

REPORT OF THE HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY TO THE CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES

Meetings Held on 16 December 2004 and 16 February 2005

APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. The constituent authorities will be aware of the retirement of Mr David O'Dwyer in March 2005. The Authority appointed me as new Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive in his place and I took up post on 18 April. This report brings the constituent authorities up to date with the last two meetings of the Authority at which Mr O'Dwyer was the Authority's principal advisor. I look forward to keeping the constituent authorities informed of the Authority's work and building on the excellent work of my predecessor.

OPERATIONAL STATISTICS

2. During the period 1 October 2004 to 31 March 2005 the Service attended some 4,299 incidents (which includes all types of fire, False Alarms and Special Service incidents). More statistics and details of notable incidents have been reported to the Authority and can be found on the Service's website (www.hwfire.org.uk).

PRECEPT 2005/06

3. The Authority has set a revenue budget for 2005/2006 of £27.289 million (an increase of 4.55%). This means a Band D Council Tax rate of £59.05 per annum compared with a Band D Council Tax rate for 2004/2005 of £56.48 per annum
4. This will permit the Authority to make some progress towards reinstating part of the programme it had originally wished to pursue in 2004/2005, before the reductions made as a result of the Government's decision to cap the Authority's budget. The Authority's proposed budget for 2004/2005, prior to capping, designed to achieve service improvements and make progress at the pace the Authority considered appropriate, would have meant a Band D Council tax rate of £60.21 per annum.

FIRE AND RESCUE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK 2005/2006

5. The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2005/06 has been published setting out the Government's ambitious targets to drive down accidental fire deaths and deliberate fires and how Government, working in partnership with Fire and Rescue Authorities and their staff, can achieve these aims.
6. It incorporates a number of key modernisation issues, including Best Value for Fire and Rescue Authorities, Best Value Performance Indicators, the National Workforce Development Strategy, the National Procurement Strategy, and, most recently, new pension arrangements for Firefighters.
7. The Framework has already been used to inform the corporate priorities for the Service's Business Plan 2005/2006 and Members of the Authority will be fully briefed upon it.

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

8. As previously reported the Authority is required to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The purpose of the Plan is to provide a strategic overview of all aspects of service delivery and determine current and future policy. It is intended to make the service more responsive to locally identified needs and better able to deliver community safety.
9. The Authority has approved the second annual action plan designed to deliver the IRMP's objectives.

BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN PRIORITIES

10. The Authority has approved a vision statement and service objectives and priorities, which will inform the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/2006. The vision statement is: "To make Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer from fire and other hazards and to improve community well-being".

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY

11. The Authority has noted progress on a wide range of Community Fire Safety (CFS) initiatives.

Education Activity

12. A new Key Stage 3 pack has been launched in schools targeted towards Year 8 pupils. The programme was piloted successfully in September 2004 and is proving to be an extremely popular extension of the Service's prevention activity in schools. Such is the pilot's success in Worcestershire schools that Herefordshire Council is also now supporting the introduction of the pack. Demand is also high from other Fire and Rescue Services as the Service is leading nationally in this area.
13. Work is almost complete on the Youth Strategy. A great deal of research was undertaken in order to inform future provision for young people and emerging outcomes include a range of ground-breaking initiatives. These provide opportunities for partnership working and focus on agendas for social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal as well as the extension of the Service's current provision for education.
14. In line with the Government's plans to extend the school day and provide further provision of child care for parents, the service is piloting the provision of an 'After School Club'. This new approach to 'Out of School Hours learning' will provide extensive opportunities for partnership working and will be targeted at schools currently suffering a range of problems. Again, this idea has been extremely well received by Head teachers, staff and parents and will engage local communities, providing safety information from a range of agencies in an attractive and informative way. The initial pilot began in January 2005 at Leominster Junior School.
15. The 'Juvenile Arsonists Group' Project devised by the Service in partnership with Worcestershire County Council's Social Services Family Support Unit, provides intervention for young people who have demonstrated fire setting behaviour. Demand in this area is very high and again, the Service is leading nationally in this intervention programme.

Outreach

Mela 8-10 October 2004

16. The Service had a stand at the Mela, an Asian cultural event attracting 30,000 visitors to the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The stand was sponsored by FireWorks, a project to improve the employment of ethnic minorities and women in

the Fire and Rescue Service jointly funded by the European Social Fund and Anglia Polytechnic University and supported by East and West Midland Brigades working in partnership under the 'Fire Services of the Midlands' brand.

17. The Service's presence promoted recruitment and Community Fire Safety activities in an attractive and meaningful way, making use of the Service's marketing, outreach and recruitment skills.

DIWALI

18. A successful working partnership has been formed with Leicester Fire and Rescue Service to help promote safety issues in relation to the festival of Diwali in the West and East Midlands regions. The National Community Fire Safety Centre (NCFSC) has commissioned advertising for various targeted media and produced materials to support local campaigns.
19. Following a request from the NCFSC an audio-visual presentation produced by the Service's Marketing Officer was used at the national launch of the Diwali Fire Safety Awareness Campaign in London.

FIRE PROTECTION MATTERS

Licensing Act 2003

20. Common inspection practices and protocols between the Fire and Rescue Service and other stakeholders are being determined in response to the Licensing Act. The number of premises who may apply for variations to their Licence is unknown at present. There are some 2,400 premises in the two counties that may be affected (Herefordshire 700, Worcestershire 1700).

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order

21. This legislation is intended to rationalise the existing system, which has some 70 separate references to Fire Safety enforcement in various pieces of legislation. It is intended that procedures will be developed to a nationally agreed standard. This will be of benefit to the business community as a whole, providing consistency in approach and enforcement. National guidance documents are also under development, which will be aimed at specific classes of premises, for example, shops, factories and licensed premises.

Single Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Inspection

22. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires Fire Authorities to provide advice and assistance to local businesses in relation to fire prevention and fire safety. Fire Authorities already undertake audits under the Fire Precautions Act, and in many instances educational work will be undertaken alongside its enforcement role. The Service will work with occupiers/owners in the business community to offer advice over a broad range of topics, as well as legislative enforcement, using the Service's recently developed Single Inspection process.
23. The Single Inspection process contains seven core elements: legislative fire safety, firefighter safety, reduction of unwanted fire signals, arson prevention, business continuity management, environmental protection, and community fire safety. It is wholly compatible with the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Fire and Rescue Service Framework and the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to improving community safety.

Business Continuity

24. A fact sheet on business continuity management, to protect the well-being of businesses and ensure continuity in the face of unforeseen or difficult circumstances, has been developed by the Service to help raise the profile of this important matter within the Business Community. It has been developed in conjunction with specialist industry providers, such as the Business Continuity Forum and with the approval of the Emergency Planning Officers of the constituent authorities. This will link in with various elements of contingency management, at both National and Local level of contingency planning.
25. The Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) is considering requiring Local Authorities to "have regard" to work undertaken by other local responders, (Fire and Rescue Services plus other 999 services). The Service has been approached by the CCS to use the Service's Single Inspection process as an example of how the Fire and Rescue Service can assist in raising awareness on the issue of business continuity. The CCS recognises that the Service is working closely with other enforcement agencies and bodies providing business continuity advice and is exploring opportunities for partnership working.

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS

26. As previously reported, the three year Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) entered into by each of the Constituent Authorities both contain an objective to be delivered in partnership with the Service: to achieve a reduction in the incidence of accidental fires and fire related deaths and injuries. The Agreements' three-year life cycle concluded in March 2005 with the successful delivery of the agreed stretch targets. Work on a second LPSA bid is underway.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

27. Progress continues to be made on meeting the objectives outlined in the Authority's equality and diversity strategy.

PENSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIREFIGHTERS

28. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting on changes to the existing pension scheme for firefighters and proposals for a new scheme for new firefighters. The proposed arrangements represent a fundamental change. The initial indication is that whilst these changes are expected to result in lower pension costs to the Authority eventually, there will be increased costs over the next 30 years.

CORPORATE ISSUES

New Headquarters

29. As announced in a recent press release Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is to move to a new administrative headquarters at Atlanta House, off Newtown Road, Worcester. The move will bring together functions currently delivered from a number of sites, significantly improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service. The move is expected to be completed by summer 2005.

Audit Opinion on 2003/04 Statutory Financial Statements

30. The Authority has received the opinion of the Authority's external auditors PriceWaterhouseCoopers on the various statutory financial statements they are required to submit to the Authority. The Auditors have also confirmed that they have issued an unqualified audit opinion on the 2003/2004 accounts.

Financial Regulations

31. The Authority has approved revised and updated Financial Regulations in line with good practice. It has also adopted Regulations to govern contracts for Regional projects led by the Regional Management Board.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

32. The Authority has been inspected under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework. The outcome of the inspection is expected to be published by August 2005.

Code of Corporate Governance

33. The Authority has revised and updated its Code of Corporate Governance.

Risk Management

34. The previous report to the constituent authorities advised that the Authority had approved a Risk Management Strategy as part of its corporate governance arrangements. A strategic risk register has now been approved as a further part of the process of strengthening risk management.

Freedom of Information Act

35. The Authority has put arrangements in place to ensure compliance with the Act.

**PAUL HAYDEN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE
HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
APRIL 2005**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agenda papers of the meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 16 December 2004 and 16 February 2005