

## Fire and Emergency Support Service

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260205 or Martin Timmis, Head of Prevention and Protection, on 01743 260285.

### 1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines work to introduce the British Red Cross Fire and Emergency Support Service to the whole of Shropshire, and seeks Member approval for match funding the Service.

### 2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Approve funding of £19,000 to be taken from existing balances to part fund the project.

### 3 Background

British Red Cross (BRC) operates a Fire Emergency Support Service (FESS) across the UK, providing trained, skilled volunteers to work alongside the Fire and Rescue Service at many kinds of emergency.

Every year, hundreds of families and individuals suffer damage to their homes following a fire, flood or similar incident. FESS volunteers, equipped with a specially adapted vehicle, respond around the clock to provide help when things go wrong for families. Besides offering immediate safe shelter – along with clothing, food and shower facilities – the Red Cross also helps with practical necessities, such as securing temporary accommodation and contacting insurance companies.

Crucially, FESS volunteers are trained to provide emotional support to people at a time of significant upheaval, which can make a huge difference at such a distressing time.

## 4 Our Proposal

Shropshire is one of very few Fire and Rescue Services that does not have a FESS operating within its borders. Many of our operational crews, who have experience of working in other Service areas have commented on the advantages of operating FESS, particularly how it places people, who are distressed and vulnerable, in the care of another agency, allowing our personnel to concentrate on dealing with operational matters.

The use of FESS adds value to the excellent service that we already provide, but puts more emphasis on the people we serve than the situation they find themselves in – this was highlighted as a failing by the report into the 7/7 bombings in London.

Your officers, therefore, propose to introduce FESS into Shropshire. To do this, BRC has already carried out a needs analysis and has determined that we would be able to make good use of the facilities provided. On average they suggest we will be able to mobilise FESS around twice each week, to fires, floods or other emergencies. As a result, BRC has already managed to raise the sum of £19,000 through charitable donations. This will provide 50% funding for a new FESS vehicle. Around 30 new BRC volunteers have been identified and have received initial training, including some delivered by this Service related to conduct on and around incidents. In particular, volunteers are skilled in:

- Helping evacuated families find temporary accommodation;
- Providing practical help and emotional support to distressed people;
- Signposting people to other organisations and agencies, including local authorities, that will help (FESS can be on scene in as little as thirty minutes, whereas local authority help can take many hours to arrive to provide support); and
- Providing support, including provision of food and hot drinks, to emergency crews at protracted incidents.

Your officers propose that an interim capability be introduced in February 2013, which will provide an opportunity for volunteers to engage fully with operational crews, although the new vehicle will be delayed for approximately 12 weeks during its “build stage”.

For more information, Members are invited to visit:

[www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Emergency-response/UK-emergency-response/Fire-and-emergency-support-service](http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Emergency-response/UK-emergency-response/Fire-and-emergency-support-service)

A video presentation will be shown to Members at the Fire Authority meeting.

Other opportunities to utilise these BRC volunteers have been discussed and, given appropriate training, this group of willing volunteers may well be able to provide support at other community events, including delivery of community fire safety messages and home fire risk assessments.

## **5 Financial Implications**

The British Red Cross has been able to secure charitable donations to the sum of £19,000 in response to an agreed needs analysis. The Service now needs to commit £19,000 capital investment to ensure that the FESS realises its full potential in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. This money would be transferred from existing balances.

Beyond this capital investment there are minimal other costs, related to provision of mobile telephone and satellite navigation for the vehicle. This Service would provide fuel. The British Red Cross would contribute to other costs associated with its volunteers' expenses.

## **6 Legal Comment**

The Authority may approve the contribution to the BRC in accordance with the Financial Regulations of the Authority.

Should the Authority approve the contribution, an agreement would be drawn up with the BRC to ensure that the Authority achieves value for money and its position is protected.

## **7 Equality Impact Assessment**

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

## **8 Appendices**

There are no appendices attached to this report.

## **9 Background Papers**

There are no background papers associated with this report.