could be delayed; and

Location of Hub: the Council argues that traffic hold-ups are common at some of the specified locations and are a likely hindrance to a speedy response. It feels that detailed examinations of potential locations is essential - and that the hub should be located as near to Stourport as possible.

Fire Brigades Union

General Comments

The FBU does not object to the concept of a 'Blue Light' Emergency Services Hub station: it welcomes the possibility of economies of scale, training opportunities and closer working partnerships (which may also result in shared intelligence and shared training) and acknowledges that a new building should lessen overheads to all occupants and may provide an improved working environment. However, the union feels this should not be at the expense of fire cover and attendance times and suggests it is perfectly possible to have the hub in Kidderminster without closing neighbouring stations. This, it is said, will ensure the Service has adhered to the Government's agenda of closer working with Blue Light agencies but with no detrimental effect to fire and rescue cover in the Wyre Forest.

The Union's main objections to the current proposal are as follows.

Response Times

The FBU says that the current average response times to life risk incidents in the Wyre Forest is within the 10 minute attendance standard because the appliances are correctly situated to meet the needs of the communities they serve. As the standard is being achieved, the FBU challenges the rationale behind changing fire and rescue cover.

The union suggests that, under the proposal, some Wyre Forest residents will suffer a response time increase of three minutes (on top of the almost 11 minutes it currently takes appliances to arrive at life risk emergencies). This, it says, is unacceptable and irresponsible - and will result in larger fires, considerably more damage/loss to property, life at risk longer and increased risk to firefighter safety. It questions whether H&WFRS has data on how

many people may die or be seriously injured by having to wait three minutes longer for a response - and insists that, if not, this work is carried out immediately and shared in the form of consultation prior to any decision-making.

With particular regard to firefighter safety, the FBU argues that firefighters will be facing fires of greater intensity following a delayed response, and that on-call crews will take longer to get to incidents if having to travel to Kidderminster from Stourport and Bewdley. This, it is said, will mean full-time crews will be waiting longer for back-up and be unable to carry out rescues safely (unless they are carried out outside current Service policies).

On-Call Response

It is claimed that no thought has been given to how Stourport and Bewdley firefighters would respond to the new station during both 'normal' and adverse weather conditions. The FBU feels that, as a key element of the hub is the closure of the two fire stations, details around this issue should be stated during the consultation so that the public have possession of the full facts.

Furthermore, the FBU says that Kidderminster station struggles to keep its on-call appliance available during the daytime - and questions what will change regarding the pool of people from which it recruits its on-call firefighters if the hub is built within the town? The union suggests that the flexibility of having three stations (and three communities to supply firefighters) provides resilience, which disappears by consolidating the stations at one location.

Blue Light Collaboration

The FBU argues that members of the public need to know what collaborations H&WFRS currently carry out with other 'Blue Light' emergency services as they may be of the opinion that further collaboration is not appropriate.

Closer working between the Police Service (which upholds the law) and the FRS (which provides humanitarian aid) is not, in the FBU's opinion, wholly helpful for H&WFRS. The union argues that once it is known that H&WFRS is working closely with the Police, its impartiality will be gone and certain parts of society will no longer wish to interact with it - with a detrimental effect on community safety. Working closer with the Ambulance Service is, the Union feels, a much more viable option insofar as both of the services provide humanitarian aid and neither has any law enforcement responsibilities.

Overall it is said that, while closer working with other 'Blue Light' organisations will have some benefits to the residents of the Wyre Forest, these benefits are yet to be fully determined.

Financial Considerations

The FBU believes the FRS should be fully funded by Government and should not be forced into collaboration with other emergency services. The union feels that the Service

Management Team should be speaking with FRS ministers and Government officials in an attempt to have fairer funding for H&WFRS (which is one of the lowest funded Fire and Rescue Services in the country) rather than accepting further cuts in funding.

The FBU argues that H&WFRS would not be considering this proposal were it not for reduced budgets and the Government's 'back door' offer of reclaiming some money through forced collaboration. The Union feels the Service should be honest and admit the main reason for considering the Blue Light Hub is purely financial due to budget constraints.

H&WFRS's claim that it would lose its Government grant if this relocation were not to take place (and that its budgetary constraints could mean one or more of the three Wyre Forest fire stations close in future) is countered by the FBU: it says that the 2014 Community Risk Management Plan considered budgetary pressures and proposed that the three stations are retained and funded until at least 2020.

Environmental Considerations

The FBU argues that the proposal will result in a greater environmental impact as Stourport and Bewdley crews will have to drive to Kidderminster to get on an appliance and then drive back home following incidents.

The Consultation

The Union argues that H&WFRS has not adequately explained during the consultation that Bewdley and Stourport Fire Stations will close to enable the Blue Light Emergency Services Hub and that attendance times to life risk incidents will be three minutes longer in certain areas of the Wyre Forest. It also says that, until the hub's location is decided, it is impossible to decide if it will be suitable or not for the communities it is intended to serve.

Furthermore, the Service has not, in the FBU's opinion, given the public all of the relevant facts and figures on the number of incidents attended by the Wyre Forest FRS appliances. For example, the consultation document states that the total incidents for the Kidderminster area was 597, whereas Kidderminster actually attended a total of 864 incidents (the additional 267 were 'out-of-area').

With particular regard to Stourport-on-Severn, the FBU has asked the Service to undertake a separate public consultation because, as recently as 2014 (in the Community Risk Management Plan), Stourport was not an 'at risk' station for closure.

Overall, the FBU is concerned that there was no consultation prior to making the bid for transformational funding, despite the fact that the success of the bid was dependent on the closure of the two stations. The Union also describes the consultation process itself as a 'sham' based on far too many 'what ifs?' - and says there is no evidence, risk assessments or facts to back up H&WFRS's claims that the proposal represents a cost-saving to provide a better service to the community.

Opposition to Proposal (Bewdley)

Bewdley Branch Labour Party

The Bewdley Branch Labour Party (BBLP) is concerned that the proposed central hub will not meet the needs of Bewdley residents as, it feels, response times will be longer and lives will be endangered.

The BBLP is also concerned that local RDS firefighters will not be able to maintain their service as they will not be able to get to the new hub in the required turnout time – sacrificing their commitment, skill, experience, loyalty and training.

The organisation supports the plan proposed by the Bewdley and Stourport firefighters to combine their fire stations into one new station at Blackstone or Burlish (the ‘two into one proposal’). It urges H&WFRS to consider this insofar as it is more suited to the needs of the residents of the three towns and surrounding hinterland and enables current RDS firefighters to continue serving their community.

Resident 1

The resident is aware of the fire risks inherent in Bewdley’s many old buildings of wooden construction and feels the proximity of the town’s fire station is important to respond quickly to local emergencies.

They note that Bewdley Fire Station is not 100% available, but feel that removing it completely and relying on a hub station will increase response times to Bewdley. They also note that traffic congestion is ever-growing and will only worsen (especially if the recently approved large expansion of the West Midlands Safari Park goes ahead).

The resident feels that, against this background, local concern about the hub Station concept is inevitable and must be properly addressed.

Resident 2

The resident feels that closing Bewdley Fire Station would be dangerous and wrong because:

- Bewdley has many timber framed buildings;

- When the local police station was closed, residents were told that the Police would still have a base in the town at the Fire Station;

- Bewdley’s on-call firefighters could not reach the new hub station within the required five minutes if they must cross the Severn and travel to Kidderminster (wasting their training and putting lives at risk); and

- Bewdley Fire Station is the only one in the Wyre Forest on the West side of the Severn, which is important as there are few river crossings - and floods, roadworks and accidents can block these.

Alternative Proposal

Stourport-on-Severn Station Staff

General Comments

Stourport-on-Severn Fire Station staff say that the firefighters at all three stations are very concerned and cannot defend the current proposal. They agree on the need to find a workable solution that the firefighters believe in; one that will save money and benefit the community. One proposed solution is to retain Kidderminster Fire Station in its current location (with its direct access to the town centre and ring road system) while merging those at Bewdley and Stourport into a hub station at Blackstone.

After researching travel times for fire engines travelling to locations within the Wyre Forest (based on road speeds and taking traffic conditions into consideration), Stourport-on-Severn Fire Station staff have concluded that a fire station at Blackstone would offer the best response times to cover Stourport and Bewdley from one central location because it:

- Has direct access to the Bewdley bypass, from where fire engines could access the top estates of Bewdley. The Wribbenhall and Stourport Road areas are also within minutes using main road approaches;

- Has main road access into Stourport town centre and onto the one-way system;

- Could access Kidderminster from several directions depending on incident location and attendance times for most Kidderminster areas would be improved;

- Is centrally located (staff have plotted on call firefighters' home addresses and established that those from Bewdley and Stourport would be able to respond within five minutes); and

- Opens up a whole area from which to recruit new crew members and doubles the current catchment area.

It is also argued that a Hub station located at Blackstone would be better received by the community than the current proposal.

Response Times

Station staff suggest that a fire engine from Blackstone would reach Bewdley Centre considerably quicker than one from the Castle Road (Kidderminster) site - and that Blackstone could supply two fire engines together in eight to 10 minutes. They also believe the average response times for the first and second fire engines to incidents within Stourport and Bewdley would be reduced.

Generally in terms of response times, staff argue that, as the Fire Service is currently achieving only 61% of the Government approved attendance time of 10 minutes, to consider a proposal which would reduce this further is unacceptable.

Partnership Working

Staff feel that H&WFRS should not be closing and moving fire stations to suit other services' location preferences; it needs to find its own location and scale down its plans so it can afford to build its own site. They believe the NHS and Police Service will see the benefits of the Blackstone site and would want to use a facility there.

The Blackstone site would also enable SARA to have direct access to the river and they would be closer to Bewdley and Stourport with their many water related risks. Furthermore, if SARA moved to Blackstone, West Midlands Ambulance Service could operate in Kidderminster town centre by sharing the existing Fire Station site.

Given that H&WFRS is considering co-responding with the Ambulance Service, it was said that the Blackstone site would enable a fast response to the communities of Stourport and Bewdley.

Financial Considerations

The staff expect that the purchase costs of the land would be reduced at Blackstone and that the footprint would be smaller. They also say that the station could be built discreetly away from the road. They acknowledge that the land is within the Green Belt, but are aware of existing domestic and commercial buildings and a former quarry site in the vicinity.

Staff acknowledge the possibility that this could cost less than the amount granted by Government - but say that by sharing the building it would still be a 999 Hub and would fulfil the Government's conditions. It would also allow the sale of Bewdley and Stourport fire stations for development.

Staff also question why the projected savings from establishing a hub station have not been revealed.

Geography

Staff argue that, while the Wyre Forest has been compared with Worcester City insofar as the latter has one fire station centrally located to cover the city and has a similar population, the Wyre Forest, is 195.4km² whereas Worcester is 33.28km².

Other Possible Sites?

The staff at Stourport have identified the old MIP factory site and open land near Burlish traffic light junction (adjacent to Ravenhurst nursing home) as other possible locations. In addition to other benefits, they feel that these sites - as well as Blackstone - could allow the creation of a carbonaceous fire house onsite.

Other Considerations

West Midlands Fire Service

Partnership working

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) acknowledges that, in line with the Government's 'blue light agenda', H&WFRS has a wider partnership approach with the police across the whole of its delivery area and that this is not a bespoke partnership for the hub station. WMFS does not feel that this was sufficiently emphasised (or clear) in the communication materials provided on the consultation.

Prevention and Protection

In terms of the impact on H&WFRS's proposals on prevention and protection, WMFS suggests that public reassurance activities can be beneficial when closing fire stations and that consideration could be given to delivering prevention and protection activities within areas where stations have been closed, even though risk levels may be low.

Crewing levels

WMFS notes that it has benefited greatly from introducing a blended fleet with crewing levels of 3. This system: ensures resources are available when otherwise they would not be; allows more flexibility in resourcing incidents where crewing levels of four would be an over-provision; and allows efficiencies to be achieved. WMFS suggests that H&WFRS may wish to consider this within its planning.

Petitions

Overview of Petition Objecting to the Proposals

235. One petition objecting to the proposals was organised during the consultation, which is reported below. We apologise if there have been others of which we have no knowledge, but we have cross-checked our records with those of H&WFRS and the one reviewed in the following paragraphs is the only one known about.

Summary of Petition

236. 2,350 people signed a petition (organised by the Stourport-on Severn firefighters) entitled 'Save our Fire Station'. The petition was simply worded as follows:

Save our Fire Station

We the under-signed oppose the proposal to relocate the Wyre Forest Fire Stations.

237. An accompanying document stated that the signatures were collected in Stourport Town Centre - where the firefighters were assisted by local shops and members of the public in collecting them. Most of the signatures are from Stourport residents, with a small number from visitors and people with holiday homes around the town. The petition organisers believe that 10% of the town's population has taken the trouble to object to the proposal via this petition.

Petitions: Need for Interpretation

238. The petition summarised above is clearly important in indicating public anxiety about important aspects of H&WFA's proposed changes, and the Authority will wish to treat it seriously. Nonetheless, it should also note that petitions can exaggerate general public sentiment if organised by motivated opponents; and in this case there has been a considerable local campaign by the Stourport RDS firefighters about changes to services in the Wyre Forest. Indeed, during the Stourport Public Meeting, one firefighter stated that '*we easily got 350 signatures for our petition within only two hours!*'
239. So petitions should never be disregarded or discredited, for they clearly show local feelings; but they should be interpreted in context.

Overall Considerations

Towards a Conclusion

Introduction

- ^{240.} Overall, the views expressed through the open consultation questionnaire, public meetings and some staff forums differed considerably from those expressed in the deliberative forums with stakeholders, randomly selected members of the public, and the others with staff. The former were largely opposed to the hub and the proposed closure of three stations, whereas the latter were broadly supportive. The reasons for the respective support and opposition have been documented in this summary, and more fully later in the report, and so are not repeated in detail here; but it is interesting that many of the concerns raised in the questionnaires and public meetings were reviewed in the deliberative forums. In the forums, most people's concerns were allayed through questioning and discussion, but in the questionnaire and public meetings they were not.
- ^{241.} 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

- ^{242.} In this case, though, the outcome of the consultation process are in relative equipoise, with some support and about the same level of opposition, as the following summary of outcomes shows, in terms of who was favourable or unfavourable to the proposals.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Favourable on the principles of closer blue light collaboration and the creation of a single hub site

Unfavourable on the proposal to close three fire stations

STAFF FORUMS

Most Kidderminster wholetime and RDS crews were favourable or did not object

Bewdley and Stourport RDS and one Kidderminster wholetime crew were unfavourable

PUBLIC FORUM

Overwhelmingly favourable

STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Overwhelmingly favourable

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Overwhelmingly unfavourable

PETITION (gathered by Stourport RDS crew members)

Unfavourable (with 2,350 signatures)

SUBMISSIONS

Six unfavourable – including the FBU

Two favourable – including the Corporate Leadership Team of Wyre Forest District Council

One alternative suggestion

One making more general comments.

243. Of course, the opposition by the questionnaire respondents, attendees at public meetings, petition signatories and some staff members numerically outweighs the public, stakeholder and other staff forum participants; but the questionnaire supported the general principles for a hub station and the forums had the benefit of being in-depth deliberative meetings that could review the evidence.

Need for Interpretation

244. 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 staff, public and stakeholder forums for being deliberative and thoughtful, and because they included a diverse range of affected staff and members of the public. This does not mean that the findings of the questionnaire, public meetings and petition 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 results are not necessarily representative of the whole population.
245. 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.

Further Consultation

246. The Fire Authority will be well aware that the current consultation was about the principle of establishing a hub station while closing the current fire stations, and respondents were clearly told this in all the meetings and literature. As a consequence, many said that they cannot form a definitive or final judgement without knowing the proposed location of any hub; and in any case the issue of principle is distinct from considering a specific location in practice.
247. Therefore, if the Fire Authority decides to progress the creation of a hub station through a three-into-one merger of the existing stations, then ORS recommends that it should consult further once a suitable site has been chosen – and prior to making a final decision.



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

Log No.

HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT – RISK MANAGEMENT

Policy, Project, Activity: (e.g. SPI, SMB or FRA Paper, etc).	Wyre Forest Hub Station Proposal 2015	New/Existing? (If existing, please state which document it will replace)	New project
		Date:	26 th August 2015
Directorate:	Service Delivery	Department	Community Risk & Training
Author:	Mark Preece	Head of Department	Mark Preece
Title:	Wyre Forest Emergency Services Hub Station Proposal		
Purpose:	<p><i>Please use the Executive Summary information from the SPI to complete this section, members of the public as well as staff will read this form.</i></p> <p>Through a one-off award of £2.38 million capital funding from the government, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority has the opportunity to create a Joint Emergency Services Hub Station for the Wyre Forest. A hub station is a central base for a number of different services, where they can work together more effectively for the benefit of the local area.</p> <p>The Fire Authority believes that a central hub station would have important advantages in terms of bringing together on one site resources of the three 'blue light' services (fire, police and ambulance) with other voluntary sector emergency support services, while helping to share costs, local intelligence and training facilities. Instead of being in different parts of the Wyre Forest area, some parts of the services would come together on a single site, not to merge their organisations, but to co-operate more closely and effectively.</p> <p>The key aim is to develop existing relationships between emergency service partners to improve their joint working for both routine and major incidents – an aspiration that fits very well with the government's 'blue light agenda' which encourages fire, police and ambulance services to co-operate to make the best use of their resources.</p> <p>In this context, the proposal is to create a Joint Emergency Services Hub station for Wyre Forest by centralising the current Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport fire stations and their resources onto a single site in Wyre Forest.</p> <p>Following preliminary 'listening and engagement' sessions with Wyre Forest staff and members of the public, the Fire Authority is currently formally consulting the public, its staff and partner organisations about its proposal. At this stage, the consultation is about whether a hub station would be a good idea <i>in principle</i>; no decisions have been taken and no site has yet been selected.</p>		

HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Strategic Policy Implications	Yes / No
Does this policy/activity help us to deliver our CRMP and Corporate Objectives?	Yes
<p><i>If yes, please state how, if No please state why the document should be put in place.</i></p> <p>If created, the hub station would contribute to many community safety initiatives and improve the effectiveness of their delivery. There has been provisional agreement with partners that the hub station would become the operational base for the following emergency services in Wyre Forest:</p> <p>Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service – for the Wyre Forest wholetime and on-call fire engines, crew training and community safety</p> <p>West Mercia Police – to accommodate the 25 members of the Wyre Forest local policing team (but the Kidderminster police station would remain to accommodate other Wyre Forest policing functions)</p> <p>West Midlands Ambulance Service – to support its work in the north of Worcestershire</p> <p>Severn Area Rescue Association – for specialist water rescue equipment and training for volunteers</p> <p>British Red Cross – for its vehicles, training, victim support and community engagement.</p> <p>Other organisations – there would also be opportunities for other voluntary and community organisations to use the hub station for meetings and training, and where appropriate to enhance their links with the emergency services.</p> <p>A hub station would also be a focus for the community – a centre where the emergency services would work together, and with voluntary organisations and volunteers, to improve community safety across Wyre Forest.</p> <p>Therefore, for all the services in question and for the Fire and Rescue Service in particular, the hub station would strengthen the organisation and delivery of prevention, protection, response and resilience services.</p>	
Equality and Diversity Outcomes	Yes / No
Are there any equality and diversity outcomes for this policy/activity?	Yes
<p><i>If Yes, please outline i.e. Home Fire Safety Check Policy will have objectives for the targeting of vulnerable groups which link to the Equality strands becoming objectives.</i></p> <p>Groups more likely to be at risk of fire are, <i>for example</i>, frail, elderly and disabled people (especially if they live alone), socially and economically disadvantaged people in social or private rented accommodation, some ethnic minority and migrant worker groups (especially if they live in over-crowded or multiple occupation dwellings), and heavy smokers. There is no evidence that the proposal for a hub station would differentially and adversely affect those with protected characteristics or any other vulnerable groups at higher risk of fire and other emergencies.</p> <p>Indeed, insofar as the Fire and Rescue Service targets its prevention and protection programmes towards individuals and groups known to be more at risk of fire and other life-threatening emergencies, a hub station should enhance those initiatives.</p> <p>For example, Fire-Police co-location would provide for:</p>	

Better day-to-day communications between the emergency services and their voluntary sector partners

Sharing of local intelligence about vulnerable people

Greater co-operation in tackling anti-social behaviour such as malicious false alarms, deliberate fire setting, vandalism and malicious damage, and reckless driving

More facilities for crime and fire prevention campaigns

Facilities and space for voluntary sector partners to use for their meetings.

Fire-Ambulance co-location would provide for:

Better co-ordination in preparing for and managing serious accidents and road traffic collisions – such as those involving extrications with cutting gear in parallel with life support interventions

Regular joint training for serious incidents, including quarterly training sessions for water rescues

Co-responding for medical emergencies – in which the Fire and Rescue Service assist the Ambulance Service to provide rapid response to immediately life-threatening medical emergencies.

In terms of saving life the Fire and Rescue Service can potentially make an even bigger contribution by supporting medical urgent interventions rather than by just fighting fires.

Emergency Services-Voluntary Sector co-location would provide advantages for the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) and the British Red Cross, for example by providing:

Secure storage and maintenance services for specialist equipment and vehicles

Regular training for volunteers

Realistic experience in operational settings alongside the emergency services

A more co-ordinated role alongside the emergency services in dealing with exceptional incidents like flooding and similar emergencies

Some administrative, clerical and office support

Shared experience in victim support, care of the injured and vulnerable, and community engagement.

Through the creation of an emergency services hub station, relations between the statutory and voluntary sectors would be strengthened by greater sharing of resources; volunteers would get valuable experience; their organisations would gain even greater resilience; and the emergency services would build closer links with their communities.

Moreover, the creation of a hub station would overcome the equality and diversity disadvantages of the current three stations. For example:

Kidderminster fire station's site is too small to develop a modern community fire station with space for partners and community facilities

Bewdley and **Stourport** fire stations have very limited training facilities in which to practise tackling the risks and scenarios crews encounter at incidents

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Bewdley and **Stourport** also lack suitable facilities for women firefighters and visitors to the sites

All three stations provide very limited access for disabled and special needs visitors.

It is neither cost-effective nor physically feasible to address these issues properly at the existing stations, but a purpose-built hub station on a larger site would be able to meet all these requirements.

Equality Monitoring	Yes / No
Does the Service currently collate data specific to this activity for equality monitoring?	Yes
<p>The Service regularly monitors and assesses its estate in terms of general condition and suitability in respect of equality and diversity issues.</p> <p>It also routinely monitors those and other matters in relation to its emergency incidents, particularly by using “After the Incident” survey questionnaires which are distributed to all households experiencing emergency incidents. The Service also carries out ‘quick strike’ targeting of households in neighbouring properties with fire safety leaflets and home fire safety advice.</p> <p>The Service also carries out other forms of routine monitoring in term of quarterly performance reports to the Fire Authority as well as an Annual Report.</p> <p>The Fire Authority is currently conducting formal qualitative and quantitative consultation about the proposal for a hub station with the public, staff and stakeholders across Wyre Forest – and the widely available consultation questionnaire asks specifically about human rights, vulnerable groups, and those with protected characteristics.</p>	
Partnership Working	Yes / No
Does this policy/ activity involve working or interaction with other organisations?	Yes
<p><i>If yes, please ensure that the Partnership Working SPI has been completed and advice sought from the Partnership Officer</i></p> <p>The proposal for a ‘blue light’ emergency services hub station is based upon enhancing partnerships with other statutory and voluntary sector emergency services. In early discussions there has been provisional agreement between the Fire and Rescue Service and its partners that, if a hub station was created, then it would become an operational base for local fire, police and ambulance services as well as for SARA and the Red Cross.</p> <p>Overall, the hub station would be a focus for community safety – a centre where the emergency services could work together and with voluntary organisations and volunteers to improve community safety across Wyre Forest.</p> <p>Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service wishes to improve its partnerships in order to work more effectively with other organisations to serve the public and to target those people and areas most at risk of fire and other emergencies.</p>	

Log No.

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Risk Management

Please complete all fields identifying the risk/ impact of your subject area.

The Risk Score is derived from the level of Impact and the Likelihood, calculated from the Strategic Risk Matrix – please see below. The risk matrix provides a score based upon the impact (low, medium or high effect) that this risk could have upon the Fire Authority and the likelihood (low, medium or high) that this risk could actually happen during the application of the policy, decision or project.

Completion of this form ensures that all relevant corporate considerations have been addressed that may impact upon the Authority. Any residual risk scores of 7, 8 and 9 (the red areas) must be escalated to the Risk Management for consideration into appropriate Risk Registers. Where the answer is no, the inherent and residual risk score will be **N/A**.

Risk Areas Identified <small>(Risk impact or concerns arising from the subject area being adopted)</small>	Inherent Risk Score <small>(before any control measures applied)</small>	Control Measures/Solution <small>(What action has or will be taken to reduce the inherent risk score and who is responsible?)</small>	Residual Risk Score <small>(after control measures are applied to mitigate inherent risk scores)</small>
1. Does this activity/policy involve or have an impact on these groups? If yes, please indicate: with a (✓) and state which group(s) Public ✓ Staff ✓ Partners ✓ Contractors Consultants Community Groups ✓ Local Government ✓ Local Resilience Forum			
<i>From the groups identified above, state here what the actual risk is to the Authority</i>			
<u>Public</u> Overall, it is likely that the public across Wyre Forest would benefit from a hub station and the associated enhanced partnership working – particularly in terms of prevention and protection initiatives and increased intelligence and collaboration. However, depending on the location chosen for the hub, it is likely that average response times to incidents in some areas may be longer than at present, while for other areas response times may be shorter. A further assessment of the likely impact on the levels of	4	<u>Public</u> The Service has undertaken extensive risk analysis to inform its professional judgement about the merits of a hub station and the likely effect on response times of potential locations. It accepts that if a hub station is created then in some areas fire engines will take longer to arrive – however, there are important mitigating factors that offset this consideration: <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> The first fire engine sent to incidents will always be the nearest and most appropriate one, given the circumstances of the incident The hub station would allow for the recruitment and retention of a larger ‘pool’ of on-call firefighters, thus </div>	2

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Equality & Diversity			
1. Does this subject area impact upon the 9 protected characteristics? If yes, please indicate: Race Gender Reassignment Disability Age Sexual Orientation Religion & Belief Pregnancy & Maternity Marriage & Civil Partnership Sex			
<p><i>From the groups identified above, state here what the actual risk is to the Authority.</i></p> <p>As noted in the <i>Outcomes'</i> section above, there is no evidence that the hub station proposal would have any disproportionately adverse impacts on any groups with protected characteristics, but some people, because of their personal circumstances, are likely to be at greater risk of fire and other life-risk emergencies, including some elderly and disabled people.</p>	2	<p>The Service targets its prevention and protection activities towards the most vulnerable and at-risk people; and multiple factors are taken into account in the targeting because combinations of factors increase risk (including levels of deprivation). Simply being elderly or disabled does not increase fire risk, but being elderly <i>and</i> disabled <i>and</i> living alone <i>and</i> smoking <i>and</i> being poor does so.</p> <p>The Fire and Rescue Service's community risk planning takes into account the population and households in all local neighbourhoods and uses Census analysis, the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Mosaic lifestyle characteristics and the incidence of fire and road traffic collisions (and any associated injuries and fatalities) within those areas to help determine relative levels of risk across the whole Service area.</p>	1
2. Could this activity prevent us promoting equality for any diverse group? No			
<i>If yes, please identify how and what the risk is here.</i>	NA		NA
3. Could this activity potentially discourage the participation of any equality groups? Yes			
<i>If yes, please identify how and what the risk is here.</i>			
<p>The proposal would reduce the number of fire stations in Wyre Forest from three to one. Depending on the location of the hub, this may lead to some current members of staff deciding they are unable to continue their employment with the Fire and Rescue Service. While this may affect some</p>	2	<p>If additional on-call firefighters are required for the hub station, the Service will continue to develop innovative campaigns to encourage the recruitment of a more diverse workforce.</p>	1

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parts of the Wyre Forest area, it is unlikely to impact differentially on any equality groups.			
4. Could this activity promote negative attitudes towards any equality groups? No			
<i>If yes, please identify how and what the risk is here.</i>	NA		NA
5. Could this activity help to promote equality of opportunity between diverse groups? Yes			
<i>If no, please identify why and what the risk is here.</i>			
There is some scope for initiatives to promote equality of opportunity by positive action and recruitment campaigns	2	Recruitment of additional on-call firefighters and volunteer activities at the proposed hub station would provide opportunities to promote equality of opportunity by positive action and recruitment campaigns.	1

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6. Is there any public concern that the function or policy is being carried out in a discriminatory way? No			
<i>If yes, please identify how and what the risk is here.</i>			
There are no such concerns at the moment, but public and staff perceptions will be explored in depth during the consultation.	NA	The current consultation exercise is asking consultees specifically about any potential issues bearing on human rights and/or protected characteristics. The responses will be thoroughly analysed and policies will be developed to mitigate any identified problems.	NA
7. Has consultation internally/externally been completed with all groups affected? No			
<i>If yes, please provide details and risk score appropriately. If no, please provide details and risk score appropriately.</i>			
Following preliminary 'listening and engagement' meetings with staff and members of the public, the formal consultation process runs for 12 weeks, beginning in September. In other words, the consultation has not yet been 'completed' but this assessment is based on the considerable information currently available, and remains provisional pending the full completion of the consultation.	2	<p>The Service is confident that its preliminary and formal consultation procedures have been/are proportionate, thorough and inclusive.</p> <p>The consultation process is informed by a detailed Consultation Document that outlines the proposal while explaining why the Service considers the status quo and some other possible options not to be feasible. Different methods of consultation are being used to encourage individuals and organisations to take part – including public meetings in the three affected areas, a forum with randomly selected members of the public and an inclusive consultation questionnaire. In particular:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Human rights and protected characteristics are addressed specifically in the consultation questionnaire.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Copies of the consultation document and questionnaire are being circulated widely and the public, staff and organisations are also invited to make written submissions.</p>	1

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		Senior members of the Service have also held meetings with partners and other stakeholders to discuss the proposals.	
8. Can the Service be sure that the policy/ activity is meeting all of the needs of all of these groups? Yes <i>If no, please identify what needs are not being met.</i>			
The consultation has not yet finished and this assessment remains provisional pending the full completion of the consultation.	2	The consultation processes are thorough and will be analysed and reported by an independent organisation before being carefully considered by the Fire Authority. The proposal for a joint emergency services hub station is designed to enhance community safety for all groups in the population.	1
Strategic Policy/Governance Implications – e.g. Political impact, Leadership, or senior management change			
<p>The current consultation on the hub station proposal focuses on the issue of <i>principle</i> – is a hub station at an as yet unspecified site in Wyre Forest a good idea in principle? Because no location has been selected, it is not possible to specify the area-by-area effects on local response times of moving from three stations to one.</p> <p>Initial analysis reported in the Consultation Document suggests that on average it may take up to three minutes to reach some areas than at present. Residents in those areas most affected may want more specific risk information once a suitable location has been chosen.</p> <p>There are organisational and governance challenges in bringing together on one site three ‘blue light’ services with some voluntary sector emergency support services.</p>	7	<p>The Fire Authority will pay careful attention to the current consultation findings before considering whether further consultation is required once a site has been chosen.</p> <p>The Fire Authority and Service recognise the importance of effective partnership working and will put in place management systems and monitoring procedures to achieve their goals. Early discussions with partners led to the funding application to the government and there has been provisional agreement already that the success of the hub station depends upon the Fire Service working effectively with its statutory and voluntary sector partners in sharing costs and designing and managing joint community safety and operational initiatives.</p>	5

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Operational – e.g. how we carry out our duties			
<p>The creation of a one-site hub station will increase response times to some areas of Wyre Forest by between a few seconds and up to three minutes. There will also be some rebalancing in the proportion of incidents attended by wholetime and on-call firefighters.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Additional on-call firefighter recruitment may be necessary to enlarge the overall pool of on-call firefighters. The availability of the on-call crews will continue to be monitored by the Service. In any case, the proportion of emergency calls responded to by wholetime firefighters is likely to increase, subject to normal risk assessment protocols.</p> <p>Overall, the hub station and proposal to reduce from three stations to one for Wyre Forest is an appropriate response to the big reduction in emergency incidents across Herefordshire and Worcestershire in general and in Wyre Forest in particular. There has also been a 30% drop in incidents in Wyre Forest over the last five years – from 1,257 attended in 2010-11 to 873 during 2014-15, with a 43% reduction in the number of fires attended. Each of the Wyre Forest fire stations has seen big reductions in incidents during the same five year period.</p> <p>The three current stations are also less than four miles apart and in total they consistently attend fewer incidents each year than the single station at Worcester.</p>	<p>1</p>

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Legal – eg change or failure to comply with legislation including specialist advice			
The Fire Authority will need to consider if its current consultation on whether the hub station is desirable <i>in principle</i> completely fulfils its duty to consult the public while giving them sufficient information about the implications of the closure of three stations for area-by-area response times.	3	Following the current consultation, the Fire Authority will consider whether further consultation is required once a site has been chosen.	1
Financial – eg monetary or resource implications			
The Authority faces continuing reductions in central government funding and has to make savings in frontline service delivery.	5	While the need to make savings cannot be ignored, the proposal for a Wyre Forest hub station is not driven primarily by financial considerations, but is seen as a potential service improvement. Nonetheless, the proposal offers the opportunity to benefit from £2.38 million of capital funding from the government while avoiding recurrent maintenance, refurbishment and upgrading costs for the three current fire stations.	3
Reputational – eg Will the reputation of the service be put at risk by the adoption of this policy/ activity?			
There is a risk to the Authority's reputation if people in some areas of Wyre Forest feel critical of longer response times that could occur in those areas following the relocation of emergency cover from three stations into one at a suitable site.	4	<p>The Authority appreciates that any reduction in the number of fire stations and any consequent increase in response times will be matters of concern. However, such decisions are not taken lightly and require extensive risk analysis and professional judgement in order to ensure that fire cover is balanced most effectively and efficiently across the whole Service area. The hub station proposal also recognises that emergency cover may safely be rebalanced in order to match more closely current risk levels, in the light of the big reductions in risk and incidents over the last 10 years.</p> <p>The Authority is conducting a proportionate and thorough consultation that provides opportunities for the public, staff</p>	2

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		and stakeholders to understand and comments on the issues. The Service will continue to promote its fire safety education and other prevention work, targeting its activities towards the most vulnerable members of the community.	
Environmental – Is there any impact including Sustainability – eg Energy saving, waste disposal, decontamination and containment of fire-fighting media.			
<i>Please ensure that the Sustainability Impact Appraisal form has been completed and advice sought from the Head of Asset Management</i>			
Relocating three older fire stations into one purpose-built station will allow for the use of greener and more efficient technologies to reduce energy consumption.	2	Environmental issues will be a key consideration in designing, building and operating the proposed hub station	1
Assets – Procurement/ ICT/Property/Fleet/Equipment – eg Purchasing, New builds, Maintenance/Alterations			
By creating the hub station, the Authority will benefit from a one-off opportunity for capital funding of £2.38 million from the government – money that is not available for any other purpose – and also from the sale of the current three sites. There will also be savings in running costs deriving from sharing the new site with the other blue light services.	2	The government funding has been secured and there has been provisional agreement with the other emergency services to share the site	1
Human Resources – eg Recruitment, Policy changes, Monitoring information Establishment changes, Employee Relations, Employee Development			
The Service recognises that some current on-call firefighters may not be able to meet the five minute turn-in requirement at the new hub station. It also recognises that there may be some local resistance to the closure of each current fire station.	5	The Service will continue to work closely with staff representative bodies through the Joint Consultative Committee. A larger pool of on-call firefighters will be required at the new hub station and so recruitment of on-call employees will continue – using innovative campaigns to attract diverse staff.	3
Training – eg Is training required in this area? Will Training & Development need to be notified in order for them to assist in the			

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delivery training in this area?			
Training routines and facilities will need to be maintained and if possible improved.	2	The hub station would have more space and more facilities for fire and rescue service training, and also for exercises with the other blue light services in respect of training for both routine and exceptional incidents.	1
Health and Safety – eg Will this enhance or undermine Health, Safety and wellbeing			
Safe systems of working will need to be in place.	2	The hub station would provide for and encourage more effective collaboration between wholetime and on-call firefighters, with more co-ordinated training on a single site. Existing policies and procedures will be reinforced and where necessary new protocols will be developed for fire and rescue service training and for training in association with the other services on the site.	1
Partnership – eg Working or interaction with other organisations			
As already noted, the success of the project depends on effective partnership working with other emergency services and with voluntary support services.	2	As noted above, the Authority is aware of the need to promote effective partnerships on the shared site and will have policies to promote and monitor their effectiveness.	1
Information Management – eg Data Quality, Privacy Impact Assessment, Data Protection and Freedom of Information, Environmental Regulation			
<p><i>Does this policy/activity conform to the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Quality principles?</i></p> <p>The creation of a hub station does not carry inherent data management risks, except insofar as the different services will need to share data about, for example, community risks, vulnerable people and potential anti-social or perhaps more serious potential offenders. The sharing of such data must be fully compliant with the relevant legislation.</p>	4	The Authority recognises the important of these issues and will ensure that appropriate protocols are in place to regulate data management and sharing at the hub station and elsewhere.	3

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Total Inherent Score		61	Total Residual Score
			33
Outcome			Yes / No
Does this Policy/Project/Activity reduce the overall risk for the service? <i>If no, please state why there is not a reduction in risk</i>			Yes

Impact	High	Important risks - may potentially affect provision of key services or duties 6	Key risk- may potentially affect provision of key services or duties 8	Immediate action needed - serious threat to provision and/or achievement of key services or duties 9
	Medium	Monitor as necessary - less important but still could have a serious effect on the provision of key services or duties 3	Monitor as necessary - less important but still could have a serious effect on the provision of key services or duties 5	Key risks - may potentially affect provision of key services or duties 7
	Low	No action necessary 1	Monitor as necessary - ensure being properly managed 2	Monitor as necessary- less important but still could have a serious effect on the provision of key services or duties 4
		Low	Likelihood	High

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Opportunities:	Responsible:
What further Opportunities can be identified from this activity/policy matter? Not applicable	Who is responsible for delivery? Not applicable

Publishing the Document:			
Is there any reason why this policy, SMB paper or FRA report and accompanying Business Impact Analysis should not be published?			
Please consider Data Protection, Privacy Impact Assessment and Freedom Of Information concerns. If there is a reason why this information can not be published, please state why. None			
Policy Author Signature	<i>Signature on original copy</i>	Date	26-08-2015
Head of Department/Mgr	Mark Preece	Date	26-08-2015

TO BE COMPLETED BY SERVICE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE ONLY:		
Escalation of Risk:	Yes / No	
Please identify the escalation of risk e.g. Departmental or Strategic Risk Register, Equality and Diversity Advisory Group or relevant Corporate Risk Consideration Lead e.g. Training, Partnership		
Authorisation:	Outcome:	Date:

Senior HR Advisor - Equality & Diversity Lead		
Group Commander		

SMB AND FRA PAPERS ONLY:	
SMB:	
FRA:	
Programme Support:	
Procurement:	
Sustainability impact appraisal completed	

Report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer

10. Pay Policy Statement

Purpose of report

1. To bring to the attention of the Authority the requirement for the Service to publish its annual Pay Policy Statement for year 2016/17.
-

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Pay Policy Statement and supporting information be approved for publication.

Introduction and Background

2. The Fire Authority is required by section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011 (openness and accountability in local pay) to prepare and publish annual pay policy statements. These statements articulate an Authority's own policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff, Chief Officers and its lowest paid employees. They are required to be approved by the Fire Authority and published on the Authority's website on an annual basis.

Pay Policy

3. The Act requires that authorities include in their pay policy statements, their approach to the publication of and access to information relating to the remuneration of Chief Officers. Remuneration includes salary, expenses, bonuses, performance related pay as well as severance payments.
4. The definition of Chief Officers (as set out in section 43(2)) is not limited to Heads of Paid Service or statutory Chief Officers. It also includes those who report directly to them (non-statutory Chief Officers), and the people who report directly to them. The Act sets out the information that authorities are required to include in their pay policy statements as a minimum.

Conclusion/Summary

5. It is a requirement that the Authority's approach to pay, as set out in the attached Pay Policy Statement, is accessible for citizens and enables local taxpayers to take an informed view of whether local decisions on all aspects of remuneration are fair and make best use of public funds. The Pay Policy Statement is accessible on the Authority's website.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	There are legal issues referenced in paragraph numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the 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

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Pay Policy Statement

Appendix 2 – Pay Grades 2016/17

Appendix 3 – Other Main Pay Grades

Appendix 4 – Grades and Staff in Post

Contact Officer

Jean Cole, Head of Corporate Services
(01905 368 329)
Email: jcole@hwfire.org.uk

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Pay Policy Statement

Introduction

Pay for all Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority staff is determined by the Local Government Employers with the Employers' Sides of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, the Middle Managers' Negotiating Body, the NJC for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, the Fire and Rescue Authority locally and representative bodies nationally. Pay awards are considered annually for all staff.

Pay Framework

Terms and conditions of employment for staff within the Fire Authority pay framework are set nationally with any variations negotiated and agreed locally.

Pay Grades and Progression

For uniformed staff, new firefighters will be appointed to the trainee rate of pay. Once their initial training has been completed, the employee will move to development rate of pay and once they have successfully completed their development programme, they will move to competent rate of pay. Existing employees who are promoted will commence on development rate of pay and will move to competent rate of pay upon completion of the workplace assessment.

For non-uniformed support staff, new employees will usually be appointed to the bottom of the scale point / pay grade for the relevant grade. There are occasions when a higher scale point is offered where the employee comes from a role that is paid at a higher level **and** they have additional skills and experience required of the post.

For grades containing between 3 and 5 increments, progression through each scale point is on an annual basis. However, where an employee commences in post after 1st October they will receive an increment six months later and then annually on 1st April. The date of progression is normally 1st April each year until the top of the grade is reached.

Market Forces

Where necessary the Service may apply market supplements for specific roles in order to ensure that it can recruit the best staff. This approach will only be adopted where there is clear evidence of recruitment difficulty and any such payments will be time limited and reviewed annually. We do not currently pay any market supplements however; these continue to be considered when recruiting for specialists.

Pay Allowances

There are a number of allowances paid to employees where specific circumstances require this and where it can be justified, for example to cover additional responsibilities over and above pay grades. Allowances are negotiated nationally or locally through collective bargaining arrangements and/or as determined by Service policy.

Non Uniformed Support Staff

The HWFRS pay framework for non-uniformed support staff was implemented in 2003 in line with national guidance, with the grade for each role being determined by the national Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC) Job Evaluation scheme. The Scheme was developed to support Local Authorities in carrying out their obligations under the national agreement on single status. The national agreement required all Local Authorities, and a number of other public sector employers, to review their pay and grading frameworks to ensure fair and consistent practice for different groups of workers with the same employer.

The grading structure was reviewed and implemented in 2012 for non-uniformed Senior Management posts, PO3 and above.

For non-uniformed support staff any outcome of national consultations by the Local Government Employers in negotiation with the Trade Unions is applied in April each year.

Uniformed Staff

The HWFRS pay framework for operational staff was reviewed in 2003 and implemented in December 2003 following a rank-to-role exercise in line with national guidance, with the grade for each role being determined by a consistent job evaluation process.

For operational staff any outcome of national consultations by the Local Government Employers in negotiation with the Trade Unions is applied in July each year.

Chief Fire Officer /Chief Executive's Pay

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive's pay is considered by the Fire and Rescue Authority. Account is taken of relevant available information, including the salaries of Chief Officers in other comparable Fire and Rescue Services nationally. To support the pay review, information may be provided on inflation, earnings growth and any significant considerations from elsewhere in the public sector. The last review of the Chief Fire Officer's pay was in September 2007.

The Authority has adopted the following pay levels for the Principal Officer team:

- Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) – 80.14% of CFO
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) – 75.13% of CFO
- Director of Finance – 80% of ACFO

The Treasurer is part of the Director of Finance's role for which a specific honorarium is paid and this is reviewed periodically.

Latest National Pay Award

Annual pay awards normally take place as follows:

- Chief Officers' - January
- Non-uniformed support staff - April
- Uniformed staff - July

The last annual pay award for these groups were as follows:

- Chief Officers - January 2015
- Non-uniformed support staff - January 2015
- Uniformed staff - July 2015

Appendix 1 and 2 details the remuneration relating to the above groups.

Other Employment-Related Arrangements

Pension Schemes

These are the pension schemes that we operate for our employees:

- Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)
- 1992 Firefighter Pension Scheme
- 2006 Firefighter Pension Scheme
- Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 (Modified)
- The Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 (England)

Employment Arrangements

Due to the nature and responsibilities of their role, Senior Managers are normally employed on full time permanent employment contracts. The Services' policy and procedures with regards to recruitment of Chief Officers' is set out within the Officer Employment Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4 of the Fire Authority Constitution.

When recruiting to all posts the Service will take full and proper account of its own Equal Opportunities, Recruitment and Redeployment Policies. The determination of the remuneration to be offered to any newly appointed Chief Officer will be in accordance with the pay structure and the relevant policies in place at the time of recruitment. The current Chief Officer retires from the organisation on the 31st March 2016 and a recruitment process is currently taking place. A relocation package has been agreed, for this post, up to £10,000.

Payments on Termination of Employment

The Services' approach to statutory and discretionary payments on termination of employment for all staff prior to reaching normal retirement age are in accordance with the Services' Redundancy Policy and relevant terms and conditions as follows:-

- Arrangements for non-uniformed staff are set out within the Services' LGPS Discretions Policy Statement in accordance with Regulations 5 and 6 of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment), (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006 [and if adopted] Regulations 12 and 13 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contribution) Regulations 2007.
- Arrangements for uniformed staff are set out within the relevant conditions of service i.e. NJC for Brigade Managers' of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services and the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

The Authority agreed on 18 February 2015, the discretion to pay a voluntary redundancy to all employee groups based on the number of statutory weeks x actual weekly pay, enhanced by 75%. On the 8 October 2015, the Authority extended the Scheme of Delegation to permit the CFO to approve early retirements, in consultation with the Chairman and Treasurer, in the case of employees whose salary is less than £45,000 to include Officers at Station Commander rank subject to the pension costs still not exceeding £45,000. Where it is above £45,000 the decision will be taken by the Policy & Resources Committee.

The Service operates a Flexible Retirement Policy which was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee of the FRA at its meeting on 25 January 2012. This policy applies to all staff in all relevant pension schemes. The Fire Authority offers re-employment as an option to fill specific post(s) where there is a shortage of skills/experience within the remaining workforce.

Where the Authority has defined a specific need a business case must be produced by the relevant Head of Department showing that there are clear benefits for the Authority to offer a re-employment opportunity. Part of the business case will include whether to offer the post out to open competition.

Appendix 2

Pay Grades 2016/17					
Job	Remuneration		Pay Relationship to CFO (%)	Salary Range	
				Min	Max
1. Head of Paid Service					
Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive	£123,477		Set by Appointments Committee		
2. Statutory Chief Officer					
Treasurer (Part of Director of Finance role) receives an additional £3,000 honorarium for the extra responsibility of Treasurer					
Monitoring Officer (Part of Head of Legal Services role)					
3. Non Statutory Chief Officer					
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO)	£98,953		80.14		
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)	£92,768		75.13		
Director of Finance (excluding Treasurer role)	£74,214		60.11		
Head of Legal Services	£59,946		48.55	£57,617	£61,146
4. Deputy Chief Officer					
Area Commander Service Delivery	£72,737	*	58.91	£66,310	£72,737
Area Commander Community Risk & Training	£72,737	*	58.91	£66,310	£72,737
Area Commander (Collaboration)	£72,737	*	58.91	£66,310	£72,737
Area Commander Operations Support (temporary)	£61,398	**	49.73	£61,398	£67,349
Head of Corporate Services	£59,946		48.55	£57,617	£61,146
Finance Manager	£45,726		37.04	£42,957	£46,652
5. Lowest Paid Employees***					
Uniformed					
Firefighter (Control)	£21,786		17.65	£20,916	£27,877
Non Uniformed					
Administrator	£16,231		13.15	£16,231	£17,372

Notes:

*** includes 20% allowance to provide out of hours fire cover on a continuous rota system and includes an additional 8% enhancement to provide a higher level of fire cover responsibility.**

**** includes 20% allowance to provide out of hours fire cover on a continuous rota system.**

***** The lowest paid workers (administrators) are paid in accordance with their job evaluation score which matches across to Scale 3 of the Services' Pay and Grading structure which is the lowest grade**

The Head of Paid Service, Director of Finance, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Area Commanders are provided with a motor vehicle for work purposes. Any private use is chargeable.

The Head of Legal Services and the Head of Corporate Services receive an essential mileage car user allowance in accordance with the NJC provisions.

The Head of Paid Service, all statutory and non-statutory Chief Officers and all Deputy Officers are provided with a mobile phone and iPad for work purposes. Any private use is chargeable.

Other Main Pay Grades

	Grade	Pay Range Minimum	Pay Range Maximum	No of Staff In Post		
Non Uniformed Pay Grades						
PO7		£57,617	£61,146	2		
PO6		£51,881	£54,972	0		
PO5 *		£46,507	£49,450	2		
PO4 *		£41,823	£45,104	1		
PO3 *		£36,571	£39,267	1		
PO2		£32,778	£35,662	2		
PO1		£29,558	£31,846	11		
SO2		£27,924	£29,558	5		
SO1		£25,440	£27,123	11		
Scale 6		£22,937	£24,472	9		
Scale 5		£20,253	£22,212	15		
Scale 4		£17,714	£19,742	9		
Scale 3		£16,231	£17,372	26		
Total				94		
Uniformed Pay Grades **				WT	RDS	Total
Area Commander		£51,165	£56,124	3		3
Group Commander		£43,582	£48,313	8		8
Station Commander		£37,842	£41,737	16		16
Station Commander Control		£35,950	£39,650	1		1
Watch Commander		£33,237	£36,381	53	23	76
Watch Commander Control		£31,575	£34,562	2		2
Crew Commander		£31,189	£32,533	32	62	94
Crew Commander Control		£29,629	£30,906	6		6
Firefighter		£22,017	£29,345	152	309	461
Firefighter Control ***		£20,916	£27,877	13		13
Total				286	394	680

* 3 employees are protected on the old salary levels

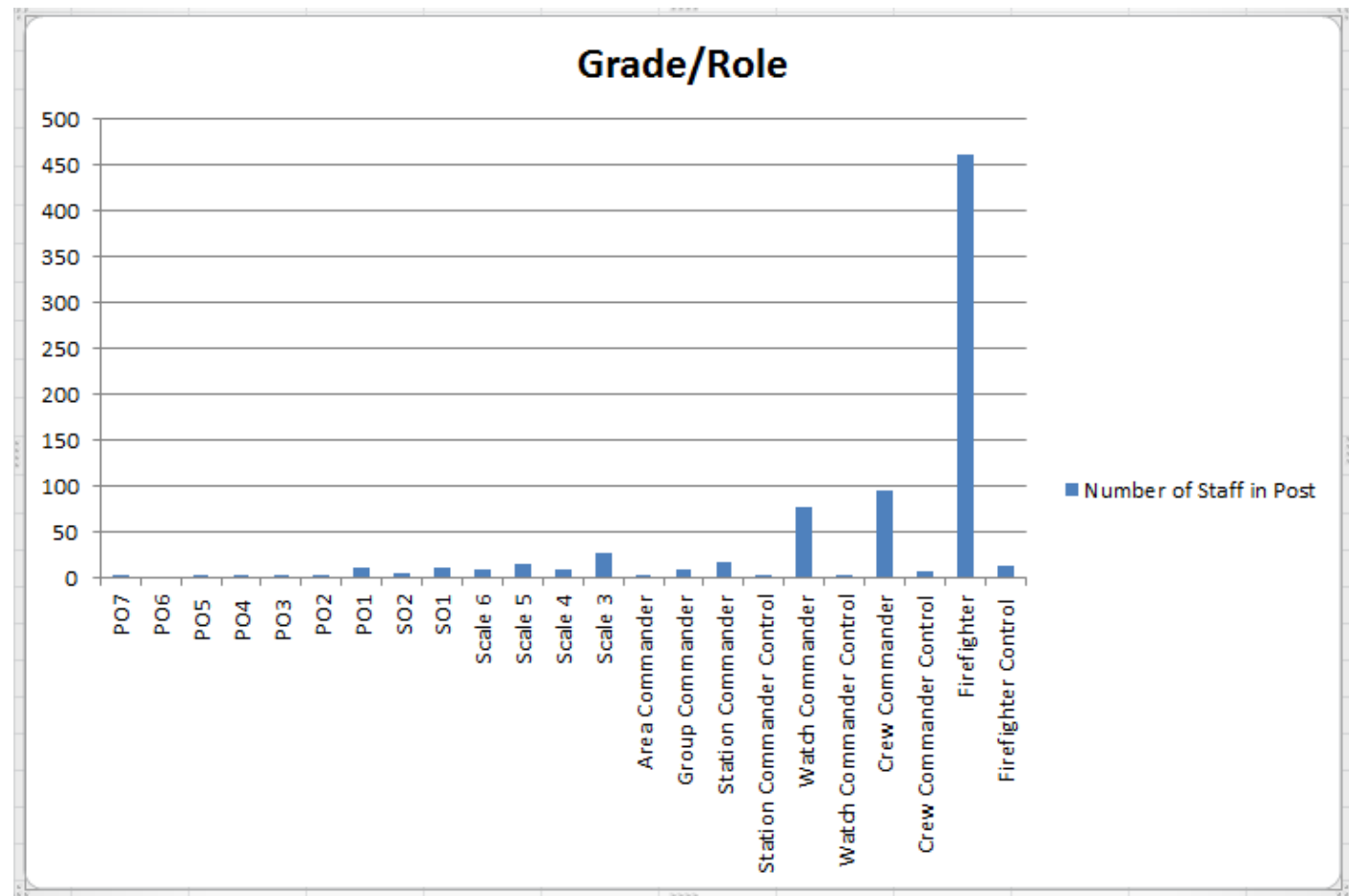
** These figures are headcount not full time equivalent. Retained duty system employees have a different pay structure to wholetime – a retaining fee of 7½% or 10% of the equivalent wholetime rate, depending on cover, plus the same hourly rate as wholetime.

*** This number includes 2 contingent firefighters

NOTES - Number of staff in post is at 11th January 2016 and are based on people in their substantive roles. From 2015 there is no longer a scale 2 pay grade.

Grades and Staff in Post

PO7	2
PO6	0
PO5	2
PO4	1
PO3	1
PO2	2
PO1	11
SO2	5
SO1	11
Scale 6	9
Scale 5	15
Scale 4	9
Scale 3	26
Area Commander	3
Group Commander	8
Station Commander	16
Station Commander Control	1
Watch Commander	76
Watch Commander Control	2
Crew Commander	94
Crew Commander Control	6
Firefighter	461
Firefighter Control	13



Report of Head of Legal Services

11. Members' Allowances Scheme 2016/17

Purpose of report

1. To consider whether to make any alterations to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2016/17 in light of the very small change in the Consumer Price Index to December 2015.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members determine the level of Members' Allowances for 2016/17.

Introduction and Background

2. The Authority is required to have a scheme for its Members to be paid a basic annual allowance, under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Authorities may also make provision for other allowances, for example for those Members with special responsibilities or for travel and subsistence. The proposed 2016/17 budget for Members' Allowances is £50,301.
3. Prior to making or amending its scheme, the Authority must have regard to the recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panels of the authorities from which its Members are nominated i.e. Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council. The current Members' Allowances Scheme is attached at Appendix 1.

Consumer Price Index

4. On 16 June 2008 the Authority agreed to use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the purpose of annually adjusting Members' Allowances. However the Authority has subsequently agreed not to take any CPI related increase since 2009. Both the Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council Independent Remuneration Panels have recommended further use of the CPI until the end of the financial year 2016/17.
5. The Office of National Statistics has reported that the CPI rose by 0.2% in the year to December 2015, compared with a 0.1% rise in the year to November 2015. Although this is the first month since January 2015 for which the rate has exceeded 0.1%, this continues the trend since early 2015 of the rate being very close to zero.

6. By way of example, an increase of 0.2% would equate to an additional £2.33 on the current basic allowance of £1,136 and would increase the total cost of members' allowances by approximately £100.
7. Members are asked to determine whether to make any alterations to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2016/17 in light of the changes in the CPI.
8. On 29 January 2013 all Members were granted a dispensation by the Standards Committee in January 2013 for a period of four years to speak and vote on the Members' Allowances Scheme. Members are therefore not treated as having an Other Disclosable Interest (ODI) in this matter.

Conclusion/Summary

9. The Independent Remuneration Panels have recommended the use of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to make annual adjustments to Members' Allowances until the end of 2016/17. There has been a slight rise in the CPI of 0.2% in the year to December 2015. Members are therefore asked to determine whether to make any alterations to the Members' Allowances Scheme in light of the slight rise in the CPI.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The proposed budget for Members' Allowances is £50,301.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	None directly.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None directly.
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?)	The basic allowance payable is determined by Regulation, however the current Members' Allowances Scheme also includes a Dependents' Carers' Allowance to assist those Members with caring responsibilities in carrying out their approved duties.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Members' Allowances Scheme 2015/16

Background papers –

Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003

Fire Authority Report and Minutes – 17 June 2015

Standards Committee Report and Minutes – 29 January 2013

Contact Officer

Nigel Snape, Head of Legal Services

(01905 368242)

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Members' Allowances Scheme 2016/17

Fire Authority Members receive certain allowances in recognition of their various duties and to recognise the time they give to undertake Authority work. Allowances are also intended to cover incidental costs that may be incurred by Members.

Allowances are adjusted annually in line with the Consumer Price Index, as approved by the Authority.

Basic Allowance

The annual basic allowance of £1163 is paid to all Members.

Special Responsibility Allowance

The following additional allowances are paid to Members with special responsibilities:

Chair of the Authority £9032
Vice Chair of the Authority £5419
Political Group Leaders £1355
Chairman of Audit & Standards Committee £1355
Chairman of Policy & Resources Committee £1355

Members with more than one special responsibility will only receive one special responsibility allowance at the higher appropriate level.

The Members' Allowances Scheme also includes the following travel and subsistence allowances:

Travel Allowance

Allowances for travel expenses incurred by Members undertaking their approved duties can be claimed.

Mileage can be claimed for travel by car motorbike or cycle in line with the rate used by HM Revenue & Customs. Car park costs incurred by a Member whilst undertaking an approved duty may also be claimed back although evidence of the payment will need to be submitted.

For those Members who car share, a passenger allowance can be claimed by the driver in respect of one or more passengers who are fellow Authority Members carried on Authority business.

Members may claim for use of public transport up to the amount of the ordinary standard class fare (or any available cheap fare as incurred). Evidence of the payment will need to be submitted. Taxi fares may be claimed where bus/train travel is not practical. Receipts will be required.

Approved Duties

Members may submit a claim for travel allowances

- a) meetings of the Authority, its committees, sub-committees, panels or working parties;
- b) meetings of outside bodies to which a Member is appointed by the Authority, if that organisation does not pay Members' expenses;
- c) Authority Member training seminars, events and workshops;
- d) Chairman's briefing meetings;
- e) meetings with Officers in connection with the functions of the Authority which have been convened by the Chief Fire Officer or a member of the Senior Management Board; or
- f) any meeting or event as approved by the Authority or its Committees.

Subsistence Allowances

Members can claim subsistence allowance payments as a reimbursement of actual expenditure, on the basis that reasonable expenses evidenced by receipts will be paid. Similarly, overnight accommodation expenses will be paid where this is necessary and is evidenced by receipts.

Dependent Carers' Allowance

Members can claim an additional allowance to cover expenditure incurred for the care of dependents as follows:

- i) £6.09 per hour;
- ii) Payable in respect of attendance at meetings of the Authority, its committees and Member training events; and
- iii) Claims to be made only in respect of care provided by persons other than family members resident in the house and all claims to be evidenced by receipts.

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

12. Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

Purpose of Report

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

Recommendation

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the report be noted.

Primary Authority Scheme

2. In late December 2015 it was formally confirmed by the Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO), part of the Government's Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) Department, that Primary Authority Partnership applications had been approved between Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and two local businesses.
3. The approved partnership with Marston's PLC (a national brewery) and one currently being negotiated with Mainstay Residential (a Worcester based property company) will see the Community Risk department offer fire safety advice to both companies, and discuss fire safety enforcement matters with other Fire Services regarding both companies' property estates around the country.
4. Both partnerships enable HWFRS to cost recover appropriate fees against any work undertaken on the businesses behalf, and each agreement will be reviewed annually. The Government's key driver for Primary Authority Partnerships is their ability to offer business consistent regulatory advice across county boundaries. The Community Risk department is pleased to have secured approval with these two local companies and will continue to discuss the merits of Primary Authority with other interested parties when appropriate.

Medical Response by Firefighters

5. West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) does not currently have any significant schemes in place to work with its local Fire and Rescue Services to utilise the emergency medical skills of firefighters, although it must be emphasised that they do have robust response arrangements utilising a number of different response resources. An outline proposal has been developed through the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) Regional Operations Committee, led by Area Commander Jon Pryce (HWFRS), which looks to offer assistance to the Ambulance Service in remote areas where an ambulance may be some distance away and where there is no WMAS community first responder available. The Chief Fire Officers of Hereford & Worcester and West Midlands Fire Service recently met with the Chief

Ambulance Officer to discuss how all West Midlands Fire Services could work more closely together.

6. In some areas and on occasions, ambulances may need to travel considerable distances to attend life threatening emergencies. All HWFRS fire stations have a defibrillator, full trauma packs, oxygen and trained staff, and we believe the FRS may have a role play in contributing to the provision of life-saving medial response. The draft proposal is being considered by WMAS as a part of a wider review of their operational response and attendance times and, should they decide to develop the proposal into a pilot scheme, we will be seeking Fire Authority approval and permission to consult more widely with staff and Representative Bodies.

Service to sign up to Mental Health Anti-Stigma Pledge

7. The Service has joined over 300 emergency service employers in England by signing up to the Blue Light Time to Change Pledge, which aims to put an end to mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace.
8. One in four individuals in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. Furthermore, independent research indicates that an estimated quarter of a million individuals who work or volunteer for the emergency services are more likely to experience a mental health problem, but are less likely to receive support. The Blue Light Programme, which is run by the mental health charity Mind, aims to address this gap by providing independent mental health support for all emergency service employees across England.
9. By signing the pledge, the Service aims to encourage staff to feel more able to speak openly about mental health and to seek support when they need it. It will also help to improve mental health awareness within the Service, which will better enable staff and volunteers to look out for themselves, their team and members of the public. Moreover, bigger problems have a better chance of being prevented if staff and volunteers feel able to get support as soon as they need it.
10. As part of the signing up to the Blue Light Time to Change Pledge the Service will be:
 - Launching an internal communications campaign to raise awareness of mental health issues and MIND support/courses available;
 - Reviewing policies and processes which impact on mental wellbeing;
 - Offering support for managers in the form of a half day course focusing on how to manage mental health within the workplace. Each district or department will be asked to nominate a minimum of one manager to attend this training; and
 - Taking part in mental health awareness week 16-22 May 2016.

Public access automated external defibrillator (AED) now at Broadway Fire Station

11. Thanks to a donation from Broadway Parish Council made to the Community First Responder scheme, Broadway Fire Station now has an AED that is available to the public, 24 hours a day.
12. The AED has been supplied by West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and is located in a green security box at the front of the building. This new

addition means that there are now two public access AEDs in Broadway, with one each end of town.

13. In addition to Broadway, Bromyard, Kingsland and Redditch fire stations also have a public access AED.

Contact Officer

Mark Yates, Chief Fire Officer

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Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Monday, 18 January 2016, 10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Ms K S Guthrie, Mrs A T Hingley, Mr G C Yarranton (Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr S D Williams

Substitutes: none

Absent: none

Apologies for Absence: Ms L R Duffy, Mr W P Gretton, Mr G J Vickery, Mr R I Matthews, Professor J W Raine, Mr S C Cross

Declarations of Interest: none

32 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 28 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33 Annual Audit Letter

External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP presented the report. An unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2014/15 financial statements and value for money conclusions were issued on 29 September 2015 and were considered to give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position.

The External Auditor highlighted the following key messages arising in the Audit 2014/15

- i. Testing was conducted as planned and the audit of the accounts went well.
- ii. Officers prepared the accounts in accordance with the agreed timetable, and audit.
- iii. Working papers were good quality and officers were responsive to

questions. The External Auditor expressed appreciation for the continued excellent standard of work from officers and the team.

iv. The Authority has a realistic Medium Term Financial Plan which underpins the annual budget.

v. The Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in its use of resources.

RESOLVED the Annual Audit Letter 2014/15 from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP be noted.

34 External Audit Fee

The External Auditor summarised the scale fee for audit work and confirmed to Members that no additional fees outside the Audit Code had been incurred. Members discussed the significantly reduced fees and queried whether the fee in the past had been too high. The External Auditor explained to Members that following the demise of the Audit Commission, work outside of the key fundamental areas had been scaled back but that the audit was still conducted in accordance with the Audit Code of Practice and professional standards obligations of auditors. Members were reassured that fees are independently set and that any variation during the course of the audit has to also be independently agreed.

RESOLVED the External Audit Fee 2015/2016 from Grant Thornton UK LLP be noted.

35 Internal Audit Monitoring Report 2015/2016

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service reported progress against the 2015/16 plan and highlighted to Members that of the three completed audits there are no high priority recommendations. The remaining two reports are close to completion and full report summaries will be presented at the next meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised to Members the strong and successful relationship that exists not only between the Fire Authority and the Auditors but also between the Internal and External Auditors themselves. He highlighted that it was a credit to all involved including Members that such robust professional conduct is continually maintained.

RESOLVED the Internal Audit Monitoring Report 2015/2016 be noted.

36 Whistleblowing Policy

In light of recently published best practice Members were advised of suggested amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy. Key changes focused on providing further clarity with regards to legal protection and guidance to staff in raising a concern.

[10:49 Derek Prodger entered the room]

Members were reassured that awareness sessions with managers and updates in the Service Bulletin would ensure that all staff are kept fully informed of the updates to the policy.

Following an ensuing discussion Members were reassured that measures are in place to offer all staff at whatever level a variety of disclosure options to make raising a concern as accessible as possible. Members congratulated Officers on the policy highlighting it as a model of best practice in this field.

***RESOLVED* the revised Whistleblowing Policy be approved.**

The Meeting ended at: 11:03

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Policy and Resources Committee

Wednesday, 27 January 2016, 10:30

Minutes

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

Substitutes: none

Absent: Mr J L V Kenyon

Apologies for Absence: Mr B A Baker

37 Declarations of Interest (if any)

No Member declared an interest.

38 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 16 November 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39 Treasury Management Activities 2014/15

Members were informed of the Treasury Management Activities for 2014/15 and advised that the Prudential indicators set by the Authority in February 2015 were within the limits of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED that Members agree the Prudential Indicators were within the limits set by the Authority in February 2015 and that there are no matters that require further attention.

40 Budget 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Members were informed of the current position in relation to budgets for 2016/17 and beyond.

Members were advised that in late December the formula grant provisional figures for 2016/17 to 2019/20 were announced. Over the four year comprehensive spending review period, the total grant reduction is as anticipated in the Medium Term Financial Plan. However, the savings are greater in the first two years which mean that additional savings would need to be made in the earlier years, which total £1.096m. This can be funded from earmarked reserves that we put aside last year to cover this eventuality.

[Councillor Adams entered the meeting at 10.38am.]

In respect of the precept, Members were asked to consider an increase of 1.96% for Band D.

Members were reminded that the last 2015/16 budget monitoring report identified potential savings of £0.792m but a decision as to how this should be used had not as yet been decided.

Members congratulated the Finance team on the work they had done with the figures.

RESOLVED that the Fire Authority be recommended to:

- i) increase council tax by £1.50 per year (1.96%) for 2016/17;**
- ii) use £0.960m of the earmarked reserve to smooth the impact of the accelerated grant reduction;**
- iii) rephase £0.150m of the previously approved use of general balances from 2016/17 to 2017/18;**
- iv) agree the budget planning assumptions set out in Appendix 1;**
- and**
- v) note the remaining budget gaps set out in Appendix 2.**

41 Task and Finish Group for Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme

Members were asked to establish a Task and Finish Group to examine the Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme. The Group will enable Members to have oversight of the Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme and an updated report will be provided to Members by the end of March 2016.

Members were asked to consider nominating Members for the Task and Finish Group who were interested in the subject matter and inform the Head of Legal Services.

The Terms of Reference agreed by Members were:

- review the Vehicle Fleet Strategy approved in 2007;
- review the Authority's anticipated future requirements and strategy with regard to replacement of vehicles; and
- make recommendations.

RESOLVED that:

- i) a Task and Finish Group to examine the Vehicle Fleet Capital Programme be set up;**
- ii) Councillor R Phillips be appointed as Chairman to the Task and Finish Group;**
- iii) the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group be agreed; and**
- iv) Group Leaders to nominate a Member from each group and inform the Head of Legal Services.**

42 Removal of Incident Response Unit for Mass Decontamination

Members were informed that following a national review, it had been determined that 22 National Resilience Incident Response Units (IRU) provided for mass decontamination across the Country, including the one currently stationed within Hereford & Worcester, are no longer required and will no longer be funded by Government.

Members were advised that the loss of the IRU at Hereford Fire Station would not cause any significant operational issues within the Service and the local decontamination capability could easily be provided at minimal cost for Hereford Fire Station. Assurance was also given that all HWFRS firefighters would 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.

RESOLVED 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.

43 West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police Operations and Communications Centre (OCC) Programme

Members were informed of the progress of the West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police Operations and Communications Centre (OCC) programme and were asked to approve the relocation of the HWFRS Fire Control to Hindlip Park.

Members were reminded that this was a separate issue to the relocation of Service Headquarters.

Members were assured that HWFRS were fully engaged with the programme, were key stakeholders in all of the associated projects and it was hoped the OCC, including the HWFRS Fire Control, would be in operation in 2017.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the progress of the OCC Programme and of the planning application submitted by West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police be noted; and.**
- ii) Officers be authorised to proceed with the relocation of Fire Control to the Hindlip Park site, on terms to be agreed by the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Treasurer and Head of Legal Services.**

44 Health and Safety Committee Update

Members were updated on the activities and items of significance from the Service's Health and Safety Committee and Members' attention was drawn to key areas of work currently being undertaken by the Service.

RESOLVED that the following items, in particular, be noted:

- i) Health and Safety performance for Quarter 2 of year 2015-16 (Jul - Sept 2015); and**
- ii) the involvement of the Service in a number of Health and Safety initiatives at a national level.**

The Meeting ended at: 11:26

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Appointments Committee

Wednesday, 16 December 2015, 12:50

Minutes

Members Present: Ms L R Duffy, Mr D W Prodger MBE, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R M Udall, Mrs F M Oborski MBE, Mr R J Phillips, Ms R E Jenkins

1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

2 Declarations of Interest (if any)

No interests were declared.

3 Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of item 4 due to the likelihood that it discloses information relating to an individual and relating to the business affairs of the Authority.

4 Recruitment of Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

Following the approval by the Authority to allow the current Chief Fire Officer to retire, the Committee considered the proposed recruitment and selection arrangements for the appointment of a Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive.

The Committee discussed in detail the operational nature of the role, the recruitment plan, person specification and the terms and conditions of the post. The Committee noted the need for a technical advisor during the recruitment process and it was suggested that the current Chief Fire Officer could perform the role.

RESOLVED that:

i) the recruitment and selection arrangements for the appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive be approved and officers be authorised to make any minor administrative amendments as necessary; and

ii) the Chief Fire Officer perform the role of technical advisor to the Committee during the selection and recruitment process.

The Meeting ended at: 14:16

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Appointments Committee

Wednesday, 27 January 2016,09:05

Minutes

Members Present: Ms L R Duffy, Mr D W Prodger MBE, Mr C B Taylor, Mr R M Udall, Mr R J Phillips, Ms R E Jenkins

5 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

6 Declarations of Interest (if any)

No interests were declared.

7 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8 Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the following item due to the likelihood that it discloses information relating to an individual.

9 Appointment of Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

The Head of Legal Services informed the Committee that Officers had recently met to undertake a shortlisting exercise in relation to the applicants for the post of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive. The shortlisting information was circulated to Members by the Head of Legal Services who explained that there were no applicants suitable to take forward to the interview stage.

[Cllr C.B. Taylor arrived]

The Committee considered the information provided by the Head of Legal Services and discussed a variety of options that could be taken to progress matters.

The option to explore the potential to fill the post with a secondee from another fire and rescue service was discussed in detail. It was generally agreed that this option would provide the Authority with an opportunity to fill the post for an interim period whilst further work was undertaken to establish any further options available to fill the post permanently.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the Chief Fire Officer examine the potential to secure a six month secondment from another fire and rescue service to fill the role of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive on the basis that any successful secondee:**
 - a) be seconded on the same salary and terms and conditions as the current Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive;**
 - b) be required to undertake a review of the terms and conditions of Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive post;**
 - c) has any reasonable out of pocket expenses met by the Authority if necessary; and**
- ii) that the Appointments Committee reconvenes on 9th or 10th February 2016 to review progress, meet any potential secondee and make recommendations to the Authority.**

The Meeting ended at: 10:10

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman