

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

14. Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub

Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on the Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub project and to gain authorisation for public consultation.
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Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Authority approves the commencement of formal public consultation for the Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub project.

Introduction and Background

2. In March 2014, the Government made £75 million available to Fire and Rescue Authorities through a Fire Transformation Fund and invited bids for projects designed to ensure better and more efficient front line services for the public.
3. The bid assessment criteria made it clear that successful bids would most likely be those that encouraged greater collaboration with other emergency services and which also promoted asset/property transformation and other efficiencies delivering better value for money.
4. Following consultation with the Authority's political Group Leaders, two bids were prepared and formally signed off by the Chairman and Treasurer.
5. In October 2014, the Government announced that both bids had been successful, with the FRA to receive a total of £4.27 million from the Transformation Fund. The two projects are as follows:
 - a. Move the Fire Service Headquarters from its present location on the outskirts of Worcester to join West Mercia Police at their headquarters at Hindlip near Worcester;

Transformation Fund award: **£1.89 million** received
 - b. Create a new Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub which relocates the existing three fire stations in the Wyre Forest area into a new purpose-built, centrally located station;

Transformation Fund award: **£2.38 million** received.

Update on progress to date

6. On 19 November 2014, the Policy and Resources Committee authorised officers to carry out the necessary work to prepare detailed schemes and proposals for implementing both projects, including incurring professional fees where necessary. The Committee also noted that a further report would be submitted to the Fire Authority prior to undertaking formal public consultation or entering into any contractual arrangements for land purchase or building construction.
7. Since November 2014 officers have been preparing detailed schemes for both projects. In terms of the Hindlip project, an update was submitted to the Fire Authority on 18 February 2015. Since then negotiations with West Mercia Police and detailed planning design work are progressing well and will be reported separately to the Fire Authority as appropriate.

Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub project

8. With regard to the Wyre Forest project, the development of the scheme has made the following progress:
 - a. Officers are working closely with partner agencies (West Mercia Police, West Midlands Ambulance Service, Severn Area Rescue Association and the British Red Cross) to finalise their specific site requirements prior to identifying potential sites.
 - b. As the project potentially involves changes to how fire and emergency cover will be provided, an extensive formal public consultation programme will need to be carried out during 2015.
 - c. To assist with identifying a new site and assessing the implications, Operational Research in Health Ltd. (ORH) have been commissioned to undertake independent data analysis and validation of the operational impact associated with any potential changes to fire station locations and appliance deployment.
 - d. In addition, Opinion Research Services (ORS) have been commissioned to support officers in convening and facilitating 'Listening and Engagement Forums' with key stakeholders. ORS has a wealth of experience working with other fire authorities and public sector organisations on statutory public consultation and engagement.
 - e. The results of the Listening and Engagement Forums and the findings will inform the consultation programme.
9. On 15 May 2015, the Fire Authority received the £4.27 million grant from the Transformation Fund and was notified of the conditions attached for its lawful expenditure.

Financial context

10. Members will be aware of the scale of the financial issues facing the Authority. Over the coming years there is a growing gap between the budget needed to deliver the current range of services and what will be available. Actions taken to date to address this include savings from crewing changes at fire stations and the

removal of two fire engines as part of the Community Risk Management Plan 2014-2020, and further reductions in management, support staff and spending budgets.

11. While these actions have enabled the Fire Authority to set a budget for 2015-16 and effectively for 2016-17, the funding issues are likely to persist beyond then. The Treasurer estimates that a further £3.3 million savings will need to be found by 2019-2020. Plans to address this include the highly innovative 2020 Vision Programme, which Members will be aware of. Both Transformation Fund projects are part of this Programme and will contribute towards meeting the required savings and efficiencies.
12. Members should note that the Wyre Forest project requires further funding in addition to the Transformation Fund grant, and it is expected that a large proportion of this will be met from the sale of existing sites and from on-going revenue savings following the implementation of the project or from savings already accrued from past years' budgets. These costs and savings will be determined in the light of detailed analysis of the new site location and the consultation outcomes.

Consultation

13. In order to meet the required funding timetable and before a new site location can be selected, it is proposed that a full, formal public consultation be carried out. Following authority to consult, officers will prepare a consultation document based upon work carried out by ORH and in the light of a review of outcomes from the listening and engagement forums. The timetable for consultation is proposed as follows:
 - a. June 2015: Fire Authority approval to carry out public consultation.
 - b. July 2015: Commencement of a 12-week formal public consultation period.
 - c. October 2015: Completion of consultation period followed by analysis and write up of results.
 - d. November 2015: Preparation of report of findings and recommendations.
 - e. December 2015: Report to Fire Authority for decision on proposal.
14. A proposed consultation programme is being drawn up between officers and ORS, taking into account the need to carry out extensive direct consultation with the wider general public. Meetings with other appropriate groups and interested parties will be included in the programme, along with personnel at those fire stations most affected by the project. A proposed list of consultees is attached as Appendix 1 although this list cannot be considered to be definitive.
15. At the end of the consultation period an analysis of the results will be brought back to the Fire Authority for consideration. Subject to the Authority's comments and obviously approval, an implementation plan will then be prepared.

Conclusion/Summary

16. The Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub is a key project in the 2020 Vision Programme. Due to it potentially involving the relocation of three existing fire stations into a single, central hub and co-locating multiple partners, it is important to ensure the views of staff, stakeholders and the wider public are heard. The consultation programme will enable these views to be considered in drawing up the final project details for consideration by the Fire Authority in December 2015. Officers will ensure the consultation process and the implementation of the agreed course of action are carried out with the utmost sensitivity.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	<p>The project is designed to 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>If the project is found to be not viable and does not proceed, or if the bid funding is withdrawn for any reason, then under the funding terms and conditions any revenue costs already incurred will need to be absorbed from other areas of the Fire Authority budget.</p>
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	<p>The project is directly linked to delivering 'Our Strategy' (Resourcing the Future and Buildings and Infrastructure).</p>
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	<p>A Risk Management log is included within the project documentation.</p>
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	<p>Listening and Engagement forums for the Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub project have been held with key stakeholders. An extensive formal consultation programme will be carried out prior to implementing the project.</p>
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	<p>No, an Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out following Fire Authority's approval to proceed with formal consultation.</p>

Supporting Information

Background Information

Appendix 1: Consultation – list of consultees

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Consultation – list of consultees

The consultation on the Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub project will run for 12 weeks.

A wide range of stakeholders will be contacted during the consultation period in order for them to have a full appreciation of the proposal being put forward.

The consultation programme includes both internal consultation with members of staff at the Fire and Rescue Service, as well as external consultation with key groups and organisations. In addition, there will be wider publicity to raise awareness with members of the public. There will also be a series of briefings with key heads of organisations and members of the press.

External Consultation – wider public awareness	
	Press releases to be issued throughout consultation process.
	Social media campaign to be launched when consultation gets underway.
	Dedicated website page on www.hwfire.org.uk with all documents available. A visible banner on the home page of the website to direct people to the relevant page.
	Questionnaires to be handed out at public events undertaken by the Service during the consultation period.

External Consultation – key groups and organisations	
Direct email with links to the consultation document.	Other Fire and Rescue Services
	Voluntary, Third Sector and Interest Groups
	County, District, Town and Parish Councils
	Public Sector Organisations, including Police, Ambulance and NHS Trusts
	Housing Associations and Trusts
	Business Organisations

Internal Consultation	
All watches at affected fire stations will receive briefings from the Project Team and the Station Commander for each specific fire station.	
All Service Departments will be invited to attend briefing sessions to be held at appropriate locations.	
Direct email will be sent to all staff with links to relevant documents.	
Regular articles and reminders will be placed in the Service's weekly newsletter/bulletin.	
The Service Intranet will be regularly updated to help to encourage staff to respond to consultation.	
Representative Bodies will have direct briefings.	

Briefings	
One-to-one briefing by the Chief Fire Officer or a Principal Officer, to include:	Members of Parliament
	Chief Executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service
	Chief Constable of West Mercia Police
	Chief Executive Officer of Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce
	Members of the Press