

Aerial Ladder Platform Crewing Project

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) Crewing Project and seeks approval of the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations for the crewing of this appliance.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the results from the staff consultation process undertaken to look at how the Service provides its ALP cover into the future; and
- b) Consider and, if appropriate, approve the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations, as detailed in section 7.

3 Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has been hit by unprecedented cuts to its grant from Central Government of 12.6% for years 2011/12 and 2012/13. Further, unknown cuts are also likely to be incurred for the following two years, 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The 2010 Public Value review document sets out exactly what the Service is aiming to achieve with the setting of its new budgetary targets for each of the next four years.

The most significant change proposed for next year's plan involves no longer permanently crewing the ALP. This will result in a reduction of 2 wholetime firefighters per watch at Shrewsbury (resulting in a saving of approximately £297,000).

4 Consultation with Staff and Representative Bodies

In order to explore alternative crewing options, which were not reliant upon permanent crewing by wholetime personnel and, therefore, realising the saving of £297,000, a staff consultation procedure was undertaken.

The initial phase of consultation resulted in staff identifying a number of different options that could be considered as the new way of delivering ALP cover in Shropshire. The various options identified are briefly described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Main ALP Options

ALP Options	Explanation
1. Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury only	If an ALP is required, two staff 'switch' between one of the permanently crewed fire engines at Shrewsbury and the ALP, in the same manner that the boat is currently crewed.
2. Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury and Telford Central	Similar to Option 1, but having one ALP based at Shrewsbury (SY) and one at Telford Central (TC), neither of which is permanently crewed When an incident dictates that an aerial appliance is required, whenever available, the nearest ALP is mobilised.
3. RDS Crewing at Shrewsbury	ALP crewed by Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel along with other station appliances
4. RDS ALP station	RDS staff are employed specifically to crew the ALPs and only undertake sufficient other firefighting skills training to their ensure safety on fire ground
5. Wholetime on call (Wholetime / RDS) crewing	Both ALPs would be based at either TC or SY and would be crewed by a dedicated team of wholetime-on-call personnel who, whilst off duty from their main firefighting role, would respond from home when alerted, solely to crew the brigades aerial appliances.
6. Lose a pump (Specials station)	Lose one of the frontline fire engines at Telford or Shrewsbury and use those 4 people per watch to crew all of the special appliances (2 ALPs, Boat, Rescue Tender and Incident Response Unit), which would all be located on one station
7. No ALPs in Shropshire	ALP cover is supplied on request from neighbouring brigades or through a contract with a private company.
8. CARP	Replace one or both ALPs, and one or two fire engines, with a Combined Aerial Rescue Pump (CARP)
9. Brigade Merger	Amalgamation with neighbouring Brigade in an effort to force out possible savings that could be achieved instead of doing these changes to the ALP cover
10. Other Staff	ALP is crewed by non-watch based staff (e.g. Fire Safety, Training or Workshops).

In addition to the main options, staff also identified a number of options that could be combined with the Switch Crewing Options (Options 1 and 2) to make them less susceptible to delays being incurred, when the pumps on the ALP station are already committed to other duties. These options are described in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Switch Crewing Resilience Options

Resilience Option	Explanation
1. Composite Crewing	The remaining staff, left on the pumping appliance from which the ALP crew switched, take the appliance to the incident and support the ALP crew in its setting up, providing water and reliefs.
2. Mixed Crewing	Retained staff, based at Shrewsbury, are called in, when the ALP is mobilised, and sufficient numbers ride with the remaining Wholetime staff in order to make the pumping appliance available for normal fire cover.
3. XL Cabs	One of the pumping appliances, at the ALP station/s, is replaced with an XL Cab, and the remaining staff, left on the pumping appliance from which the ALP crew switched, are then able to ride on the XL Cab with all of the other staff based at that station.

Having identified all of these options, the second phase of consultation consisted of asking all staff and their Representative Bodies to select their preferred option. The next section summarises the feedback received from this phase of the consultation process.

5 Staff Feedback

A total of 139 operational staff submitted a return indicating their preferred ALP crewing option. Table 3 summarises the number and percentage of returns received from Wholetime and Retained staff.

Table 3 – Returns Received

Staff Group	Number of returns	% of staff
Wholetime	105	69
Retained	34	11
Total	139	30

The appendix details the results received from staff. With 75.2% of Wholetime and 85.3% of Retained staff (77.7% of all staff) preferring Option 2, this was easily the most favoured option.

Despite this very strong consensus in opinion that Wholetime and Retained staff have on the 'Main ALP Option', which they would like to see taken forward, the two groups of staff have very different views on which 'Switch Crewing Resilience Option' they would like to see combined with it. 96.6% of Wholetime staff prefer the Composite Crewing Option, and 92.9% of Retained staff prefer the Mixed Crewing Option.

We also see similar views expressed by the two main unions: the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU). Again, both unions agreed on Option 2 as the one to be taken forward, but disagree on the favoured 'Switch Crewing Resilience Option'.

The FBU stated:

“Obviously our first position is that the ALP should remain permanently crewed as it is now. If the current financial situation dictates otherwise, then the Composite / Unit crewing option that was outlined would seem preferable. Although we would expect this would be a temporary measure until funding returns to correct levels to enable the ALP to be re-instated as a frontline appliance with permanent staffing.

This, we feel, is a system that could work very effectively for Shropshire, given the financial constraints being imposed. Under all normal requirements, albeit with some changes to mobilising procedures, Composite / Unit crewing will provide an availability and resilience of all current appliances. This is a position that many of the other options cannot provide. It also avoids the switch crewing or other arrangements that would entail a wholetime pump being redundant whilst the ALP is committed, which are options that we would be very disappointed to see the Brigade consider.”

The RFU stated:

“Option 2 would be our first choice because it gives greater availability by having up to 2 ALP's available.

We would suggest that the ALP at Shrewsbury be the preferred option used in conjunction with mixed crewing from Shrewsbury RDS in order to maintain availability of the Shrewsbury Wholetime pumps.”

When specifically asked about the 'Mixed Crewing' option at Shrewsbury, it is interesting to note that the Officer in Charge of the RDS staff at Shrewsbury stated:

“Most staff are not keen on the mixed crewing option as they would rather see their appliance become second pump, instead of backfilling the Wholetime pump.”

Picking up on the points raised by the FBU, about how they would prefer that no change was made, if at all possible, one of the watches from Shrewsbury stated as part of their response:

“The watch feel that it is important to note and be shown when publishing their decision that their choice reflects the fact that this is a decision on reduction of staff only through a forced austerity measure and not one as an improvement to the brigades operational response. The group feel that the change/reduction in fire fighter numbers is a decrease in the service that we provide and that it could have detrimental effects on the safety of personnel. The option chosen made by the group should only be a short term implementation until such a time as funding is found to provide the full standard of cover as is provided at this time.”

This exemplifies the very constructive approach that staff have taken to the whole Public Value process. Members will have experienced this, first-hand, during this year’s Public Value / IRMP round of visits to stations.

This feedback was presented to, and considered by, the Senior Management Team at their meeting on 30 November 2011. The next section summarises the outcome from that meeting.

6 Senior Management Team Considerations

The Senior Management Team’s (SMT) preference is also for a ‘switch crewing’ option. Although there will be some training costs incurred by all of the proposed options, the ‘switch crewing’ options (Options 1 and 2) are most likely to result in the level of savings required to support the budget cuts facing the Service, as depicted in the Fire Authority’s Public Value report from December 2010 (approximately £297,000).

Of the two ‘Switch Crewing’ options, SMT recognises that Option 2 will provide greater resilience (we are more likely to avoid possible delays in mobilising an ALP, if there is an ALP at two stations, rather than just the one) and would, therefore, tend to favour this option. However, SMT is also conscious that there are a number of unknowns that would need to be considered before implementation of Option 2 could be taken forward with any confidence.

1. Comments received from the Training Department, during the consultation, indicate that there are likely to be capacity issues within the Department, due to 22 additional personnel possibly requiring ALP training, in order to have enough trained staff at Telford Central. This would require up to 11 four-day internal ALP courses and the spare capacity within the Department, to provide this number of courses at short notice, does not exist. This training would certainly not be completed in time for the 1 April 2012 target date.

The situation in Shrewsbury is better; as it is the existing ALP station.

Whilst Shrewsbury would require some additional ALP, swift water rescue and boat courses, these would simply be required to improve resilience on the station, when it eventually drops from 15 staff on each watch to 13 – something that is not forecast to occur until later in 2012/13. This would not delay the possible implementation of Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury (Option 1) by the 1 April target date.

2. Utilising both ALPs for the ongoing, watch-based training on both stations is likely to impact on the maintenance programme for the two ALPs. This impact has not yet been determined and is likely to have an impact on the life expectancy of the ALPs.
3. As part of the 2010 IRMP Action Plan, the two ALPs were consolidated at Shrewsbury and the Incident Response Unit was moved across to Telford Central. This negated the need to extend one of the appliance bays at Telford Central in order to accommodate the IRU and an ALP. At that time, the quote that had been received for this work was approximately £25,000. To implement Option 2 this extension work would need to be undertaken, in order to accommodate the ALP and the IRU. The Service will need to obtain an updated quote for these works.
4. Members will be aware that they are currently in discussion with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in relation to the allocation of costs to the Service for the ongoing annual maintenance and replacement costs for the Incident Response Unit, which is a Government provided vehicle. These discussions are pertinent to the building works discussed above, in that, if the Authority had to take the decision not to continue to support this vehicle, then the building works at Telford would not be required. It would, therefore, be prudent to await the outcome of those discussions, before committing the Service to spending its budget on something that may not be required.

As a consequence of these various 'unknowns', SMT believes that it would be inappropriate to commit to full implementation of Option 2 at this stage. It is, therefore, recommending that the Service should put plans in place to implement Option 1 (Switch crewing at Shrewsbury) in time for the 1 April deadline (so that we can start to accrue the budget savings as people retire during the following year), and at the same time seek further clarification on the Option 2 issues outlined above.

In relation to the 'Resilience Options', that could be implemented alongside options 1 and 2, SMT can see benefit in both the 'Mixed' and 'Composite' crewing options. However, SMT is very conscious that the method of 'Resilience' chosen is likely to have significant implications on how the Rescue Tender project might also be taken forward as part of the following year's Public Value projects.

With this in mind, SMT has decided to recommend that, rather than jump into one or other of these options without fully understanding their potential impact on the Service into the future, it would prefer that we undertake a series of short pilots (2 months about), which would explore the implications of the two preferred 'Resilience Options', as well as running a third pilot, which would involve no 'Resilience Option' being in place.

A report on the results from these three pilots, as well as the findings from the further investigation into implementing Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury and Telford Central (Option 2), will be taken to SMT during 2012, so that the long-term implications on both ALP and Rescue Tender (RT) delivery can be discussed and decided upon from a more informed position.

Depending on when clarification can be gained on the outstanding issues around Option 2, the report relating to that decision may be presented separately to the 'Resilience Options Pilot' report. In any case, the report/s would need to be considered by SMT by November 2012, so that long-term recommendations on ALP and RT cover in Shropshire can be brought to the Fire Authority by December 2012.

7 Recommendations

Having considered all of the feedback and issues discussed in this report, the Chief Fire Officer recommends that, in order to be able to achieve the budget reductions required by its Public Value plan, the Fire Authority approves the implementation of an ALP project that will be completed in four phases:

Phase 1 will see the implementation of ALP Option 1, with cover being provided by Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury from 1 April 2012.

Phase 2 will involve 3 'Resilience Option Pilot' projects being run out of Shrewsbury, between April and October 2012.

Phase 3 will consist of a report, or reports presented to the Fire Authority by December 2012, which will detail 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.

At that stage, if Members consider it appropriate, the Service will move to phase 4.

Phase 4 would consist of the full implementation of Option 2 (switch crewing at Telford and Shrewsbury) in conjunction with the 'Resilience Option' determined to be the most appropriate.

8 Financial Implications

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

Phase 4 may involve some additional capital and/or revenue expenditure, due to the additional training and building works that may be required. These additional costs will be determined and brought to Members for their consideration, as part of the Phase 3 reporting.

9 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

10 Equality Impact Assessment

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

11 Appendix

Staff Consultation Results

12 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority, 15 December 2010,
Agenda Item 8 - 2010/11 and later years budget summary, Appendix B –
Public Value Review

Staff Consultation Results

Main Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) Options

Group of staff		Returns	OPTION NUMBER									
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
			Switch Crewing SY	Switch Crewing SY and TC	RDS Crewing	RDS ALP station	Wholetime On-call	Lose a pump (Specials Station)	No ALPs in Shropshire	CARP	Brigade Merger	Other Staff
Wholetime	No.	105	14	79	2	0	3	2	4	0	1	0
	%	100.0	13.3	75.2	1.9	0.0	2.9	1.9	3.8	0.0	1.0	0.0
Retained	No.	34	2	29	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
	%	100.0	5.9	85.3	0.0	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.0
All staff	No.	139	16	108	2	2	3	2	4	0	2	0
	%	100.0	11.5	77.7	1.4	1.4	2.2	1.4	2.9	0.0	1.4	0.0

Switch Crewing Resilience Options

Group of staff		Returns	Resilience Options		
			1	2	3
			Composite crewing.	Mixed Crewing SY	XL Cabs
Wholetime	No.	88	85	1	2
	%	100.0	96.6	1.1	2.3
Retained	No.	14	1	13	0
	%	100.0	7.1	92.9	0.0
All staff	No.	102	86	14	2
	%	100.0	84.3	13.7	2.0