

# REPORT OF THE HEREFORD & WORCESTER COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY TO THE CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES

Meetings Held on 16 June 2003, 2 September 2003 and 25 September 2003.

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## OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. During the period 1 April 2003 to 30 September 2003 the Brigade attended a total of 5,909 incidents (this includes all types of Fire, All 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 Brigade's website ([www.hwfire.org.uk](http://www.hwfire.org.uk))

## INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

2. The Deputy Prime Minister has stated that there should be a programme of reform and modernisation of the framework within which the fire service operates. The White Paper *Our Fire and Rescue Service* sets out the Government's vision for the future and strategy for achieving that vision in England and Wales. The White Paper describes fundamental changes to the way in which the fire service is structured and run.

3. The summary of the White Paper states that

*"The Government's prevention strategy rests on three main strands:*

- *designing fire safety into our homes, offices and other buildings through the Building Regulations;*
- *maintaining a safe environment, through fire safety and other legislation, which sets out employers' and commercial property owners' responsibilities; and*
- *promoting community fire safety to encourage safe behaviour and to reduce the incidence of arson.*

*The fire service has had a key role in this strategy, but its focus until now has been on fire suppression. Traditionally, the fire service has organised its staffing levels and the location of fire fighters, stations and appliances to match nationally prescribed fire cover standards, originally set in the 1930s..... We will change that focus. In future, the fire and rescue service will plan for, and respond to, emergencies on the basis of risk assessment and management. These new requirements will be brought together in the Integrated Risk Management Plans that each fire authority will be required to produce. They will consult their local communities on these plans, and the fire and rescue service will work with the other emergency services to implement them."*

4. The purpose of an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is to provide a strategic overview of all aspects of service delivery in order to determine their relevance to the Fire Service and as a consequence enable the determination of current and future fire policy.
5. It is intended that integrated risk management will lead to improved community safety and more productive use of Fire Service resources by:
  - a. reducing the number of fires and other emergency incidents occurring;

- b. reducing loss of life in fires and other emergency incidents;
  - c. reducing the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergencies;
  - d. reducing the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents;
  - e. safeguarding the environment and heritage (both built and natural); and
  - f. providing communities with value for money.
6. The primary objective of the initiative is to make the service more responsive to locally identified needs and better able to deliver community safety. It should not be seen as a simple revision of fire cover standards and operational response, but as a holistic and corporate approach to improving community safety generally.
7. The starting point in integrated risk management planning must be the preventative measures that will reduce the incidence of fires and other emergency incidents, save lives, and reduce injuries and loss (personal, societal, commercial, economic, environmental and heritage). This will require a move from the traditional reliance on the 'formulaic approach' using recommended standards set centrally, to locally assessed and determined standards.
8. Introducing this more flexible, locally determined risk-based approach will lead to:
  - a. more effective targeting of resources that will improve community safety, and protective and prevention measures; and
  - b. more dynamic, flexible and appropriate levels of emergency response to incidents, effectively targeted to save lives and reduce injuries.
9. It is recognised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OPDM) that the Combined Fire Authority will be taking on new responsibilities for making judgements about the risks within its area, the balance between prevention and intervention, and determining response standards and resource allocation. The Authority will need to set local standards to take the place of existing centrally recommended standards of fire cover, which will be withdrawn in due course. The work will be fundamental to the delivery of modernisation in the Fire Service and will be an indispensable element of a flexible, locally determined and risk-based approach.
10. The Authority approved a draft Plan for consultation in September. This identifies existing and potential risks to the community. It evaluates the effectiveness of current arrangements and identifies opportunities for improvement. Where improvements can be made it identifies changes to resource requirements in order to deliver planned improvements and includes arrangements for implementation, monitoring, audit and review.
11. The Authority has sought to consult widely on the draft Plan. Consultation has included the following elements: a public opinion survey sent to stakeholders in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire area, five focus groups; City/Town Centre events at Hereford, Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye, Leominster, Bromyard, Malvern, Worcester, Tenbury, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Droitwich and Evesham; distribution of the Plan to a wide range of external stakeholders; use of the Brigade Website and Intranet; face-to-face meetings with all work based units; distribution of the Plan to all fire stations and departments; Brigade seminars and a series of newsletters.
12. The consultation will close on Wednesday 26 November 2003. A report will then be prepared for consideration at the Authority's meeting in December.

## **LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS**

13. 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 Brigade: to achieve a reduction in the incidence of accidental fire and fire related deaths. The Authority has been advised that the Brigade has managed to sustain further reductions in accidental dwelling fires and associated injuries and deaths. It remains on target to better the performance required by the end of the LPSAs in April 2005. This represents significant progress towards reducing avoidable fires and injuries, and tangible evidence that the Brigade's community fire safety strategies are able to make the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer. To support both the LPSA and the Integrated Risk Management Plan strategy, the Brigade will look to expand its community fire safety outreach to the vulnerable, targeting those most at risk. Increased capacity for more preventative activities will occur through a number of Brigade-wide and local initiatives. With approximately eighteen months remaining of the three-year LPSA life cycle performance targets have been set for this year that aim to maintain the downward trend achieved to date and to better the LPSA targets if possible. It remains important to note, however, that success in achieving the target specified in the Agreements is measured in the final year.

## **COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY**

14. The Authority has noted progress on a wide range of Community fire safety initiatives which as mentioned in the paragraph above are important to the LPSAs and the Integrated Risk Management Plan.

### **Partnership with the National Community Fire Safety Centre**

15. The Brigade is continuing to work in partnership with the National Community Fire Safety Centre in preparation for the BBC Good Food Show at the National Exhibition Centre in November 2003. Following last year's successful pilot, the National Centre has recognised the importance of the Brigade's presence and have agreed to part-fund this year's event. This will allow the Brigade to project kitchen safety messages from a much larger exhibition stand with more visual impact.
16. This event is an excellent example of collaborative working to maximise Community Fire Safety provision, with both West Midlands and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Services joining the Brigade to help plan the event.

### **Quick Strikes**

17. The Brigade has introduced a new procedure for carrying out 'Quick Strike' campaigns following fires. It uses the opportunity to raise fire safety awareness amongst people who may not have been involved in the original fire but who may be at risk, and is achieved through the distribution of information leaflets. It also provides an opportunity for people who may have witnessed a deliberate/arson fire to pass information to the Police via Crimestoppers.

### **Redditch and Bromsgrove Car Amnesty**

18. In a bid to reduce the number of deliberate car fires in the North East Worcestershire area, the Brigade worked with the Police and the two District Councils in Redditch and Bromsgrove to run another vehicle amnesty campaign offering members of the public the opportunity to dispose of any 'end-of-life' cars free of charge. The campaign commenced with a week of advertising to coincide with the Redditch 'Keep Safe Week' during October and was followed by a week of removing reported unwanted vehicles. This is being supported by the Police carrying out a period of

enforcement on vehicle issues.

### **Schools' Fire Safety Education Programme**

19. Since autumn 2001, the Brigade's schools' fire safety education programme has reached an impressive number of children; comprising 175 visits to key stage 1 classes, 261 visits to key stage 2 classes and 23 visits to key stage 3 classes. By July 2003, over 17,000 children had received the programme, which is a considerable achievement.
20. Although coverage has been adequate in town and city schools for the targeted key stage 2 classes, further provision had been beyond capacity. To address the needs for a wider delivery of the programme, the Brigade introduced two non-uniformed specialist education assistant posts in May 2003, funded through the Local Public Service Agreements and working during term-time only.
21. The expansion of the programme across both counties through the use of these dedicated specialists represents a major increase in the delivery of fire safety education to communities previously beyond reach.
22. In order to meet the needs of Key Stage 3 pupils, a new education programme has been designed that will be delivered by teachers of the personal, social and health education curriculum. The Brigade has identified this as the most far reaching and effective means of delivery, not only from a staffing level but also from the degree of specialism required when dealing with pupils of this age. It is essential that the key messages in the 11 to 15 year old age group are delivered as part of the curriculum and in accordance with the new guidelines for Citizenship. The programme is targeted towards malicious calls and secondary fires and was delivered to all Secondary schools during September 2003.

### **Increased Education Outreach**

23. Whilst schools' programmes are an essential part of the Brigade's work with young people, it is recognised that the Brigade can't reach all sections of the community through work in the school environment.
24. A new project was piloted in the Summer with 'Worcester Action for Youth', an organisation providing activities and advice to children and young people in socially disadvantaged areas of Worcester. By providing fire safety training to the group leaders, key messages will be cascaded to a wide range of young people and their parents. The aim is to work towards safer school holidays and reduce the risk of hoax calls and secondary fires during that period.

### **Juvenile Fire Setters**

25. A recent rise in the number of Juvenile Firesetters has led to the introduction of a new programme believed to be the first of its kind in the country. Following a number of referrals from social services, an eight-week group programme based at Redditch Fire Station was jointly developed. This was another initial pilot scheme with the potential to be extended across the two counties in due course.

### **Special Educational Needs**

26. Following a series of meetings with head teachers from some of the special schools, a new education programme for children with special needs is being developed that will be introduced in the near future.

## **Bonfire Night**

27. Staff worked with the West Midlands Fire Service to develop a bonfire night safety package, distributed to schools during the Autumn of 2003 for delivery by schoolteachers.

## **RED CROSS VICTIM SUPPORT VEHICLE**

28. Following a request from the British Red Cross, officers are progressing arrangements for the provision of a Red Cross Victim Support Vehicle at Bewdley Fire Station. This will enable the Red Cross to expand their provision of support services following a fire, flood or similar incident to Worcestershire, Herefordshire, South Shropshire and South Staffordshire.
29. The service is delivered by specially trained British Red Cross volunteers who use an adapted vehicle to assist them in providing practical and emotional support to the victims of the incident, including temporary shelter, clothing, child care and referral to other organisations. The costs to the Fire Authority are minimal; the partnership role mainly involving the provision of garage and office facilities, and mobilising arrangements.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

30. The equality and diversity agenda has continued to move ahead, with the development of the draft Equality and Diversity Strategy. Phase one of the strategy's implementation is currently underway. The strategy will take account of current proposals for future working, including the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the Integrated Personal Development System.
31. The Authority's Race Equality Scheme has been published. An Executive Summary of the scheme has also been produced. This will be available in local community languages, and accessible formats, including Braille, large print and on tape. The Race Equality Scheme itself will be available in these formats upon request.

## **PRECEPTING**

32. The Local Government Act 2003 contains provision for changing the status of the Fire Authorities from levying Authorities to precepting Authorities. The Act provides that this provision will come into force on such day as the Secretary of State may by order appoint. The Authority has noted that there are a number of implementation issues to be considered in a very tight timescale if, as expected, the power is to be conferred on the Authority for 2004/2005. A particularly important consideration will be to decide upon a prudent level of balances to be accumulated, and how they are to be generated and maintained.

## **MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME**

33. In compliance with the relevant Regulations the Authority has approved the introduction of an allowances scheme for Members. The Authority has been mindful that there is no budgetary provision in 2003/04 for a comprehensive scheme of allowances. It has therefore agreed that no change will be made to the existing allowances scheme until 1 April 2004.

## **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2002/2003**

34. The Authority has approved the Statement of Accounts for 2002/03. The Authority's auditors PriceWaterhouseCoopers have issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts.

## **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

35. The Authority has approved the Performance Plan for 2003/2004. Performance in 2002/2003 against the 24 national performance indicators applicable to the Brigade showed that against 7 the Brigade was performing in the top 25% of all Brigades and in a further twelve was performing above the national average. Performance was below average in only four areas, with information on one indicator unavailable.

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS**

36. The Authority has modified its Code of Governance at the request of its Standards Committee to reflect the role in monitoring the Code which the Standards Committee considers it should undertake to discharge its responsibilities effectively. It has been advised that no concerns have been expressed about the operation of the Authority's Code of Conduct, adopted in 2002, which incorporates all the mandatory provisions of the statutory Model Code of Conduct.
37. The Standards Committee has discussed a work programme for itself. In doing so it has been mindful of the wish not to duplicate the work of the constituent authorities and to ensure that its work is proportionate. It has recognised the potential changes associated with the Authority becoming a precepting authority and the possible need to acknowledge this in its work in due course
38. The Committee intends to take the opportunity to familiarise itself with the procedures for a hearing under the Local Authority (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) Regulations 2003 and believes that this could most usefully be done in partnership with the Standards Committees of the constituent authorities. In arranging a meeting with the Standards Committees of the constituent authorities it will also be established whether there were any other common issues which it would be prudent to address.

**DAVID O'DWYER**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE**  
**HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**  
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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Agenda papers of the meeting of the Combined Fire Authority held on 16 June 2003, 2 September, 2003 and 25 September, 2003.