

Aerial Ladder Platform Crewing Project

Phase 3

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of the outcome of the Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) project and its various resilience options and seeks the Fire Authority's approval of the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations for Phase 4 and final implementation.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to consider and, if appropriate, approve the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations, as detailed in section 7.

3 Background

The Fire Authority determined in December 2011 that, in order to be able to achieve the budget reductions required by its Public Value plan, it should approve the implementation of an ALP project, to be completed in the four phases shown below.

Phase 1

Implementation of ALP Option 1, with cover being provided by Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury from 1 April 2012

Phase 2

Three 'Resilience Option Pilot' projects run from Shrewsbury Fire Station, between April and October 2012

Phase 3

A report, or reports, to the Fire Authority, by December 2012, detailing the full implications of Option 2 (Switch crewing at Telford Central, in addition to Shrewsbury), as well as the results from the Phase 2 Pilot projects

If Members consider it appropriate, the Service would then move to Phase 4.

Phase 4

Full implementation of Option 2 (Switch crewing at Telford and Shrewsbury), in conjunction with the 'Resilience Option' determined to be most appropriate

4 Implementation

Phase 1

Phase 1 was implemented at Shrewsbury fire station from April 2012. Since that date the ALP has been available on a switch crewed basis, i.e. 2 members of the water ladder (fire engine) crew will "switch" to the ALP and mobilise to an incident. This would then mean that there are insufficient crew left (only 2 or 3) to staff the water ladder, so it would not be available. Phase 2 would test various "resilience" options to optimise the use of the ALP.

Phase 2 Outcomes

A summary of the outcomes of the three resilience options, which have been the subject of trials since April 2012, is given below.

In the time period 1 April to 28 November 2012 the ALP has been mobilised to incidents on 19 occasions.

Resilience Option 1 – Water Ladder Unavailable

This took place between April and May 2012 at Shrewsbury Fire Station. It involved two ALP operators swapping from the water ladder to crew the ALP upon receipt of a mobilisation, resulting in the water ladder being unavailable due to insufficient crew. The remaining crew members would undertake other station or community based work.

Summary of outcomes

- i) The extra personnel available to carry out additional activity would only be useful between certain time periods. In general, business fire safety and community fire safety activity takes place between 9.00 am and 6.00 pm due to the availability of access to business premises and the disturbance factor in visiting people's homes in the evening.
- ii) The overriding negative factor with this option would be the loss of a pumping appliance and the reduction in fire cover for the community.

Resilience Option 2 - Composite Crewing

This took place between June and July 2012. It involved the water ladder proceeding with the ALP, when mobilisation for the ALP was received, i.e. the ALP would proceed to the incident followed by the water ladder with the remaining crew. The additional crew would assist in the set up of the ALP and its operation.

Summary of outcomes

- i) Increased specialised knowledge could be available at the scene and it improved the ability to manage staff rotation and welfare arrangements for extended duration incidents.
- ii) A dedicated support appliance for pumping capability to supply the ALP was immediately available.
- iii) The removal of an additional pumping appliance from the host station area could reduce overall fire cover for the community for the period of deployment.

Resilience Option 3 - Mixed Crewing

This took place between August and November 2012. It involved the utilisation of the Retained Duty System (RDS) Amber Watch at Shrewsbury to respond to fill positions on the water ladder vacated by two ALP operators.

Summary of outcomes

- i) This option offered some positives, such as joint working opportunities for wholetime and RDS crews and ensuring the availability of the water ladder in Shrewsbury.
- ii) A period of up skilling in, for example, positive pressure ventilation and breathing apparatus guidelines would be required for the RDS crew.
- iii) It is anticipated that at times the RDS appliance will not be available due to RDS crew backfilling the wholetime appliance. This has not been an issue during the trial, however the numbers of ALP mobilisations have been low in such a relatively short period and no issues have arisen. It is proposed to continue the trial until the implementation of the final recommendations to test this configuration fully.
- iv) Welfare and uniform arrangements have been addressed. RDS crews are able to take part in additional station work.
- v) If all three pumps are attending incidents, the ALP is off the run.
- vi) Also increased demand is placed upon the RDS in order to support the second appliance.

5 Consultation

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) have been consulted on the project as it has progressed. The following is a summary of the FBU response to the consultation on the proposed changes.

“...we hope to see that any alteration to crewing levels for special appliances would be a temporary measure imposed upon the Brigade by recent financial constraints and that permanent staffing should return when possible.”

The FBU also raised concerns about switch crewing a single ALP with a water ladder, as they believe it renders the ALP unavailable for immediate response to an incident, if that water ladder has already been committed.

The FBU conclude their response by stating:

“...whilst we are disappointed that permanent crewing of the ALPs has ended, the Composite/Unit crewing option at Shrewsbury and Telford Central would appear to be the way forward under the present financial circumstances. It offers as much resilience as possible, does not leave aerial or pumping appliances unavailable and increases safety and welfare of ALP operators.”

The Service acknowledged the responses and again reiterated the desired intention to move to Phase 4. With regard to resilience option 3 (use of the RDS) the Service felt that it would be beneficial to explore fully all of the issues with this option and, to that end, the pilot would continue until the implementation of Phase 4, if approved by Members.

6 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is now asked to give consideration to approving Phase 4 of the ALP project as follows:

The primary ALP to be permanently based at Shrewsbury and switch crewed with the water ladder. This would entail two firefighters from the water ladder crew going onto the ALP and mobilising to an incident. It is recommended that the remaining crew proceed on the water ladder to the incident to provide support and a dedicated pump for the ALP.

The spare ALP would be based at Telford.

The ALP based at Shrewsbury would be the primary vehicle, with the Telford ALP providing resilience only. It would be used only in circumstances when the Shrewsbury ALP is committed to an incident or off the run. Crewing for the spare ALP would be achieved in Telford in the same way as the primary vehicle from Shrewsbury.

Work to accommodate the ALP at Telford would need to be undertaken and would cost in the region of £30,000, dependent upon some exploratory foundation work. This was factored into the original project scope and has been budgeted for. The project can still be implemented prior to this work being undertaken. Implementation should be possible by 1 February 2013 with the building works completed as soon as possible after that date

7 Financial Implications

If the recommendations detailed above are accepted, this will result in an ongoing reduction of approximately £297,000 per year in the Service's revenue budget.

Phase 4 would involve some additional capital and/or revenue expenditure, due to the building works that may be required. These additional costs are currently estimated to be £30,000, dependent on exploratory foundation testing results. Savings from the first year may be used to fund these works.

8 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications as a consequence of the recommendations outlined in this report.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this report.

10 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

11 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.