

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

21ST MAY 2007

1. RESOURCING THE TECHNICAL RESCUE STATION

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Executive Committee approve the steps that have been taken to resource the Technical Rescue Station.
- 1.2 THAT the Executive Committee approve the establishment of three additional posts as detailed in paragraph 3.5.1.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to discharge a requirement made by the Authority in October 2005.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2005 the Authority took the decision to develop a Technical Rescue Station. The Technical Rescue Station concept is that the Service is able to better provide a range of specialist rescue services using staff whose sole responsibility is Technical Rescue.
- 3.2 The Technical Rescue Station would have responsibility for Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), Rope Rescue, Water Rescue and Major Rescue Unit services.
 - 3.2.1 USAR services have been provided by the Service since November 2006. This has been supported by staff working day shifts and providing retained cover at night. These staff are further supported by staff giving retained cover whilst working as operational firefighting staff. This method of providing the service has created significant issues relating to training and skills maintenance for retained staff.

- 3.2.2 Rope rescue services are presently provided by West Bromwich Community Fire Station. Following the transfer of responsibility for rope rescue to the Technical Rescue Station the time available for West Bromwich's staff to carry out community safety work and other activities would increase.
- 3.2.3 Water support services are presently provided by Willenhall, Perry Barr and Hay Mills Community Fire Stations. The proposal would remove the requirement for Willenhall and Hay Mills to provide water support services with a commensurate increase in time available for community safety work and other activities. The Technical Rescue Station's personnel would be able to provide a higher specification service and would present the Service with the opportunity to provide a water rescue service rather than a water support service.
- 3.2.4 Major rescue unit services are at present provided by West Bromwich and Bickenhill Community Fire Stations. Bickenhill would no longer be required to provide this service.
- 3.3 Changes at Bickenhill Community Fire Station would see a breathing apparatus main control unit relocated to Hay Mills Community Fire Station and a Foam Distribution Unit decommissioned. These changes and the change detailed in 3.2.4 would mean that Bickenhill Community Fire Station would no longer need to staff a Prime Mover.

- 3.3.1 The present staffing for Bickenhill Community Fire Stations is:

4	Watch Commanders
8	Crew Commanders
36	Firefighters
48	Total

Following the changes detailed in 3.2.4 and 3.3 the staffing requirement would be:

4	Watch Commanders
4	Crew Commanders
24	Firefighters

32 Total

- 3.4 The present staffing for USAR from July 2006 has been funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government. This provided for the following staff:

2	Watch Commanders
2	Crew Commanders
12	Firefighters
16	Total

- 3.4.1 The Technical Rescue Station, following implementation of this resourcing plan would be staffed full time throughout the 24 hour day. The sixteen posts released from Bickenhill Community Fire Station would all be transferred to the Technical Rescue Station and would continue to support the Service's emergency response to its communities. This move to using full time staff would allow us to provide high quality technical rescue services and to properly fulfil our commitments to provide a USAR service that complies with the criteria defined in the Government's New Dimensions Programme.

- 3.5 The Technical Rescue Station would have a total staff of:

4	Watch Commanders
4	Crew Commanders
24	Firefighters
1	USAR dog handler
1	Equipment Maintenance Officer
1	Administrative Assistant
35	Total

- 3.5.1 This requires an increase in the uniformed establishment of one firefighter post to act as USAR dog handler and 2 non-uniformed posts.

- 3.6 At present the Technical Rescue Station is sited at Solihull Community Fire Station. Following the completion of the building work approved by this Committee on 13th November 2006 the Technical Rescue Station would be moved to Bickenhill Community Fire Station.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is required and has been carried out. The initial Equality Impact Assessment did not raise issues which required a full Equality Impact Assessment to be completed.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

6. **TRADE UNION CONSULTATION**

Consultation with Trade Unions has taken place and will be maintained throughout the implementation process.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The annual salary costs of the proposed Technical Rescue Station, based on current rates of pay and including a 10% retainer fee for uniformed officers, would be as follows:

	£'000
1 dog handler	38
4 Watch Managers A	176
4 Crew Managers	167
24 Technicians	904
1 Equipment Maintenance Officer (Grade 11)*	29
1 Admin Assistant (Grade 7)*	19
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	<u>1,333</u>

*These grades shown are estimated and subject to job evaluation.

- 7.2 The funding source for the above would be as follows:

	£'000
Adjustments to Staffing at Bickenhill Community Fire Station:	
4 Watch Commander B to A	11
4 Crew Commanders	152
12 Firefighters	410
New Dimension Crew Funding	720
ARA Payments	41
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	<u>1,334</u>

Any advertising and recruitment expenses associated with the proposed staffing would need to be met from available 2006/2007 New Dimension Crew Funding.

- 7.3 The New Dimension Crew Funding in the above table is subject to Government review to establish how the ongoing funding arrangements are to be reflected, either in the form of Section 31 Grant or incorporated into the Annual Revenue Support Grant. This situation will need to be closely monitored to assess any impact upon the proposed funding arrangements.
- 7.4 The changes proposed would also result in a reduced requirement within the Vehicle Replacement Programme, due to the decommissioning of the Foam Distribution Unit. This would save annual maintenance costs of approximately £2K per annum and provide increased capacity within the Authority's available capital resources at the point when the asset would otherwise have needed replacement.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Demountable Fleet Review – 27th March 2007
Executive Committee Meeting – 13th November 2006
Executive Committee Meeting – 24th October 2005

F. J. E. SHEEHAN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER