

**REPORT OF THE HEREFORD & WORCESTER
FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
TO THE CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES**
Meetings Held on 13 June 2005 and 23 September 2005.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. During the period 1 April 2005 to 30 September 2005 the Service attended a total of 4,885 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 Service's website (www.hwfire.org.uk).

CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS

2. The Chief Fire Officer has reported to the Authority on his first impressions of the organisation. These were formed following a series of visits and discussions undertaken with the aim of meeting as many members of staff as he could to discuss issues affecting the Service and gain a feel for the organisation.
3. His findings were that the Service had much to be proud of and was undertaking a number of cutting edge initiatives. Whilst challenges lay ahead foundation stones in place included great people proud of the job they did, great frontline kit and the conclusion, supported by current statistics and public satisfaction levels, that a great service was being provided.
4. He explained that these initial findings would now be analysed. Whilst it had already been possible to address some practical issues identified, through efficiencies within existing budgets, other matters would be considered through the existing business planning processes.

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

5. In July 2005 the Audit Commission published the result of its assessment of Fire Services in England under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. This placed Services in five categories: excellent, good, fair, weak and poor.
6. The Authority was rated in the "good" category. Of the 47 Services assessed only 2 were rated excellent, with 20 rated good, and 25 in the other categories. Only five authorities achieved a higher "raw score" than Hereford & Worcester.
7. The Authority has welcomed this positive result and noted the Chief Fire Officer's intention to continue to strive toward excellence.

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

8. The Constituent Authorities have previously been advised of the requirement under the Fire and Rescue National Framework that all Fire and Rescue Services must produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and associated annual action plans. 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. Plans must undergo a full public consultation process for twelve

weeks before being adopted by the Authority.

9. The Authority's first IRMP was approved in December 2003 for the period 2004/2005. Many of the original objectives have either been completed or become statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and are now core activities for the Service. Those not yet completed are ongoing and contained within the Annual Action Plan.
10. The Authority has now approved a draft Plan for consultation covering the period 2006-09.
11. The main themes of the proposals in the draft Plan are:
 - Strengthen capacity to improve community safety and reduce risk;
 - Ensure that operational resources are best aligned to areas of greatest risk and need;
 - Realign management resources in order to improve support to frontline services.
 - Update incident command structures and arrangements to assess operational performance;
 - Provide improved support to Fire Stations in rural areas and those Firefighters who work the retained duty system;
 - Prepare for anticipated changes to fire safety legislation and enforcement, principally the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order; and
 - Ensure that Fire Stations are appropriately located and have the necessary facilities to provide an efficient, effective and economic service in compliance with statutory duties.
12. The draft Plan contains five new objectives in support of these proposals which include:
 - Changing the crewing arrangements for the second fire appliances at Kidderminster and Redditch (increasing the number of wholetime Firefighters at Kidderminster and Redditch Fire Stations during daytime hours thereby providing a faster response to fires and other emergencies and increasing capacity to deliver community safety programmes);
 - Relocating a number of Fire Stations within the Service area using the national Fire Service Emergency Cover model to help identify the most appropriate sites. (It is planned to relocate and build new Fire Stations, in the following Towns: Bromsgrove, Hereford, Pebworth, Redditch, Worcester (2 sites), Droitwich and Malvern);
 - Reducing the number of staff conditioned to the flexible duty system;
 - Improving the management and support to Retained Stations and rural areas; and
 - Improving capacity to deliver fire safety in support of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.
13. The consultation period runs until 12th December 2005. Copies of the draft Plan are available on the Authority's website (www.hwfire.org.uk) or upon request to Service Headquarters (2 Kings Court, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester WR5 1JR (Tel 0845 12 24454). A series of consultation events will also be held across the two Counties.

REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL CENTRE

14. In 2004 the Government initiated a project as part of its modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service to replace the existing 46 local Fire Service control rooms across the Country with 9 regional control centres by the end of 2009.
15. The Authority was informed of the Government's announcement in August 2005 that the Regional Fire Control for the West Midlands was to be located in Wolverhampton, with the expectation that a new Centre would be operational by 2008-09.
16. Government expectations are that the regional fire control project will deliver an improved service at local level as well as when dealing with major or widespread incidents. As with any major project there are a number of risks and these are being addressed by a national project team.
17. However, the Authority has been advised that there are also a number of significant local risks for the Authority in the short to medium term. These include the maintenance of existing control and communications provision; the continued ability to deliver locally determined and locally accountable services; the costs during the project phase in retaining key staff, supporting existing ageing systems, regional project work and the eventual contributions to the running costs of the regional control and the expected operating costs of the replacement radio system; and the implications for the Authority's medium to long term planning in terms of service delivery, ICT provision, property and finance given that much of the detail of the fire control project is still awaited.
18. The Authority has been assured that work is being undertaken at local level to manage these risks, which were not unique to the Authority, and that teams at local, regional and national level were working to ensure that the project was successful. It has noted that managing the risk will nevertheless be complex and time consuming, posing a significant additional burden for the Authority.
19. The Authority has authorised the Chief Fire Officer to write to the ODPM expressing concerns about the significant local risks which had been identified as facing the Authority and seeking the ODPM's constructive engagement in reducing these risks. The Authority will also receive regular reports as the project progresses.

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE

20. The national New Dimension Programme was designed to provide the Fire and Rescue Service with a national capability to respond to major emergencies. One part of the programme includes the development of a national Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability. Each USAR unit consists of four large containers and a van for canine transport. The containers will carry a range of equipment for heavy lifting, shoring, lighting, cutting and drilling.
21. The Authority was one of 16 Fire and Rescue Authorities approached to take provision of USAR facilities largely based upon its geographical location but also due to the Authority's perceived ability to deliver the service.
22. The Authority has been informed of the staffing and financial arrangements associated with the project and that it will not have an adverse impact on the Service. It has, therefore, accepted the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) request to take receipt of a Unit.

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES ACT 2004

23. Following the fuel crisis and the severe flooding in Autumn/Winter 2000, the Deputy Prime Minister announced a review of emergency planning arrangements. The review concluded that existing legislation no longer provided an adequate framework for modern civil protection efforts and that new legislation was needed.
24. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 will deliver a single framework for civil protection in the United Kingdom to meet the challenges of the 21st century and is in two parts: local arrangements for civil protection (Part 1) and emergency powers (Part 2). The overall objective is to modernise outdated legislation.
25. Part 1 of the Act establishes a new statutory framework for civil protection at the local level. This sets out clear expectations and responsibilities for front line (Category 1) responders at the local level (local authorities, emergency services, national health service bodies and the Environment Agency to ensure that they are prepared to deal effectively with the full range of emergencies. Part 2 of the Act allows the making of special temporary legislation to deal with the most serious of emergencies.
26. The Authority has been advised of the steps the Service has taken to ensure compliance with the Act.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING MAJOR INCIDENTS

27. In the light of the bombings in London in the summer the Service has reviewed practices and procedures for dealing with potential terrorist events and major incidents. Particular attention has been paid to communication and command structures for dealing with major incidents, and the practical and support arrangements required to deploy resources from Hereford & Worcester in support of a major incident elsewhere in the Country. This work included reviewing the arrangements for receiving and handling security information with partners in West Mercia Constabulary.
28. A bomb scare in Birmingham City Centre in July necessitated the evacuation of over 20,000 people. Although the incident proved to be a false alarm and no resources were eventually deployed from Hereford & Worcester, the advantages of having improved command and communication links with colleagues across the region was clearly demonstrated. Lessons learned are to be considered by the Regional Resilience Forum.

THE MANAGEMENT OF MAJOR FLOODING EVENTS

29. Increasingly frequent devastating flood events, both in the UK and around the world, have raised a number of issues for Emergency Services. In Herefordshire and Worcestershire the natural geography places many of communities at risk from significant flooding events making it an important issue for the Service.
30. The Chief Fire Officer has been extensively involved in this area of work, and was recently invited to address a national conference, outlining progress being made within the UK to manage incidents of this type. Other speakers came from North Carolina in the United States, sharing the lessons they had learnt from managing the consequences of widespread flooding following hurricanes.
31. There is a growing international interest in how major flooding events can be managed, both to save lives and to mitigate the long-term consequences for the communities affected. The subject will be raised at this year's national Fire Conference in Manchester and the Chief Fire Officer has been invited to chair the session. His American colleagues will also be addressing the conference, and whilst visiting the UK, will be coming to Hereford & Worcester to evaluate the Service's

practices and procedures with a view to establishing best practice guidelines.

32. A local seminar was held at Service Headquarters on 31 October 2005, providing an informative insight in to the risks posed by major flooding events, and identifying current best practice for dealing with them. The event facilitated information sharing with colleagues from Emergency Services, Health and Local Government who are designated Category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

33. The Service has recently signed a Local Area Agreement with the Environment Agency that will lead to a greater understanding and synergy at operational incidents when working together. The Agreement formalises the respective roles and expectations of those attending incidents that pose a threat to the environment and ensures safe working practices are implemented at a very early stage. It contains information sharing expectations, roles and responsibilities, anticipated attendance times and contact details as well as charging mechanisms and protocols for instances where environmental protection is required beyond a Fire Service emergency incident.
34. The Environment Agency has previously supplied two Environmental Protection Units, based at Stourport-on-Severn and Evesham, and environmental Grab Packs for all front line appliances to prevent or mitigate the environmental impact of many incident types. This Local Area Agreement further cements the positive and proactive relationship that exists between the Service and the Environment Agency.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

35. The Authority has noted progress on a wide range of Community Safety initiatives.

'Dying To Drive'

36. The initial pilot of the new road safety initiative 'Dying to Drive' was held at Bishop Perowne School, Worcester in July. This programme, led strategically by the Service, is designed to highlight a range of road safety issues in a hard-hitting format in which pupils watch a mock road traffic collision. The scene is deliberately graphic as pupils watch passengers cut from a car. The crash is then followed by a series of workshops in which all of the agencies involved put across their specific message. The pilot proved to be highly successful attracting a great deal of media attention and support from partner agencies. Evaluation from pupils confirms that the programme is extremely effective and that pupils were likely to remember the key messages. Pupils were particularly impressed with the Fire and Rescue Service input. The Steering Group plans to meet again in September with a view to running the programme in a further three target schools in the next academic year. Following the immense success of the pilot, all partner agencies are fully committed to the programme ensuring input from West Mercia Police, YOT, Worcestershire County Council, Road Safety Team, Ambulance Service and the Casualty Union.

Key Stage 3 Programme

37. The first year of the new Key Stage 3 programme is now complete and has reached 6,869 Year 8 pupils. The programme was piloted successfully at the start of the academic year and is proving to be an extremely popular extension of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's prevention activity in schools. This furthers the spiral learning approach by extending input to the higher age group and dealing with the issues of arson and hoax calls. Demand is high for the programme with visits booked into 2006. A full evaluation will be carried out at the start of the new academic year in September.

After School Club – ‘Hot Squad’

38. The highly successful After School Club – ‘Hot Squad’ piloted in three target schools: Woodrow First School - Redditch; Leominster Junior School - Hereford; Madley Primary School - Hereford in the last academic year has provided extensive opportunities for partnership working and will be offered to a range of schools in the next academic year who are currently suffering a range of problems. Again, this idea has been extremely well received by Headteachers, staff and parents and will hit the heart of local communities, providing safety information from a range of agencies in a fun and informative way.

New Work Experience Programme

39. A new work experience programme was piloted in July at Redditch Fire Station specifically aimed towards disaffected pupils. The programme was designed in partnership with Worcestershire’s Black and Minority Ethnic business development manager to raise the expectations and self esteem of Year 10 pupils and in particular those from ethnic minorities. The pupils took part in a range of practical and operational exercises including team building and discipline and also assisted the organisation in the ‘Dying to Drive’ initiative. The week concluded with a passing out parade attended by teachers, governors and parents and was extremely successful having produced a noticeable difference in the youngsters involved. Again, demand is high from schools wishing to undertake a similar programme. It is planned that this provision will be continued following the successful recruitment of a ‘Youth Services’ post as identified in the Service’s Youth Strategy.

Higher Education

40. A number of initiatives have been introduced into local Higher Education institutes in order to reduce the disproportionate high number of false alarm calls received by the Service from these premises. The Service will be maintaining a high profile during Freshers Week and the colleges involved have agreed to inflict harsh penalties on any offenders. It will also be speaking to students as part of the introduction to their accommodation and drawing attention to key safety messages.

Special Needs Provision

41. The Community Safety Team is continuing research into provision for Special Needs Pupils. It will be working closely with a number of other Fire and Rescue Services and has formed a close working relationship with local schools. It is hoped that this relationship will be further enhanced by the contribution to two partnership schemes in the north of the Service area. Firstly the team will be supporting the ‘Technology Tree’ initiative in partnership with Connexions and Hunters Hill School. This residential school provides for young people with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties, frequently excluded from mainstream schooling. It is hoped that by embarking on this scheme, the team can provide support to pupils and teachers and get the messages across to this key target group. The team will also support the ‘Young Enterprise Scheme’ at Chadsgrove School for pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties. This scheme will encourage pupils to set up and run their own business and give them an insight into the business world. Again it is hoped that, working closely with specialist teachers, this will prepare the pupils for independent living.

Marketing

National Campaign

42. The Service attended a briefing hosted by the National Community Fire Safety Campaign Forum to launch the next national fire safety campaign which commenced in September 2005. The theme of this campaign is, "A Fire Doesn't Have To Kill You To Take Your Life". The campaign involves a range of high profile television, radio and press advertising which will be supported locally by posters and banners placed in strategic locations.
43. Part of this campaign will promote DIY Home Fire Safety Checks. The Service's Marketing Officer is working closely with West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service to jointly promote the Fire Service Home Fire Safety Check Scheme to 'at risk groups' within the individual Service areas across the greater West Midlands Region. It is planned that this campaign will make best use of the bigger regional broadcast media (such as Heart FM which covers the majority of high risk areas) in conjunction with local media.

Arson Prevention

44. All 26 wholetime watches have now received training in Arson Prevention Advice. Community Fire Safety staff whose work takes them out into the community have also received the training and selected Retained Units are being prioritised as part of the programme to reduce deliberate fires.

Building Control Consultation

45. Specialist Fire Safety Officers have attended a joint meeting with Building Control Officers representing the Local Authority Departments. This enabled Officers to explore mutual areas of working practices at both a practical and technical level. This also resulted in a greater degree of working knowledge between the two sectors to the benefit of both parties and to the consulting professional bodies.
46. The Fire Safety technical guidance documents used by the Officers are currently being reviewed and Officers will play a role in the consultation process. The Procedural Guidance issued by ODPM, which formalises the consultation process between Building Control Officers and Fire Safety Officers, is due to be amended during the coming months. This may well impact on the way that consultation between the two parties is carried out in the future and to what level of response and responsibility for specific fire safety measures are appropriate.

Licensing Act 2003

47. Following the introduction of the new style of licence, under the Licensing Act 2003 for commercial premises that have held either drinks licences or other forms of entertainment licences, Fire Safety Officers have been involved in the conversion process which allows existing premises to obtain the new style licence. Concern that applications would be concentrated at either the beginning or end of the period to convert was borne out by experience with rush of applications before the deadline for the conversion process of 7 August. Premises who did not convert their licence will need to make new applications to the relevant Authorities by 24 November or will be in a position where they will have to cease trading.

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT – SECOND GENERATION (LPSA2)

48. In March 2005 Worcestershire County Council put forward 13 priorities in its initial proposals under the LPSA2 bid. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service are heavily involved in three of the priorities to improve the quality of life of people living in identified hotspot areas. Working in partnership with the Police and the Crime and Disorder Safety Partnerships in Wyre Forest, Redditch and Worcester, projects have been developed to tackle crime, deliberate fire setting and environmental issues. The Service also expressed the wish to be fully involved in Herefordshire Council's LPSA2 bid but as that Agreement has been developed the Service will only be involved in a supporting role.
49. At present the Service is negotiating with ODPM to stretch the BVPI 206 target (deliberate fires) for the three-year duration of the project and determining the necessary pump-priming funding for the partnership targets. The project will have a cost benefit to the community and is likely to be linked to the forthcoming Local Area Agreements.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Equality and Diversity

The Equality and Diversity Strategy

50. Progress is continuing against the objectives outlined in the strategy, including the recruitment strategy, induction, and the Rights and Responsibilities document. This document has been expanded to include an employee code of conduct.
51. Following the review of the Race Equality Scheme (outlined below), and in preparation for the 'positive duty' on disability due next year, an "Equalities Scheme" will be developed from the existing Equality and Diversity Strategy, and the current Race Equality Scheme, thus consolidating the two pieces of work into one document. This approach follows recent advice received from the Worcester Race Equality Council.

The Disability Discrimination Act

52. Following the access audits undertaken by the organisation, consultants have approved the audit methodology and outcomes. They are currently analysing the results to establish priorities for change which maximise the support for people with disabilities, and ensure the Service has a considered and positive approach to making adjustments to premises based on need.

The Race Equality Scheme

53. The review of the Race Equality Scheme has been completed, and a report of findings, progress and recommendations is being devised. This will include the strategy for incorporating the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 into a single "Equalities Scheme".

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

54. The Committee has received the annual report of its Standards Committee covering the period April 2004 to March 2005. The Committee has sought to avoid duplicating the work of the Constituent Authorities in such matters as training and to ensure that its work is proportionate. It has, therefore, operated on the basis that it will meet as business requires and in addition hold an annual review meeting.

55. The Committee has reviewed the 10th report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the national review of the Code of Conduct for Members, the Code of Corporate Governance, the Authority's code on confidential reporting and the Members' Development programme.

CORPORATE ISSUES

New Headquarters

56. The Authority has completed its move to a new headquarters building at 2 Kings Court, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester WR5 1JR (Tel 0845 12 24454) on time and on budget. The building will accommodate the Authority's Headquarters and support staff.
57. The new Headquarters project supports the Authority in achieving a range of strategic objectives and is critical to the development of its Asset Management Strategy. Benefits include increased efficiencies, reduced costs, improved communications and better working conditions for staff. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment assessment team commented particularly positively on this project, its impact on improving the culture and working conditions for staff, and its key role in releasing Authority assets to support the outcome of the Fire Services Emergency Cover process.

Finance

Statutory Financial Statements

58. The Authority's external auditors have issued an unqualified audit opinion on the 2004/05 accounts. The Authority has also received the auditors' findings on the audit of 2004/005 financial statements, and accepted the findings. It has also noted the 2004/05 Audit letter and approved the 2005/06 External Audit Plan.

Council Tax/Government Grant Distribution

59. The Authority has responded to the Government consultation on changes to the Formula Grant Distribution.
60. The Authority has made it absolutely clear in responding that it cannot afford to see resources diverted away from Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
61. The response has asserted that the following facts warrant consideration:
- 5.3% of the land area of Combined Fire Authorities is protected by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service;
 - 3.3% of the resident population of Combined Fire Authorities live in Herefordshire and Worcestershire;
 - 3.1% of the total net budget requirement of the Combined Fire Authorities is attributable to Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority;
 - 2.5% of the total Revenue Support Grant and redistributed non-Domestic Rates allocated to the Combined Fire Authorities is payable to Hereford and Worcester;
 - Of the 24 Combined Fire Authorities 5 (21%) have a higher Band D tax;
 - 14 (58%) have a higher cost per citizen; and
 - 22 (92%) have greater government grant per citizen.

62. Any diversion of resources cannot be balanced by adding to the Council Tax burden or jeopardising public safety by budget cuts.
63. The fundamental point remains that Council tax-payers in Herefordshire and Worcestershire are already financing a disproportionately high share of Fire and Rescue Service expenditure compared to other parts of the country.
64. A number of technical observations have been made separately.

Performance Plan

65. The Authority has approved the Performance Plan for 2005/06.

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

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any person wishing to seek further information on this report should contact Carole Williams on 0845 12 24454

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

Agenda papers of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 13 June 2005 and 23 September, 2005.