

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY TO HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL 3 FEBRUARY 2013

Financial Prospects 2013/14

A report was considered that provided Members with a further update on developments on the funding position for 2013/14 beyond.

Members' attention was drawn to the predicted budget gap. Members were advised that officers had identified savings that amounted to approximately £1 million but were cautioned that the goalposts had moved in that the Authority had adopted a planning assumption of a 3.5% precept increase, however the Government had announced a grant equal to 1% of precept if an authority were to freeze the precept again and the threshold for increase over and above what a referendum was required was now set at 2%. Members were advised that the change in precept increase would have a significant impact for the Authority as the precept represented two thirds of the Authority's funding. Furthermore, it was noted that in order to cover the costs of a referendum and deliver an additional useable resource of £0.5 million, a precept increase of 6.2% would be required.

Members had been invited to attend a Budget Seminar on 16 January 2013 when options to bridge the budget gap would be discussed.

The report was noted.

Equality Scheme Update and Equality Objectives

A report was considered that informed Members of progress with regard to the Service's existing Equality Scheme Action Plan and sought approval for the publication of future organisational equality objectives.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Equality Act 2010 placed a legal obligation on all public bodies to publish equality objectives at least every four years and to publish information demonstrating compliance with the equality duty at least annually.

The Authority noted the progress with the existing Equality Scheme Action Plan and approved equality objectives for publication in 2013.

Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

The Chief Fire Officer presented his report and highlighted the following:

- The total number of incidents had reduced but this could primarily be attributed to the weather (for example the number of outdoor fires had decreased due to the amount of rain that had fallen);
- Special Services calls had increased by 24.3% and was attributable to flooding due to the weather;
- A total of 56 health and safety related incidents had occurred this during the quarter but only 2 of these had the potential to be 'serious' incidents;

- Staff had not been enamoured with the grey colour of their uniform. These comments had been noted and changes had been made within the current costs of the contract.

Items of Interest

Herefordshire Medals and Awards Ceremony

Firefighters and staff from Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service were honoured at a Medals and Awards Ceremony held on Friday 23 November at Hereford Town Hall.

During the evening medals for Long Service and Good Conduct were presented by the Countess of Darnley, Lord-Lieutenant of Herefordshire, with commendations being presented by Chief Fire Officer Mark Yates and Long Service Awards being presented by Councillor Derek W Prodger, MBE, Chairman of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority. The High Sheriff of Herefordshire, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Thwaites, MBE, also attended the ceremony to present the High Sheriff's Award to the Community Safety Volunteer of the Year. Station Commander Neil Pigott from Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service acted as Master of Ceremonies.

Operational Assurance Audit (Op A)

As part of a voluntary process facilitated by the Local Government Association, the Service has recently undertaken a peer review operational audit.

Between 5 and 8 November the Service hosted a multi-disciplined peer review team that looked at areas of operational performance and specific areas such as operational training, HR, Procurement and Risk Information. The spirit of the assessment was to provide rigour and challenge and to act as a critical friend.

The assessment was extensive involving 44 meetings and 188 staff and Members giving the peer review team a diverse audience group and a good basis on which to base their judgements.

Paul Raymond, the Chief Fire Officer of Shropshire and team leader presented the team's provisional findings on the last day of their visit and early indications are that the Service is well led, motivated and has some areas of notable practice. A final report outlining all findings from the visit will be analysed and presented to the Audit Committee.

Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)

The Service is developing a new risk management plan. Formally known as the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), it will be suggested that a new name be adopted; the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which more readily reflects the emphasis of the document and the desired target audience.

The document will span a seven year period between 2013-2020 giving the Authority an opportunity to articulate its broad vision of how services will be delivered and what challenges the Service will face going into the future.

Recently officers of the Service conducted several risk planning days inviting all staff and Members to contribute to the development of the new CRMP. This involved staff discussing many areas such as the social and environmental impacts that we might experience, through to the political and legal challenges that the Service might face.

The sessions have been positively received and have acted as an excellent engagement mechanism for staff to have their say.

Thermal Image Cameras (TIC)

The Service has recently begun the purchase of new Thermal Image Cameras. Feedback from operational crews has indicated thermal image cameras greatly enhance their ability to deal with fires in compartments and as such are recognised as an essential item of operational equipment.

Until now provision across the Service has been limited to selected appliances. In response to the feedback from crews and in order to enhance firefighter safety and operational effectiveness, the new programme will allow for one TIC to be provided to the majority of front line appliances and in all cases one per station.

The roll out of the cameras will start in December 2012 and will be completed by the end of January 2013.

Cable Entanglement

Incidents have occurred nationally involving firefighters becoming entangled within electricity and other cables whilst tackling compartment fires with potential serious consequences. The Service has moved to provide equipment to deal with this type of scenario and has carried out trials locally and with regional partners to determine the correct equipment provision.

By the end of January 2013, crews entering compartment fires wearing breathing apparatus will be provided with cable cutters and rescue knives. In addition, a further set of heavy duty cable cutters will be provided to all breathing apparatus emergency teams. This equipment will fill a gap in existing provision and demonstrates the Service's commitment to learn from national incidents and whilst it will not prevent entanglement, it will ensure that crews have the best capability to free themselves should it happen.

Flood Incidents

Following a period of intense rain which started in the afternoon of Saturday 24 November, the Service received more than 160 calls in the 48 hour period from 24 November to 26

November. Eighty of these were to flood-related incidents. The majority of these calls were taken from 10.30 pm to 03.00 am on Saturday night/Sunday morning with Evesham, Hereford, Ross on Wye and Worcester being particularly badly affected; mostly involving either motorists stranded in their vehicles in flood water or residents with flood water in their properties.

Fire crews and Water First Responders helped rescue occupants of vehicles stranded in flood water across the two counties and also over the border in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire.

Fire Crews and Water First Responders rescued 50 people including the rescue of 15 residents in Kempsey, Worcestershire, at 05.00 am on 25 November, after the water rose so quickly that they became trapped in their houses. Two people were evacuated from their property in Bevere, Worcester and taken to safety by one of the Service's water rescue boats. One of the most serious incidents occurred at Coughton in Warwickshire when specialist crews from Evesham rescued three people trapped in a car that had been washed down stream whilst attempting to drive through a swollen ford. There was little doubt that the lives of the three elderly individuals were in grave danger and images from this rescue have appeared in many national media outlets.

Fire Control operators also received 53 calls where they gave advice and the attendance of a crew was not required. In addition to this they also dealt with a significant number of other non-flood related incidents such as road traffic collisions and fires.

The Service has repeated its warning for motorists to take extreme care and to heed any road closure or flood warning signs.

Brigadier Peter Jones CBE
Vice-Chairman

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any person wishing to seek further information on this report should contact: Corporate Support on 01905 368241. Further information on the Fire and Rescue Authority and the Fire and Rescue Service can also be found on the Internet at (www.hwfire.org.uk).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None