

Partnership with the Environment Agency

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members about the current partnership arrangement that exists between the Service and the Environment Agency and the opportunity that has arisen for the Service to improve its current environmental protection capabilities.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the existing agreement that the Service has with the Environment Agency to provide an Environmental Unit in Shropshire; and
- b) Note that the Environment Agency has presented the Service with an opportunity to upgrade its current environmental protection capabilities

3 Background

For many years the Environment Agency (EA) has operated a national agreement with Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) whereby they supply the equipment necessary to deal with most environmental incidents, and the FRS uses that equipment to respond to and deal with the aftermath of those incidents on their behalf. This has included the provision of various pieces of equipment on all front-line pumping appliances (known as 'Grab Packs'), which enables us to make an immediate attempt at preventing any chemical spillage from progressing into the drainage systems and water sources in the vicinity of the incident.

In addition, to enable us to deal with incidents involving the large scale release of pollutants, as well as to limit the spread of contaminants that have already affected open water sources, the EA have also funded FRSs to purchase and fully equip Environmental Units, which again ensure a rapid response is possible to incidents of that nature.

Any work carried out by the FRS, on behalf of the EA, is charged back to either the person responsible for the contamination (where that is known), or to the EA, who will then look to reclaim those costs from the relevant person, once identified through their subsequent investigations. A process is also in place to ensure that any of the specialist environmental protection equipment, used at these incidents, is replenished through the EA, at no cost to the FRS.

This agreement has operated in Shropshire for many years, with the Environmental Unit, which consists of a Demountable Pod carried on the back of one of the Service's Prime Movers (based at Tweedale - see photographs below), having been in operation since 1997. This responds to all appropriate incidents anywhere in the county.

More information on the Environmental Unit can be found on the Service' website at: <https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/the-emergency-service/brigade-resources/brigade-appliances/environmental-unit>)



5 Environment Agency's Refresh Programme

The EA recently approached the Service and informed us that, as part of a rolling programme, it is Shropshire's turn to receive up to £24k which can be used by the Service to replace or improve the current Environmental Unit. As part of this 'refresh programme', Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service recently decided to use the money to replace their existing Unit with a large van. They considered this to be a better vehicle for responding to the environmental incidents they get within their area.

Having considered the number and location of environmental protection incidents we have responded to over the last few years, and the fact that the current Unit has at least another 5 years before it would normally be replaced. Officers believe that replacing the current unit at this time is not the most effective use of this opportunity. Our preference was to look at how we might use it to improve on our current capabilities. The proposal detailed in the next section has been designed to do this.

6 Preferred Option

The Service has a number of Incident Support Units (ISU – see photo below) around the county which are fitted with a hydraulic lifting arm that is used to lift various large metal trays into their rear compartment. Each tray contains different equipment relevant to a particular type of risk (e.g. Fire or Road Traffic Collision etc), which the crew would put into the ISU depending on the incident that they are responding to.



The Service has decided to extend this idea by providing an environmental protection capability that sits between the capabilities of the 'Grab Packs' (carried on the Front-line Pumps) and the full equipment carried on the Environmental Unit.

A proposal has therefore been developed that consists of using the £24,000 to go towards partially funding the purchase of another Incident Support Unit (to be based at Minsterley in place of their existing Landrover pump) and the development of another version of the metal trays. The new version of trays (an Environmental Protection Tray) would contain equipment that would be able to build on the capabilities of the 'Grab Packs', whilst the crews are waiting for the attendance of the Environmental Unit from Tweedale. This proposal would also include putting the new Environmental Protection Trays on 4 of the existing ISU's that the Service has around the county.

This would result in this additional capability being able to quickly respond to all areas of the county, especially those on the extremities of our borders, where the response time for the Environmental Unit is greatest. With ISUs also having 4-wheel drive capabilities, this would also offer additional flexibility in where the equipment could be taken to, by our firefighters (e.g. closer to streams and rivers threatened by a pollutant).

Although this is a different approach to the 'normal' way that the EA Replacement Fund has been used by other Fire and Rescue Services, the EA can see the benefits of this approach and have agreed for their funds to be used in this manner.

7 Financial Implications

The total cost of the unit and the additional Environmental Protection Trays is greater than the £24,000 being provided by the Environment Agency.

The introduction of an additional ISU at this point will remove the need to replace a Landrover as part of the 2013/14 Ranger and Landrover replacement capital scheme. It is therefore proposed that the additional funding required be brought forward from this scheme to provide a new Toyota Hilux equipped with an Environmental Protection Tray, Fire Fogging (high pressure water pump) system and other trays identified as appropriate at this location. This will enable effective use of the provided funding to meet both the Environment Agency's and Fire Authority's objectives.

There is a formal funding agreement between the Environment Agency and the Fire Service, and funding will be provided before the Authority incurs expenditure on the project.

The Environment Agency do not place restrictions on the processes used by the Service to purchase the equipment provided, and this will be carried out in accordance with the Services procurement policies.

8 Legal Comment

Section 18A and 18B Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provide for an authority to charge in certain circumstances; an authority can enter into an arrangement for co-operation with other public authorities and others who exercise public functions.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached to this report.

10 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

11 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.