

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

Meetings Held on 15 December 2005 and 15 February 2006.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. During the period 1 April 2005 to 31st January, 2006 the Service attended a total of 7851 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).

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

2. 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.
3. In September 2005 the Authority approved a draft Plan for consultation covering the period 2006-09. A number of modifications were made to the Plan in response to replies made during the consultation process.
4. The main themes of the proposals in the Plan remain:
 - 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.

BUDGET 2006/07

5. The Authority has set a budget which enables the requirements of the Integrated Risk Management Plan to be met. The Authority's Net Budget Requirement is £27.061 million. The effect on the precept is to give a Band D Tax rate of £61.95 representing a 4.9% increase on 2005/06. (This is an increase of £2.90 a year.)

6. In setting this budget the Authority has noted the effects of the “damping” mechanism the Government has put in place to smooth the effects of the introduction of new formula grant arrangements. This has resulted in the Authority receiving £0.442 million (4.2%) less than it was entitled to on the basis of the formula grant calculation.
7. The Authority now receives the lowest government grant per citizen of any Fire and Rescue Authority and receives only 75% of the average for precepting Fire and Rescue Authorities.

REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL CENTRE

8. The Constituent Authorities have previously been advised of the replacement of the existing 46 local Fire Service control rooms across the Country with 9 regional control centres by the end of 2009. The Regional Fire Control for the West Midlands is to be located in Wolverhampton, the expectation being that the new Centre will be operational by 2009.
9. The Authority continues to be mindful of the significant local risks for the Authority in the short to medium term as the project is implemented and is receiving regular updates on the position. The Integrated Risk Management Plan contains specific reference to how these risks will be monitored and managed to ensure that an efficient and effective Fire Control function is provided until the Regional Control Centre becomes operational. The potential financial implications for the Authority have also been highlighted as part of the budget process.

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

10. Operational Assurance is a post Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) initiative aimed at assuring the community of the standard of operational performance and provision provided by the Fire and Rescue Service. Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate produced a guidance document and an interim toolkit linked to a quality standards approach based upon peer or self-assessment and this is part of the ongoing CPA process.
11. The West Midlands Regional Management Board has initiated a project to develop a regional operational assurance process that is due to be delivered during 2006 and the Service will establish permanent systems in line with this initiative and perhaps contribute to its development. However, there are short-term, potentially high risk issues that may need to be addressed before the regional project is implemented. Therefore, a local project has been commissioned to identify areas of immediate risk and implement corrective action where appropriate. The project will also develop a quality assurance process that matches the national and regional development.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

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

Community Fire Safety

13. The Service has extended the education programme to include those in higher education. It is essential that this audience is reached as they begin to live independently. Smoke alarm advice and the opportunity for Home Fire Safety Checks were offered to students during their Freshers week at both Bromsgrove and Redditch Colleges of Higher Education. This should help reduce the number of False Alarm Calls from institutes of higher education.

Power Cuts

14. Evaluation of statistical data has highlighted the increased risks from fire both during and immediately after a power cut affecting domestic properties, a risk which increases during the winter months. Additional safety information has been put onto the Service's website which will also be made available in printed format for distribution from local Fire Stations when crews are aware of a potential problem.

Legislative Fire Safety

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

15. Preparation for the introduction of the above Order continues, offering an opportunity for the Service to develop and expand links with the business community.

Arson Prevention

16. Fire Investigation Officers have been working closely with the police to establish cases of arson and help secure convictions. The Service's arson prevention project now forms part of the Local Area Agreement for Worcestershire.

Education Activity

17. Following the successful completion of the first year of delivery of a programme of activity to all year 8 pupils across Herefordshire and Worcestershire on the consequences of malicious calls and deliberate firesetting, the Service is busy piloting the use of an interactive, computerised system, 'Qwizdom', in schools. Children answer questions using a keypad allowing the Education Assistant to quickly evaluate their response and use such observations to adapt and determine future delivery as necessary for a particular school. Qwizdom will soon be used as a key education tool during all year 8 delivery across the two Counties. It is expected that this method of delivery will be extended as an additional delivery tool for the year 5 classes.
18. In addition to teaching key fire safety messages to Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 the Service is developing delivery methods for including both road and water safety in the education work. It is envisaged that a full programme will be in place by the end of this academic year working in partnership with the Royal Life Saving Society UK to deliver the programme of water safety education to all schools in the two Counties.
19. Research into Special Educational Needs and delivery of services to Educational establishments in response to the findings is moving forward rapidly. Strong links with North East Worcestershire College have enabled observation of and delivery of key fire safety messages to students with an array of special needs. This is a diverse and complex issue. Partnership links have been established with Chadsgrove special school for children with physical disabilities in Bromsgrove and a joint working venture is underway in this area. Liaison with other Fire and Rescue Services is also planned. As part of the process of strengthening links with students with special needs Redditch Fire Station accommodated 70 students from Redditch College for their annual Christmas party.
20. Numerous requests for work experience with the Service are in the pipeline and the aim is to accommodate these during the Spring and Summer terms. Crucial Crew was again most successful at Bosbury in September when pupils from numerous Herefordshire Schools attended practical water safety sessions.
21. Following the initial pilot of the Service's new road safety initiative 'Dying to Drive' at Bishop Perowne High School in Worcester in July 2005, an event to accommodate all year 10 pupils from Herefordshire schools is on schedule. Liaison continues with the Youth Offending Team, Police and Herefordshire Council and it is planned to run this

exciting initiative in July 2006.

22. As a lead organisation in the Public Social Health Education (PSHE) curriculum for schools across the two counties, the Service liaises closely with the Local Education Authority (LEA) advisory teams and in particular with Worcestershire Healthy Schools Programme. A high profile event was hosted in 27 January 2006 promoting the work of the Service to key specialists within the education community and giving teachers the opportunity to discuss key issues associated with alcohol and tobacco misuse.

Licensing Act 2003

23. Inspecting Officers in both Herefordshire and Worcestershire took part in the Police-lead "Operation Christmas Presence" campaign which targeted alcohol related issues. Premises inspected consisted mainly of nightclubs and the larger public houses, and with the exception of a few it was found that generally fire safety was satisfactory.

Fire Safety Promotional Activity

24. The first in a series of promotional coasters has been produced for distribution at key business seminars. They will profile Legislative Fire Safety Departments, the Service's Training and Development Centre and also remind businesses about the enhanced skills and good working practice that employing Retained Firefighters can bring.

Diwali/Eid

25. The National Community Fire Safety Centre (NCFSC) produced material targeted at UK based S.E. Asian print and broadcast media to help raise fire safety awareness amongst the ethnic S.E. Asian populations who celebrate Diwali. The Service organised a partnership project with West Midlands Fire Service to further promote Fire Safety Awareness using Radio XL, one of the largest Asian radio stations in the UK. During the broadcast the work the Service does to make staff aware of issues surrounding equality and diversity was also promoted. This will help to build long-term trust and enhance the profile of the Fire Service when reaching out to some of our 'at risk' communities.
26. NCFSC Posters were also distributed in key locations to help raise fire safety awareness amongst the Muslim populations who celebrate Eid. The Service was approached by the NCFSC to conduct a live radio interview for broadcast to the Muslim population across central England on behalf of the Regional Fire Services. Key safety messages were promoted in a format suited to the target audience.

National Mela (18-20 November 2005)

27. Along with other Fire Services in the Midlands, the Service supported the National Mela, aimed at individuals with a background or interest in S.E Asian culture. The aim was to promote the Service's safety agenda and highlight the potential career opportunities the Service has to offer. Fifty-five individuals expressed a direct interest in working for Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Road Safety

28. Working in Partnership with Worcestershire County Council's Road Safety Team, an advert has been placed in the Worcester County Council Road Safety Guide to highlight the increasing number of serious vehicle-related collisions the Fire Service attends, reminding readers about the main causes of these collisions. Both national and local statistics highlight that driver's lack of attention is the most significant factor in the majority of cases where people are killed or seriously injured in road related

incidents. The Service has also formed a partnership with Ambulance and Police Services to promote the issues surrounding road safety at this time of year.

Equality and Diversity

Strategy

29. Steady progress has been made in aligning the Strategy with objectives from the Race Equality Scheme review. Progress has also continued in developing access and services for disabled people and preparing for the 'positive duty' under the Disability Discrimination Act.
30. The global induction process has been finalised, and this is being aligned to approaches adopted by the Training and Development Centre. A comprehensive employee handbook is being developed in line with good practice. Progress is also continuing against individual objectives.

Fairness at Work Advisory Group

31. The Group will begin to consider the broader implications of changes brought about by the regional work and the review of objectives for the Equality and Diversity Strategy. Next year's targets and priorities will also be established in the planning process.

The Regional Management Board Project (improving opportunities)

32. The Regional Management Board Project is now drawing to a close, with an end date of April 2006 for this initial stage. Four areas of work have been considered: Regional approaches to the Equality Standard for Local Government, and current positions of individual Services; individual approaches to the Equality and Diversity training – designed to establish good practice in the region; Current Equality and Diversity Policy portfolios and how effectively they meet organisational and legislative requirements; The Race Equality Scheme - current positions of each individual service, and its subsequent relationship with legislative duties and good practice.
33. This will ultimately result in a regional Equality and Diversity Strategy designed to unify approaches and establish good practice norms.

ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

34. On the recommendation of the Authority's Standards Committee the Authority has adopted a protocol to govern the use of resources by Members. This is consistent with the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance which puts in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Authority's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal.
35. One of the recommendations on the ethical standards framework for local government in the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Tenth Report proposed that legislation should be introduced requiring Standards Committees to have a majority of Independent Members. The Standards Committee agreed that there would be merit, irrespective of whether or not legislation was to be forthcoming in recommending that the Authority complied with this suggestion. The Authority has now appointed three additional Independent Members to serve on the Committee.
36. The Standards Committee has stated its intention to undertake an ethical audit of the Authority. The Committee considers that this will assist the Authority in demonstrating that it has robust ethical governance arrangements in place as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Process.

CORPORATE ISSUES

37. The Authority has approved proposals for a Service restructure designed to deliver the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), address issues raised by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and respond to other service issues.
38. The Authority is participating in the “Real Improvement, Real Time” Performance Improvement Programme sponsored by the ODPM and the Local Government Association and delivered by PriceWaterhouse Coopers and SOLACE Enterprises. The programme is designed to build an organisation’s capacity. The Authority was one of six Authorities selected to participate in the Fire and Rescue Authority pilot. It is considered that the programme will assist the Authority in delivering a step change in performance improvement across the organisation, addressing key priorities identified through the self-assessment process and recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment report and will support the Authority in delivering excellence in the future.

Finance

39. In addition to preparations for the 2006/07 budget the Authority has received the Auditor’s Report produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Authority’s appointed auditor on the 2005/06 Best Value Performance Plan. No significant matters of concern were identified for inclusion in the statutory report on the Plan.

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HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
FEBRUARY 2006**

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 15 December 2005 and 15 February, 2006.