



HEREFORD & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive P Hayden MA, MSc, MIFireE
Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
2 Kings Court, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester, WR5 1JR
Tel 0845 12 24454 Fax 01905 357466 Web www.hwfire.org.uk

Mr Graeme Smith
County Fire Officer
Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service
Service Headquarters
Warwick Street
Royal Leamington Spa
CV32 5LH

Tel: 01905 368202
Fax: 01905 357392

1st December 2009

Dear Graeme,

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Plan – Response to Consultation

Further to our conversations and previous correspondence in relation to this matter, please find attached my final comments in relation to your IRMP proposals. As previously discussed, I have limited my comments to those issues that have the potential to impact Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Although these proposals were not shared or discussed with us prior to your entering into statutory public consultation, Officers working within our Policy, Planning and Performance team, led by my Deputy Chief Fire Officer Lucy Phillips, have been in contact with your staff during the consultation period to request the information necessary for us to undertake an effective evaluation of their potential impact on Hereford and Worcester. Unfortunately, whilst we have received some further clarification from your team, to date, they have not been able to provide the additional data or analysis my team has requested. Our evaluation of your proposals has therefore been based on the limited information and data you have made publicly available, and our consultation response must therefore be read with this caveat.

On the basis of the evidence you have provided, I have grave concerns over your proposals to reduce front line resources across Warwickshire. I appreciate that in designing your proposed operational response structure, you will have taken into account both the speed of response required to meet your published standards of cover, and the weight of response necessary to ensure that you have sufficient resources for a safe system of work for responders. You will also have taken into account the impact of larger scale, but routine, incidents within Warwickshire on your ability to maintain strategic cover across the County.

Although you have provided data in relation to the speed of attendance that you believe will be achieved should your IRMP proposals be accepted, we are concerned that you have not been able to provide data in relation to the impact of multiple minor incidents, or larger scale, but routine, incidents within Warwickshire on your ability to deliver safe systems of work and maintain strategic cover across the County. Our evaluation of your proposals suggests that the scale of reductions being proposed will leave you without sufficient resilience to deal with routine operations, resulting in a significant increase in requests for over the border mutual aid from neighbouring Authorities such as ourselves.



PREVENTION PROTECTION INTERVENTION
To make Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer from fire and other hazards and to improve community well-being.





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For sake of clarity, my concerns are not simply in relation to the reduction in resources you propose along our immediate border area, but that the reductions you propose across Warwickshire would adversely impact your ability to resource day-to-day activity. The practical impact of these reductions in your capacity would be to draw our front line resources into Warwickshire more frequently, and for longer periods of time, than they are at present. This would reduce the levels of emergency provision available for our own communities and increase the workload of our retained duty staff.

In addition to my concerns about our resources being drawn into Warwickshire more frequently in the future, I am concerned that your reduction in strategic capacity may reduce your ability to meet your current mutual aid obligations to us, provided through our historic mutual aid agreements. This, again, could have a detrimental impact on communities in Hereford and Worcester.

A further concern relates to the financial impact of these proposals on Hereford and Worcester. We have traditionally provided each other with mutual aid support on a "knock for knock" basis, with no monies being transferred between either Authority. However, should we move away from the current balanced position in cross border support to one which would see us effectively supplementing your resources on a regular basis, national funding systems will not fully compensate us for services provided, generating an additional cost to the Hereford & Worcester council tax payer.

You will appreciate that your proposals have generated a considerable amount of local publicity, resulting in a great deal of anxiety amongst stakeholders across Hereford and Worcester. In light of this anxiety and the above concerns, I will need to reassure my communities that any actions you take will not be allowed to adversely impact the services they receive or costs they are expected to pay through council tax. I will also need to reassure my staff that I will take whatever actions I believe to be necessary to ensure that their safety and welfare will be protected.

I am able to provide further details in relation to our concerns if that would be helpful, and would be happy to review our position should you be able to provide the additional data and analysis we have previously requested.

Yours sincerely,

P. Hayden
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE



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