

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

Meetings Held on 18 December 2003, 18 February 2004 and 19 March, 2004.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. During the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 the Brigade attended a total of approximately 1,875 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).

PRECEPTING

2. The constituent authorities were advised in November 2003 that it was expected that the Fire Authority would be given the power to set its own precept for 2004/2005. At that time it was highlighted that a particularly important consideration would be to decide upon a prudent level of balances to be accumulated and how they were to be generated and maintained.
3. The power to precept was subsequently conferred upon the Authority as expected. A revenue budget of £26.798 million was set. This incorporated the creation of balances of £1.2 million to cover risk associated with Firefighter pensions, job assimilation and operational contingencies. Based on the declared tax-bases provided by the Billing Authorities a precept, equivalent to £60.21 at Band D was required to fund the budget. This represents around 5% of the total amount payable by a Band D council tax payer.
4. The Brigade remains one of the most economical in the Country. There are 24 national performance indicators applicable to the Brigade. The most recent data available shows the Brigade to be performing in the top 25% of all Brigades against 7 indicators, performing above the national average on 12 and below average on 4, with data unavailable nationally on one indicator.

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

5. It has previously been reported that, as part of the Government's programme to reform and modernise the Fire Service, the Fire Authority was required to prepare an Integrated Risk Management Plan. The purpose of this Plan was 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.
6. The Authority approved its Plan in December 2003. It has been published and circulated to a wide range of Stakeholders and may be viewed on the Brigade's website.
7. The Government stated that the primary objective of the initiative was to make the Fire Service more responsive to locally identified needs and better able to deliver community safety. It was not to be seen as a simple revision of fire cover standards and operational response, but as an holistic and corporate approach to improving community safety generally.

8. A review of fire cover with the introduction, development and application of the new Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model is a major project. In due course, it will produce outcomes that will impact upon most aspects of the Brigade's service delivery provision and much of its supporting infrastructure, such as strategies for property, IT and training.
9. The national standards of fire cover ceased to apply with effect from 1 April 2004. Pending completion of its review the Authority has agreed that it will maintain the previous standards until it is in a position to set new local response standards and allocate resources on a risk assessed basis based upon FSEC outcomes.

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES BILL

10. The Authority has noted the main elements of the Fire and Rescue Services Bill which will drive forward the Government's Modernisation Agenda. This was set out in the recent White Paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service" which was the Government's response to the Independent Review of the Fire Service by Professor Sir George Bain.
11. The aim of the Bill, as stated in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) press release, is to "deliver a modern and efficient service designed to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. It will place greater emphasis on prevention work by creating a new duty for Fire and Rescue Authorities to promote fire safety". The main elements of the Bill are set out below:
 - **Safer Communities:** a new duty is to be placed on all Fire and Rescue Authorities to promote Fire Safety. This will underpin the shift towards a more prevention based approach, thereby saving more lives by reducing the numbers of fires occurring in the first place.
 - **Modern Legislative Framework:** existing legislation will be replaced with a new statutory framework that recognises the Fire and Rescue Service's existing role in responding to a range of incidents, for example road traffic accidents, alongside its traditional firefighting role. The Bill will also create a new duty to respond to other emergencies, for example serious flooding and measures to plan for and respond to the new terrorist threat.
 - **National Framework:** the Bill will give statutory force to the Fire and Rescue National Framework, referred to in a later section of this report, and place a duty on the Secretary of State to keep it up to date and report against it.
 - **The Regional Approach:** it proposes to strengthen and streamline existing powers to combine Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure that, should voluntary regional management arrangements prove unable to deliver functions such as planning for serious emergencies, joint control rooms, procurement and training will be organised on a regional basis.
 - **Civil Resilience:** it will underpin the Fire and Rescue Service contribution to national resilience, through new powers, to direct Fire and Rescue Authorities during particular specific emergencies, to ensure a co-ordinated and strategic response and that resources are focussed where they are needed most.
 - **Reinforcement Schemes:** It will update existing powers to allow Fire and Rescue Authorities to enter into reinforcement schemes with other Authorities, to provide mutual assistance in the discharge of their new core duties under the Bill.
 - **Partnership:** the Fire and Rescue Authority's powers to delegate functions will be extended to cover their new powers and duties, to enable partnership with others, for example in the promotion of Fire Safety. The Bill will retain the present

position whereby an Authority can only delegate its duty for fighting fires to another Authority or others who employ Firefighters.

- **Equipment:** it provides powers for the Secretary of State to procure equipment and services for Fire and Rescue Authorities and to direct them on the use of their equipment, to ensure uniformity of approach across the Service – crucial to national resilience – or in the interest of public safety.
- **Charging:** it maintains the existing ability for Fire and Rescue Authorities to charge for particular services as occurs elsewhere in Local Government. The Bill will continue to exclude the possibility of charging for Firefighting.
- **Negotiating Bodies:** it includes reserve powers to set up new bodies to negotiate pay and conditions of service. Effective negotiating machinery is critical to modernisation. A review of the current National Joint Council (NJC) arrangements is underway but the powers in the Bill could be used to establish new statutory bodies if the review does not result in satisfactory new arrangements. The Bill will also allow Ministers to issue guidance to negotiating bodies, whether or not the bodies are statutory.
- **Engaging Stakeholders:** The Bill will abolish the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) which has become too cumbersome and complex and incapable of delivering swift, meaningful change. More effective and flexible stakeholder advisory and consultative forums are already in place to ensure that advice from producers and users of the Service informs future direction. The Secretary of State will be required to consult on all orders made under the Bill for which the CFBAC acted as statutory consultee.
- **Pensions:** the Bill will bring forward existing pension provisions while providing new powers to create new, multiple pension schemes.
- **Devolution:** the Bill will devolve responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales. Responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland and Northern Ireland is already a devolved matter. The Scottish Executive is consulting on proposals to change the legal framework for the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland.

DRAFT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES NATIONAL FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

12. As referred to above, the Government has launched the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework (FRSNF), which sets out the Government's expectations for the Service and what actions Fire and Rescue Authorities should undertake.
13. In the accompanying letter to the document, the Minister of State for Local and Regional Government, the Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford MP, states, "*The Framework is based on a partnership approach. It makes clear the support that the government will provide to Fire and Rescue Authorities, including giving the flexibility they need to meet the specific requirements of their local communities*".
14. The FRSNF document contains a wide range of information, including details regarding the following matters:-
 - **Risk Management and Prevention:** accidental fire deaths in the home to be reduced by 20%. A planned programme of Community Fire Safety work (with partners) will be developed as part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Premises inspection programmes will be prioritised by "risk to life".
 - **The Regional Approach:** Regional Management Boards were required to be in place by 1st April 2004 with clear aims, delegated powers and plans for Regional

Resilience, Specialist Services such as Fire Investigation, Personnel, Training, Procurement and Fire Control. A national strategy for procurement is also to be implemented regionally.

- **Effective Response:** hoax calls and unwanted signals from automatic fire alarms are to be reduced. The benefits of implementing First and/or Co-responder schemes are to be explored. Resources such as aerial appliances, rope rescue teams, water carriers, road traffic equipment and senior officers are to be shared. Major emergency response plans are to be developed, national incident command management systems employed and recognised good practice adopted. Fire Investigation specialist capacity is to be pooled to provide an effective regional capability.
- **Resilience and New Dimension:** there is to be ODPM funding for the procurement of a national radio system (*Firelink*) to increase resilience and interoperability between emergency services. The Secretary of State is being given power to extend duties of Fire & Rescue Authorities to deal with new threats such as terrorist attacks.
- **Fire and Rescue Staff:** the Human Resources strategy must reflect the needs set out in the IRMP, including use of flexible shift patterns. A regional Human Resource strategy should be drawn up covering recruitment, training, health & safety, discipline, equality and occupational health. New disciplinary procedures are to be introduced based on ACAS best practice guidance.
- **Workforce Development:** when implementing the Integrated Personal Development System, nationally developed standards for assessing candidate potential are to be used. Systems are to be put in place and managers trained to ensure consistency of workplace assessments and their recording. Training is to be delivered in line with the national workforce development strategy.
- **Finance:** opportunities for efficiency improvements are to be utilised consistent with duties under Best Value and the Government's objectives to reduce accidental deaths from fire in the home and deliberate fires.
- **Effective Performance Management:** the Audit Commission is to introduce an inspection regime based on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) system. Best Value will remain an important tool for reviewing/managing performance against key objectives. *Implementing e-Government* (IEG) strategies are to be used to meet key objectives of the Brigade, Government White Paper and National Framework.
- **Research:** Fire & Rescue Authorities should draw on relevant research, avoid duplication and share information. Fire & Rescue Authorities should participate in review processes, complete ODPM returns and help ODPM establish a fully electronic data collection system.

CHARGING FOR SPECIAL SERVICES

15. As referred to above the Fire and Rescue Services Bill contains a provision for the Secretary of State to regulate the services for which Fire and Rescue Authorities could charge.
16. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has issued a consultation document on charging by Fire and Rescue Authorities.
17. The Authority has noted the complexities related to the introduction of charges. It has considered a number of specific issues including charging for fire safety advice, road traffic collisions, animal rescues and repeat false alarms from automated systems.

18. A response has been submitted on the basis that the Authority is minded to accept the principle of charging for some elements of non-statutory services in respect of fire safety consultancy services and Automatic Fire Alarms. It is not, however, minded to support the case for charging in the case of Road Traffic Collisions and animal rescues.
19. The Authority has recognised that as the cost of attending incidents varies, depending, for example, on the time involved and whether they are attended by whole-time or part-time staff there is a need to ensure that charges are equitable. It has suggested that an agreed national framework would be helpful. It has also requested that the operation of a charging scheme should not be to the Authority's financial detriment, taking particular note of the costs of administering any scheme.

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARDS

20. The Fire and Rescue Services Bill also refers to the Government's regional approach. Fire Authorities were required to establish Regional Management Boards (RMBs) before 1 April 2004 in the currently defined English Regions. For the West Midlands, this comprises the Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority, Shropshire Combined Fire Authority, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Combined Fire Authority, Warwickshire County Council and the West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority. The RMBs are required to take responsibility for delivering, in accordance with national policies, the following six strategic functions:
 - Resilience to emergencies especially potentially chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attacks;
 - Specialist or common services where appropriate such as fire investigation;
 - Regional control rooms;
 - Regional level procurement or procurement to national standards;
 - Regional training strategies and delivery;
 - Introducing regional personnel management and human resources management functions.
21. Authorities were warned that failure to comply with this requirement would mean the abolition of the existing Fire Authorities and their replacement with a single combined Fire Authority for the entire region.
22. The Authority has given the necessary approvals and a Regional Management Board has been established within the required timescale for the West Midlands Region.

THEMATIC REVIEW 2003 – THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

23. The Authority has noted a Thematic Review published by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate setting out reasons why the Fire Service needed to work with young people, a number of possible programmes and details of the Brigade's current activities.
24. Fire Service work with young people falls into two broad areas: schemes or programmes aimed mainly at fire prevention education and specialised schemes or programmes which have defined, wider social aims. Six main reasons were identified why the service needed to work with young people
 - **Fire prevention life skills:** teaching children and young people about fire to enable them to understand the dangers and deal with the risks.

- **Fire prevention influence:** children and young people can have great influence on those around them whether family, friends or others.
- **Fire Service empathy:** children and young people should have the opportunity to understand and support the role and aims of the Fire Service. As 'young citizens' and members of individual communities, they need to be aware of the impact and consequences of anti-social activities such as malicious false alarms and fire setting.
- **Role model influence:** the Fire Service is recognised by all from the youngest children to older people. It has a responsibility to use its resources, skills and influence to set an example to young people and encourage standards of good citizenship.
- **Representative workforce:** developing positive and informed links between the Fire Service and young people will help to ensure that the service has a workforce which is representative of the community that it serves.
- **Staff development:** working with young people can develop Fire Service personnel through improved community focus, tolerance and communication.

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY

25. The Authority has noted progress on a wide range of community fire safety initiatives.

BBC Good Food Show

26. Following a successful pilot at this event in November 2002, the National Community Fire Safety Centre (NCFSC) in partnership with the Brigade, part-funded a large stand at the BBC Good Food Show 2003 to promote Kitchen Fire Safety in the Home.
27. This was a joint venture between the National Community Fire Safety Centre, West Midlands Fire Service and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service with Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade leading the project, especially regarding appropriate Fire Safety marketing and promotion. Many of the ideas, concepts and resources are now being utilised within the Brigade to enhance promotions in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Research gathered at the show will be analysed and shared with the NCFSC to help plan future safety initiatives and national campaigns.

National Campaign Update - Push The Button –Not Your Luck!!

28. The Brigade supported the two-phase autumn national campaign focusing on smoke alarm maintenance, run in September and December 2003, involving hard-hitting TV adverts prompting the public to check their smoke alarms. Phase two of the national campaign involved staff distributing approximately 10 000 leaflets at a wide range of venues, talks and visits. This campaign provides added prominence to the Brigade's Home Fire Safety Check scheme that provides year round coverage of smoke alarm maintenance issues in dwellings.

National No Smoking Week and careless smoking campaign

29. In preparation for National No Smoking Week 2004, the Brigade's CFS department approached the NHS with a view to co-ordinating a joint campaign in Hereford and Worcester for the benefit of both partners. The campaign focused both on the health benefits of stopping smoking and also the reduction of fire risk within the home. In Worcestershire, this issue has progressed with the formation of the 'Smoke Free Worcestershire Alliance', a multi agency partnership that has affiliation across a wide

spectrum of countywide public and private sector organisations. Nationally, smoking accounts for around a third of all fire death causes. The formation of groups such as this therefore represents an important opportunity to widen the target audience for safety messages. The Brigade will actively contribute to this alliance with the express aim of promoting health improvement and fire safety in the home.

30. The National Community Fire Safety Campaign (NCFSC) has also recently run a high profile campaign including radio and television advertising. This was differentiated from the current round of 'health' related smoking campaigns by avoiding the direct health issues and concentrating on the risks of fire.

Schools Fire Safety Education Programme

31. A significant amount of work has continued through the Brigade's preventative education programmes with a number of new initiatives having been implemented. Overall, this has enabled the Brigade to increase greatly the numbers of young people who receive safety messages. The education assistants who deliver the schools programme to rural areas have enabled the Brigade to nearly double its coverage. It is estimated that for a full academic year of delivery of the schools programme, in excess of 18,000 young people will receive safety advice.
32. The Brigade is currently finalising production of a new Key Stage 3 education package aimed at 11 to 14 year olds. The new package will extend existing Key Stage 3 resources through the provision of a teacher-led classroom programme targeting hoax calls and secondary fires. A courtroom scenario will focus young people's attention on causes and consequences of such fires and will fit within the context of the Personal Social Health Education curriculum. This package will also contribute towards tackling the wider issue of anti-social behaviour. A pilot will be run in the early summer in preparation for a full launch in the new education year in September 2004.
33. In January, the Brigade also participated in a national survey of current educational activity and programmes conducted on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). This survey will evaluate the range and effectiveness of educational materials in use across Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales. This work will allow the ODPM to identify best practice in terms of specific resources that can then be disseminated nationally. Overall the Brigade was seen to be well advanced in its approach to preventative education work. The full impact of this research will be published later in the year.

Caribbean Community Event

34. Redditch Fire Station hosted a Community Fire Safety (CFS) event for the local Caribbean Youth and Drama Club (which caters for children from a variety of ages and cultural backgrounds). Twenty-three children attended the event with their parents and the local media. All children received an Educational Pack in one of the Brigade's 'homework brief cases'. The parents also took home a promotional oven glove, kitchen notepad and relevant Fire Safety literature.
35. The Brigade's Community Development Officer originally met with the Redditch Caribbean Youth and Drama Club leaders, at their stand at the Redditch African Caribbean Fun Day. Links were established and an educational visit to Redditch Fire Station was organised by CFS with the support of the duty watch and the Droitwich Young Firefighters Association.

Malvern Heartstart Group

36. On Saturday 7 February 2004 trained Firefighters were available at Malvern Fire Station, together with representatives from Malvern's Heartstart Group to provide

life-support training and a talk on Community Fire Safety issues. The sessions which covered cardiac pulmonary resuscitation and what to do if someone has a heart attack or is choking or bleeding were held at the Fire Station in Malvern Link. The event was successful and well supported with about 40 people attending from the local community.

FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT FOR CHERNOBYL

37. The Authority has approved the donation of a redundant fire appliance and equipment to the Chernobyl 2000 Charity in order to provide basic firefighting facilities to the area.
38. Whilst the terrible events of Chernobyl seem to have faded from the memories of many, the effects on the communities in the Chernobyl area are life threatening and long-term. The lack of basic firefighting equipment has resulted in a number of serious fires which have included the complete loss of an orphanage and geriatric hospital.
39. The appliance which is 20 years old and a small quantity of redundant time expired equipment are estimated to be worth approximately £2,000. The costs associated with shipping and training firefighting staff will be covered by the Chernobyl 2000 Charity.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

40. A self-assessment of Equality and Diversity Practice across the organisation has now been completed. This has been a major piece of work, which has seen each operational, procedural and policy area examined for its impact on equality. The process has also led to the identification of Equality and Diversity Champions within departments, who have assisted this process.
41. This self-assessment is currently being reviewed and will result in local and strategic objectives, which will inform the Equality and Diversity Strategy, due to be published shortly. Guidance was produced and distributed to staff and members of the Authority on the new employment regulations on Religion and Belief and Sexual Orientation, which came into force in December 2003.
42. The Authority has also received a report on progress on implementing female facilities at all relevant locations. Of the 28 locations this involves, work has been completed at 22, and is due to commence on 3 more. Interim short-term measures are to be implemented at two fire stations and a detailed options appraisal is underway at one station.

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS

43. 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 Agreements have a three-year life cycle to March 2005. The Authority continues to make excellent progress in reducing accidental dwelling fires and associated injuries through frontline prevention initiatives such as Home Fire Safety Checks and the Schools Fire Safety Education Programme.
44. As reported previously, although performance to date has been extremely encouraging, success in LPSA terms is measured by performance during the final year of the agreements. Whilst current performance indicates that the Authority can achieve the 'stretched' targets, work must continue to align strategies and prevention resources to those aspects most at risk in the final year to achieve success overall.

PROPERTY ISSUES

45. The Authority has approved an Asset Management Plan to promote the delivery of the Brigade's corporate objectives and to align the role of its capital assets in support of the modernisation of the Fire Service.
46. In pursuance of these objectives the Authority has approved the purchase and development of land for the provision of a new Brigade Headquarters. This will be combined with a new workshops facility and will be a key priority over the next two years. Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate identified the need for a new headquarters as a high priority for action in its report on the Brigade in April 2002.

Best Value Reviews

47. Best Value Reviews of Administration and Vehicle Fleet Management have been completed. The Authority has adopted the findings of both reviews and Improvement Plans will be implemented accordingly.

AUDITORS MANAGEMENT LETTER

48. The Authority's Auditors PriceWaterhouse Coopers have presented their management letter to the Authority. They issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts for 2002/2003 and on the Authority's Best Value Performance Plan.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

49. The Authority's Standards Committee has reported on a range of issues. The Authority has adopted a description of the role of the Monitoring Officer and a protocol for Member/Officer relations. The Committee has also found that there is compliance with those aspects of the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance which are its responsibility to monitor and this finding will be fed into the annual review of the Code.

FIRE STATION OPEN DAYS

50. Fire Station open days offer the opportunity for Members and local communities to meet their Firefighters, many of whom live and work within these same communities. The events allow the Brigade to present Community Fire Safety information by demonstrations and other visual displays, and other operational information relating to the services provided. The events vary from Station to Station and each commits considerable time and effort to making public access fun and informative. Dates are listed below.

Station	Dates	Times
Ross on Wye	Saturday 8 May 2004	1400 Hours
Whitchurch	Sunday 23 May 2004	1400 Hours
Pershore	Monday 31 May 2004	1100 to 1600 Hours
Bewdley	Saturday 5 June 2004	1100 TO 1600 HOURS
Redditch	Saturday 5 June 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Droitwich	Saturday 19 June 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Fownhope	Sunday 20 June 2004	1200 Hours

Station	Dates	Times
Kingsland	Sunday 20 June 2004	1400 HOURS With Village Show
Ledbury	Saturday 26 June 2004	1100 Hours
Upton upon Severn	Saturday 26 June 2004	1300 to 1600 Hours
Tenbury Wells	Saturday 26 June 2004	1800 to 2100 Hours
Bromyard	Sunday 4 July 2004	1400 Hours
Worcester	Saturday 10 July 2004	1100 to 1600 Hours
Pebworth	Saturday 17 July 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Broadway	Saturday 31 July 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Bromsgrove	Saturday 31 July 2004	1100 to 1500 Hours
Peterchurch	Saturday 7 August 2004	1300 to 1600 Hours
Evesham	Saturday 14 August 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Leominster	Saturday 14 August 2004	1400 Hours
Kidderminster	Saturday 21 August 2004	1200 to 1600 Hours
Stourport on Severn	Saturday 21 August 2004	1200 to 1600 hours
Kington	Sunday 22 August 2004	1030 Hours
Hereford	Saturday 28 August 2004	1000 to 1600 Hours
Eardisley	Monday 30 August 2004	1400 HOURS WITH VILLAGE SHOW
Malvern	Saturday 4 September 2004	1000 to 1500 Hours
Leintwardine	Sunday 5 September 2004	1400 Hours
Ewyas Harold	Friday 10 September 2004	1830 Hours Major Refurbishment – Station Re-Opening

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agenda papers of the meeting of the Combined Fire Authority held on 18 December 2003, 18 February, 2004 and 19 March, 2004.