

Update on Collaboration and Potential Opportunities for Closer Working with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report, please contact Rod Hammerton Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Kevin Faulkner, Head of Transformation and Collaboration, on 01743 260198.

1 Purpose of Report

This report seeks approval to examine formalised collaborative working options with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to provide long-term capacity and resilience for both organisations

2 Recommendations

The Strategy and Resources Committee is asked to:

- a) Note how the Service has been meeting the statutory duty to collaborate to date
- b) Give approval for officers to examine the strategic options for formalised collaborative working within the region and nationally, but more specifically an alliance with Hereford and Worcester Fire & Rescue Service;
- c) Agree the production of a Strategic Programme Business Case for consideration by both Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Fire Authorities, to include initial areas of collaborative focus and appropriate governance arrangements; and
- d) Agree that the Strategic Programme Business Case is available for consideration at the full Fire Authority meeting, in June 2018.

3 Background

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has introduced a statutory duty to collaborate on all three emergency services, to improve their efficiency or effectiveness. This is specifically detailed in sections 2.0, 2.1 and 2.2, and includes the responsibility to selflessly act in the best interests of the public.

2. Duties in relation to collaboration agreements

(1) A relevant emergency service in England (“the relevant service”) must keep under consideration whether entering into a collaboration agreement with one or more other relevant emergency services in England could be in the interests of the efficiency or effectiveness of that service and those other services.

(2) If the relevant service considers that entering into a collaboration agreement with one or more other relevant emergency services in England could be in the interests of the efficiency or effectiveness of that service and those other services (“the proposed collaboration”), the relevant service must notify those other services of the proposed collaboration.

The continued reduction in central grant funding has affected all Fire and Rescue Services but Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services have received the two highest reductions in Revenue Support Grant to Metropolitan and Combined Fire Authorities within England over the period of 2016/17 to 2019/20.

While Shropshire Fire and Rescue Authority are currently forecasting a balanced budget going into 2020/21, there is an anticipation that budgetary pressures will continue. It is anticipated that in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service this may lead to increased pressures on both capacity and resilience.

Experience has shown that effective collaboration can provide benefits of scale without the disruption or costs that come with legislative changes such as merger or combination.

4 Current Position

Both Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services (H&WFRS) have a history of successful collaboration with each other as well as with other organisations such as respective local authorities and West Mercia Police. While it is along established “modus operandi” within SFRS to form effective partnerships much of this to date has been on an opportunistic or ad-hoc basis; although there has been some recent experience of more systematic planning through the collaborative forum set up between the police and fire services in the West Mercia and Warwickshire area.

Amongst these successes are an effective property sharing strategy with West Mercia Police (WMP), cross-training Police Community Support Officers as Retained Duty System Firefighters, supporting searches for missing persons. From a Fire/Fire perspective the collaboration so far has been primarily centred on operational processes and deployments, procurement and training; although some IT system opportunities are currently under investigation.

5 Formalised Strategic Collaborative Options

While recognising the broader duty to collaborate with all emergency services, officers propose that the respective Fire and Rescue Authorities consider a more formal strategic arrangement to achieve a greater depth of collaboration and develop an agreed set of priorities to deliver greater capacity and resilience to both FRS

A strategic case will be produced to examine the potential gains that can be made from stronger closer working. Notably, increased capacity and sustainable front-line services providing more resilient public safety, and shared planning, resources and expertise, to realise the economies of scale available to larger organisations.

The strategic case would be presented as a Programme Business Case (PBC) for approval by both Fire and Rescue Authorities and will consider the following options:

- a) Continued collaborative arrangements,
- b) The creation of a Strategic Alliance,
- c) Consideration of merger or combination.

The PBC will also propose an appropriate governance structure, with terms of reference, and identify key workstreams to deliver the broader and deeper collaborative relationship.

6 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8 Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has been completed.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report.
An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

10 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

11 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.