

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2008**

1. **THE PROVISION OF TRAINING AT HEIGHT FACILITIES – DRILL TOWERS AND TRAINING BUILDINGS**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Committee note the contents of this report.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to update the Committee on the issue of training at height facilities.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Following an incident which resulted in an injury to a firefighter at Ladywood Community Fire Station in 2004, all training towers were taken out of use. Subsequent condition surveys of the towers revealed that remedial and upgrade works were required to bring the towers up to a safe standard.
- 3.2 A strategy, taking account of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRM), was developed which involved the refurbishment of fourteen strategically located drill tower/training building facilities and following advice from structural consultants the demolition of eight others.
- 3.3 Following the demolition and refurbishment phases in 2005/06 and 2006/07, seven training towers and six cold fire training buildings in addition to those at the Brigade Training Centre were available for use. Appendix 1 provides locations of these facilities.

- 3.4 In December 2007 a further condition survey was conducted into the feasibility of bringing back into use the existing towers located at the following fire station locations:

Aldridge, Fallings Park, Foleshill, Northfield, Solihull, Tipton and West Bromwich.

Outline costs to refurbish the above towers is circa £250K.

- 3.5 Further consultation was also undertaken with the Training Implementation Group (TIG), operational firefighters and Training Centre staff who collectively identified a need for towers to be replaced with training facilities that provide for training under the Working at Height Regulations and that were representative of modern day constructions. In addition, there was a desire to create realistic working at height scenarios to more closely replicate the type of structures operational personnel may have to climb and work on at fires and other incidents.
- 3.6 In addition to the above, TIG also identified the need to develop an integrated approach to realistic practical training provision within the Brigade based on the needs of IRM and the geographical disposition of service premises within the Fire Authority area. The additional areas identified for development included Road Traffic Collision Training pads as well as strategically located hot and cold fire training facilities. The latter being identified as a key element to maintaining firefighter competence in fighting fires inside buildings against the backdrop of reducing incidents in this specific area. Work in relation to these issues is currently being completed and will be reported back to the Authority in due course.
- 3.7 A training at height facility is now in early planning stages, with details of the facility set out at Appendix 2. Subject to satisfactory site condition surveys and planning authority approval it is proposed to pilot the new structure at one of the fire station sites below:

Solihull, Fallings Park, West Bromwich, Walsall or Sutton Coldfield

- 3.8 This new training at height facility would provide for safe ladder pitching, working on roofs and access through doors and windows. Its open mesh design should also eradicate an ongoing problem at existing sites of feral pigeon infestations. The structures would be constructed in galvanised steel with the potential to be relocated to other sites should the need arise. The indicative cost of each facility is circa £100K.
- 3.9 Subject to the outcome of the evaluation of the pilot training at height facility the provision of further similar facilities at the remainder of the sites identified at paragraph 3.7 above would need to be considered when reviewing the Authority's capital programme.

#### 4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out, as the matters contained in this report do not relate to a policy change.

#### 5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Planning approval will need to be sought from the respective Local Authority's in which the identified Fire Stations at which the training at height facility is proposed to be located before the pilot can proceed.

#### 6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Funding of £252K was created during the Authority's 2007/08 closedown of accounts process which would be used to fund the proposed pilot training at height facility. The provision of further training at height facilities and/or the refurbishment of existing training towers will need to be considered for inclusion within the capital programme as part of the Authority's 2009/10 to 2011/12 budget setting process.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Technical Services Files

F. J. E. SHEEHAN  
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

## APPENDIX 1

### TRAINING FACILITIES AS AT SEPTEMBER 2008

Towers Demolished	Towers On The Run	Towers Off the Run	Training Buildings On The Run
Aston	Training Centre	Aldridge	Dudley
Brierley Hill	Bournbrook	Bickenhill	Handsworth
Cradley Heath	Hay Mills	Billesley	Wolverhampton
Erdington	Perry Barr	Bilston	Woodgate Valley
Highgate	Stourbridge	Binley	Oldbury
Kings Norton	Walsall	Bloxwich	Coventry
Sedgley	Coventry	Canley	
Sheldon	Ward End	Fallings Park	
		Foleshill	
		Halesowen	
		Ladywood	
		Northfield	
		Oldbury	
		Smethwick	
		Solihull	
		Sutton Coldfield	
		Tettenhall	
		Tipton	
		Wednesbury	
		West Bromwich	
		Willenhall	

## APPENDIX 2

## DESIGN FOR NEW TRAINING AT HEIGHT FACILITY

