

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**28 NOVEMBER 2011**

1. **BUILDING UPON SUCCESS PROGRAMME, CRADLEY HEATH AND HALESOWEN PROJECT**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority notes the results of the public consultation contained in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 1.2 THAT the Authority approves the proposal to have a single fire appliance serving the Cradley Heath and Halesowen areas.
- 1.3 THAT the Authority approves as an interim measure that this single appliance will be located at the existing Cradley Heath Fire Station with effect from March 2012, whilst options for a new facility are developed.
- 1.4 THAT the Authority notes, and provides feedback to the local communities on the options for the future development of a new facility in the optimum area as identified through risk modelling and this includes the Old Hill/Cradley Heath area, as detailed in Appendices 5 and 6 of this report.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 This report is submitted to inform the Authority of the outcomes of the recent public consultation process and seek Authority approval for a single fire appliance to cover the area of Cradley Heath and Halesowen, located at the existing Cradley Heath Fire Station whilst options for a new facility are developed.
- 2.2 This report seeks Members views on the options for a new facility to inform the subsequent work that will be completed in the development of a preferred proposal which will be submitted to the Authority for approval.

### 3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 West Midlands Fire Service's funding has been reduced over the next two years by £7.677m in 2011/12 and £2.487m in 2012/13. This is the largest percentage point reduction in funding when compared to other English Fire and Rescue Authorities. West Midlands Fire Service is developing a four year plan designed to maximise efficiency with less resources. These plans include the merger of Fire Stations in Cradley Heath and Halesowen into a new single site.
- 3.2 In 2008 the Authority conducted a consultation exercise on proposals regarding fire station locations. Following the consultation the Authority approved the revised proposals on 9/02/09, which included the combination of Cradley Heath and Halesowen Fire Stations and the location of two 24 hour fire appliances at a new facility.
- 3.3 At the Executive Committee of 28/03/11, Members approved a period of consultation on the proposal to modify the decision taken in 2009. This new proposal was rather than two fire appliances there would be a single fire appliance at the new facility in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area. The consultation period has been completed. As a consequence, it is still proposed to have a single fire appliance at an optimum location in the Cradley Heath area. Details of the consultation are contained in Appendix 1.
- 3.4 A review of incident data was made available to the public in a presentation (Appendix 2). This shows that the Authority's response standards in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area can largely be met with one fire appliance, and the Authority's performance against its response standards across the West Midlands Fire Service area can be maintained.
- 3.5 The overall view of those that responded to the consultation was that they wanted to retain two fire appliances in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area. It should be noted that many of the respondents commented on the closure of Halesowen Fire Station, a decision which the Authority had already taken in 2009.

- 3.6 The main objections to the removal of the second appliance were based on the ability of the Authority to provide an acceptable attendance standard to the Halesowen area. The review of incident data, attendance times and appliance activity shows that the Authority can meet its obligations by having a single fire appliance in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area.
- 3.8 The latest data shows that the fire appliance at Halesowen only attends 49% of all incidents in the Halesowen area. Incidents in the Halesowen area are also attended by Cradley Heath (27%), Woodgate Valley (10%), Oldbury (6%), Stourbridge (4%), Northfield and Brierley Hill also attend a small percentage of incidents in Halesowen.
- 3.9 Data also shows that the fire appliance at Halesowen has one of the lowest utility rates of all the 24 hour fire appliances in the Authority area. The utility figure for Halesowen is 4% and Cradley Heath is 6% in line with the average. These low utility figures mean that there is sufficient excess capacity to reduce the two fire appliances to one.
- 3.10 Between 01/09/10 and 31/08/11, Halesowen attended 446 incidents including false alarms, special service calls and small fires (242 were in Halesowen). Cradley Heath attended 904 incidents including false alarms, special service calls and small fires (526 were in Cradley Heath). Cradley Heath attended 132 incidents in the Halesowen area.
- 3.11 The low number of incidents attended reinforces the fact that the emergency response utility of the Halesowen and Cradley Heath fire appliances is significantly low enough to support the proposal to reduce from two to one fire appliance in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen areas.
- 3.12 In 2008 work was commissioned to support the Estates Strategy which identified the optimum location for a number of the Authority's assets. In identifying the optimum location historical incident data; the local risk profile and incident response times were considered. From this analysis a 'heat map' (Appendix 4) was produced identifying the optimum location for a single fire station in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area. This map shows that the current location of Halesowen is not in the optimum area.

- 3.13 Based on the evidence and analysis it is clear that a single fire appliance can respond effectively to incidents in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area and that it should be located in the Cradley Heath area.
- 3.14 New facilities must meet the needs of a more diverse workforce with buildings that facilitate our interaction with the public and enable the Service to work more effectively with other agencies.
- 3.15 A range of options have been considered for a new facility. Summary details of these options are set out in Appendices 5 and 6. Members should note that for all the options further work is required to present the Authority with full details of a final proposal.

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

In accordance with legislation a full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and did not identify any significant adverse impact upon the protected characteristic groups. By removing the excess capacity and providing a new facility, all members of the community including those in the protected characteristic groups will benefit from this decision. The full EIA is included as Appendix 3 to this report.

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

- 5.1 The employment effects of the proposal will be considered and consulted upon with affected employees and their representatives. This would be undertaken in line with employment legislation and agreed internal Standing Orders.
- 5.2 All transactions, including land purchases, planning permissions, lease agreements and building works, relating to these proposals will be conducted within the governance framework of the Authority

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

- 6.1 The proposal to locate a single fire appliance (rather than two fire appliances) at a single location would result in annual salary related savings of approximately £1.2 million. In addition, there would be a reduction in building related running costs (gas, electricity, rates, etc.) of approximately £40k by operating from a single site.

- 6.2 The Property Asset Management Plan approved at the Authority meeting on 14 February 2011, included planned maintenance requirements at Cradley Heath and Halesowen Fire Stations of £635k over the next five years. By doing this by March 2012 a significant proportion of this estimated expenditure will be avoided.
- 6.3 Depending on the preferred option the Authority may be able to generate a capital receipt from the sale of its existing sites in the Cradley Heath and Halesowen area.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Service Plan Proposals Following 12 Weeks' Public Consultation, Fire and Rescue Authority Meeting 9 February 2009 – Agenda Item 5.

Minute 3/09 refers

Property Asset management Plan, Fire and Rescue Authority Meeting 14 February 2011 – Agenda Item 10.

Minute 9/11 refers

Executive Committee Report 28 March 2011, Update on 2009 Service Plan Proposals.

Minute 13/11 refers

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