

## **Report of the Chief Fire Officer**

### **6. Closer Working with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To inform the Authority of the progress made to date and to consider the recommendations which represent the detailed findings of the Project Arrow Team as supported by the Joint Project Board and the Member Reference Group.
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#### **Recommendations**

***The Policy and Resources Committee recommend to the Authority that:***

- i) an operational collaboration between the two Fire and Rescue Services be progressed under the direction of the two Chief Fire Officers and the Strategic Director of Resources, Warwickshire County Council;***
- ii) Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority and Warwickshire County Council continue exploring greater collaboration between the two Fire and Rescue Services, working towards a strategic alliance light by late 2015 under the direction of the Joint Project Board;***
- iii) a further report be submitted to the Joint Project Board in the summer of 2015 detailing the progress made;***
- iv) the Joint Project Board continue to meet biannually;***
- v) work to date is shared with other key partners, notably Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police with the aim of stimulating interest in wider collaboration; and***
- vi) no further work on Options 4 (strategic alliance contractual) and 5 (full combination) in the options appraisal attached at Appendix 1 be progressed until the report submitted in the summer of 2015 has been considered.***

## Introduction and Background

2. As Members are aware the Authority continues to face a challenging financial situation. Whilst we will have made savings of £6.2m to the end of 2016/17 (74% without impacting on front line response to the public), projections indicate that further savings of £2.5m to £3.5m may be needed beyond those currently identified in the Community Risk Management Plan over the following three years to 2019/20.
3. We know from Government (and those that aspire to be in government) announcements that restrictions on public sector funding are likely to continue until at least 2020, and it therefore appears inevitable that the Authority will need to find further significant savings beyond those currently envisaged. Unless alternatives are identified, it is inevitable those savings will impact to a greater or lesser degree on front line service delivery.
4. One of the alternatives is closer working with other organisations, such as neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services. The 'Sir Ken Knight Review' published last year recommended that where Fire and Rescue Authorities can provide business cases for local collaborative solutions showing clear, achievable efficiencies, central government should step forward to provide financial support for transition. In addition, the Fire Minister has also set out the challenge for Fire and Rescue Authorities to engage in greater collaboration.
5. At its meeting on 11 December 2013, the Authority considered a proposal for future collaborative working with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) and agreed that a joint officer team (Project Arrow) be established with WFRS to examine the feasibility and potential benefits of collaboration. It was anticipated that the work would be completed within 12 months and the cost would potentially be met from the £400,000 'Development Reserve'. It was expected that should this reserve be utilised the figure would be approximately £75,000. However, the use of reserves has not been necessary.

## Key Findings

6. Project Arrow has explicitly examined the potential benefits to be delivered from 2017 and beyond. At its meeting on 2 June 2014, the Policy and Resources Committee received and noted a detailed update on the project approach and progress made in assessing the benefits and options for closer working with WFRS.
7. Since then further work has been undertaken and considered by the Policy and Resources Committee. The findings are set out in the report attached at Appendix 1, entitled *Project Arrow Options Appraisal*.

8. The key findings include:

- The current optimal level of collaboration between the two Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) is assessed to be an operational collaboration i.e independent collaborations between workstreams which can proceed without an overarching formal agreement and make sense in their own right. Collaboration already exists between the two FRSs, notable in areas such as operational cover, water rescue and training.
- A number of further opportunities for operational collaboration have already been identified within departments which can be progressed under the guidance of the two Chief Fire Officers and the Strategic Director of Resources for Warwickshire County Council. Such areas include the alignment of policy, procedure, systems, processes, equipment and best practice in departments such as Operational Support, Health & Safety, Technical Services, Training & Development, Prevention & Protection, Response.
- It is proposed that the Project Team and the Joint Project Board (comprising officers and Members of both authorities) maintain their connection and that the collaborative work continues with a focus on operational collaboration and strategic alliance light (i.e. where decision making is retained by each authority but there is formal agreement between the two organisations, which umbrellas a number of operational collaborations between workstreams and/or structural changes to departments).

### **Conclusion/Summary**

9. Following agreement by the full authority in December 2013, Project Arrow was commissioned to examine the feasibility and potential benefits of collaboration with Warwickshire FRS. The Project Team's final report, attached at Appendix 1, analyses a range of options and puts forward recommendations for consideration by both this Authority and Warwickshire County Council on 9 December 2014.
10. It is recommended that Members of both authorities support the progression of an operational collaboration and the continued exploration of greater collaboration between the two Fire and Rescue Services as detailed in the attached report.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Yes – Resource implications are anticipated if both Fire and Rescue Services move beyond an operational collaboration. Implications will be identified in a full business case and summarised in the report to the Joint Project Board in summer 2015
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	Yes – The project is seeking to identify efficiency savings through collaboration with another fire and rescue service to contribute to the overall savings required by the service.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	Yes – Low risks are anticipated if both Fire and Rescue Services move beyond an operational collaboration. This will be identified in a full business case and summarised in the report to the Joint Project Board in summer 2015
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Internal consultation with staff is on going and will be enhanced should the project continue to move forward.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	No requirement at this stage.

## Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Project Arrow Options Appraisal, October 2014

Background Papers:

- Fire Authority report “Collaboration with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service” and minutes – 11 December 2013
- Policy & Resources Committee report “Closer Working with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service” and minutes – 2 June 2014 and 19 November 2014

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