



Shropshire
Fire and Rescue Service

IRMP Proposed Actions 2010/11



Stakeholder and Public Consultation Response Document

November 2009



Putting Shropshire's Safety First
www.shropshirefire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

Following the introduction of its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Proposed Actions 2010/11 document in August 2009, the IRMP Members Working Group (seven Members of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority) has conducted three months of consultation with staff, public and stakeholders. This report summarises the feedback received by the Working Group from members of the public and stakeholder organisations.

The Fire Authority's approach to the consultation process complied with guidance issued by both the Cabinet Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Additionally, the consultation process followed the recommendations of Opinion Research Services (ORS), who are independent research consultants contracted to assist with this and other consultation exercises on behalf of the Fire Authority.

The feedback received during this process has been extremely perceptive and constructive. The significant outcomes from the consultation process are as follows:

- There is support for the Authority's new Strategic IRMP Priorities;
- There is overwhelming support for the proposal to create District Development Teams;
- There is strong support for the reduction in the Wholetime Ridership Factor and the re-investment of the savings into the District Development Teams
- There is support for an alternative proposal to consolidate Aerial Ladder Platform cover in Shrewsbury, rather than Telford, as was initially proposed by the Fire Authority; and
- Whilst there is general satisfaction with the Fire Authority's IRMP consultation process, some stakeholders felt that they needed additional information to enable them to give an informed opinion.

These findings will be reported to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 16th December 2009. At that meeting, the Fire Authority will consider these outcomes, in combination with the feedback received from members of staff from the Service and their Representative Bodies, and make a final decision on what proposals it will choose to implement. The approved actions will be published in the IRMP Action Plan 2010/11 in April 2010.



Contents

Page No.

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Purpose of Report | 3 |
| Approach to Consultation | 4 |
| Summary of Responses from the Public and Stakeholders | 8 |
| 1. The IRMP Proposal Document | 9 |
| 2. The new Strategic IRMP Priorities | 10 |
| 3. The Fire Authority's proposals | 12 |
| a. District Development Team | 12 |
| b. Reducing the Wholetime Ridership Factor | 15 |
| c. Consolidation of Aerial Ladder Platform cover | 18 |
| 4. Satisfaction with the IRMP consultation process | 23 |
| IRMP Members Working Group Consultation Response | 24 |
| Annex – ORS' Report on Public Scrutiny Panels and Stakeholder Forums | 25 |



Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform all interested parties of:

- The details of the stakeholder and public consultation process undertaken by IRMP Members Working Group, on behalf of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority, on its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Proposed Actions for 2010/11;
- The comments received from stakeholders and the public of Shropshire from this consultation process; and
- The Working Group's response to the feedback received.

The results from this consultation process will be used to assist the Fire Authority in developing its IRMP Action Plan for 2010/11, which will be published on its website in April 2010.

Approach to Consultation

As described in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), the Fire Authority's approach to consultation complied with guidance issued by both the Cabinet Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The central tenet of this guidance is that the extent of consultation should be proportional to the scope of the proposed changes contained in the IRMP Proposed Actions document, and should focus upon communities or interest groups particularly affected by these changes.

To ensure the Authority received independently corroborated feedback from this process, the Fire Authority solicited the help of a consultancy company (Opinion Research Services or ORS) to conduct a significant part of the consultation process. ORS have many years experience in consulting on behalf of Public Service bodies across the whole of the country, including involvement in many fire authorities' IRMP processes.

The consultation results in this report form only part of the consultation process undertaken by the Fire Authority; with additional consultation also having been undertaken with the staff of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service and their Representative Bodies. Results from the staff consultation process have been included in a separate report.

This report summarises the consultation process with members of the public, their representatives, the business community and other organisations that have a vested interest in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Consulting with the Public

The two methods of consultation with members of the public involved:

- Formal 'Public Scrutiny Panels';
- An on-line and paper questionnaire.

Public Scrutiny Panels

Building on experience from previous years consultation, the Fire Authority determined that the most effective means for consulting with members of the public remained through the use of 'Scrutiny Panels'.

There is an increasing need for the Fire Authority to have an ongoing process of consultation. This is not only for its IRMP's, but also for other issues upon which it must consult each year (e.g. budgetary planning). In order to maximise the quality of public involvement, it is important that people should be able to voice 'informed' opinions.



One of the main issues that emerged from the consultation undertaken during the Fire Authority's first year of IRMP was that there was a relatively low level of awareness of the changing role of the Fire Service amongst the general public. This necessitated a significant amount of time being spent on providing information to enable people to discuss the issues in an informed manner.

For this reason ORS recommended that 'Scrutiny Panels' be set up within Shropshire. A 'Public Scrutiny Panel' is a group of people, representing a cross-section of the community, who can be called upon for various consultation requirements, over a number of years. These Panels will therefore build up a level of knowledge and expertise regarding the workings of the Fire and Rescue Service. The benefit of taking this approach is that the Fire Authority is able to demonstrate that an 'informed' process of consultation has taken place. Essentially, the more people know, the more likely they are to have useful insights and ideas to contribute.

ORS recruited a total of 34 people who attended one of two panels, held in Ludlow and Shrewsbury. The recruitment process ensured that panel members represent a true cross-section of the community.

These panel members received the Fire Authority's IRMP documents prior to the meetings. During the meetings, the Fire Authority's IRMP Team gave a summary presentation on the purpose of IRMP and the specific proposals contained in its IRMP Proposed Action Plan. After a lengthy question and answers session, the group was split into several smaller groups. Each group then discussed and agreed responses to various questions relating to the Fire Authority's proposals. Whilst the IRMP Team were available to answer any additional questions, they did not take part in these discussions.

A summary of the responses received is provided in the next section and details all responses received. The ORS report is included as an Annex to this report.

On-line and paper Questionnaire

To enable more members of the public to contribute to this consultation process the Authority included an on-line questionnaire within the IRMP section of its website. This work was not conducted by ORS.

The questionnaire provided the respondent with information about the Fire Authority's IRMP proposals and asks a series of questions on which the Fire Authority was seeking specific comments. Space was also provided for any other comments they wished to make. The questionnaire was made available for three months, giving ample time for people to respond.

Awareness of the questionnaire was raised with the public by signposting it on the homepage of the Service website and through the distribution of posters, advertising its existence, to all Post Offices, supermarkets and Parish notice boards in the county. Press releases were also sent to all news media outlets in and around the county. A paper version was also made available upon request for anyone wishing to give comment in this format.



Consulting with Stakeholder Organisations

Two methods were used to consult with organisations that have a vested interest in the service delivered by the Fire Authority. Namely;

- Formal 'Stakeholder Forums'; and
- A paper questionnaire.

Stakeholder Forums

On the recommendation of ORS the Fire Authority determined that the most effective means for consulting with organisations and businesses most likely to be affected by the Authority's proposals was through stakeholder forums. This format of consultation allows for the proposals to be explained on a face-to-face basis prior to obtaining the views of stakeholders through in-depth discussion.

More than 430 organisations were therefore informed of the Fire Authority's Draft IRMP Action Plan 2010/11 and the possible impact it could have on them, and were invited to attend the forum. This included:

- Both Unitary Councils in Shropshire;
- The Local Area Committees in the Shropshire Council area;
- The Parish Councils in the Telford and Wrekin Borough Council area;
- Police and Ambulance Services in Shropshire;
- Neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services;
- Primary Care Trusts;
- The Environment Agency and Environmental Health departments;
- Shropshire's diversity forums.

The Working Group was disappointed that only 2 people attended the Shrewsbury forum and no-one attended the Ludlow Forum.

The forum was managed through a structured approach by ORS, and the forum member's views on the Authority's proposals were obtained and reported to the Authority in a 'Consultation Report'. The findings from this work with stakeholders are contained in the relevant sections of the full ORS report (annex A of this report) and summarised within the sections of this report that deal with each proposal.

Questionnaires

The Fire Authority was keen to make sure that those organisations that were unable to attend one of the Stakeholder Forums had every opportunity to comment on its proposals. Therefore, every invite to the forums that was sent out also included a paper questionnaire which gave details of the proposals and asked for their thoughts.



Responses received through the questionnaire

A total of only ten questionnaire responses were received throughout the consultation process. Six responses were received via the online questionnaire, with the other four being on the paper version. The table below details the number of responses from each type of responder.

| Type of Responder | Number of Responses |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Member of the public | 6 |
| Councillor | 1 |
| Public Service | 3 |

In addition, another public service responded with comments on the proposals, but did not complete the questionnaire.

In view of the low number of responses received, they have been combined and summarised in the relevant sections of this report.



Summary of Responses from the Public and Stakeholders

This section contains a summary of the feedback received from members of the public and stakeholders via paper questionnaires, the on-line questionnaire and the Public Scrutiny and Stakeholder Panels.

The section has been split into four parts, dealing with each of the consultation questions in turn:

- **Did you consider the IRMP Proposals Documents to be;**
 - Easy to read;
 - Informative.

- **Do you agree with the Fire Authority's new Strategic IRMP Priorities?**
 - Communication
 - Competence:
 - Capacity.

- **Do you agree with the Fire Authority's proposals to;**
 - Create the District Development Teams;
 - Reduce the Wholetime Ridership Factor:
 - Consolidate ALP cover in Telford.

- **Are you satisfied with the IRMP Consultation Process?**

The graphs included within each part have been compiled from the information provided in all the questionnaires that were returned. All of the comments received via the questionnaires have also been included.

Each part also includes a summary of the views expressed during the Public Scrutiny Panels held at Shrewsbury and Ludlow and the Stakeholder Forum at Shrewsbury. The full ORS report has been included as an Annex to this report.



1. Did you consider the IRMP Proposal Document is;

- a. Easy to read
- b. Informative

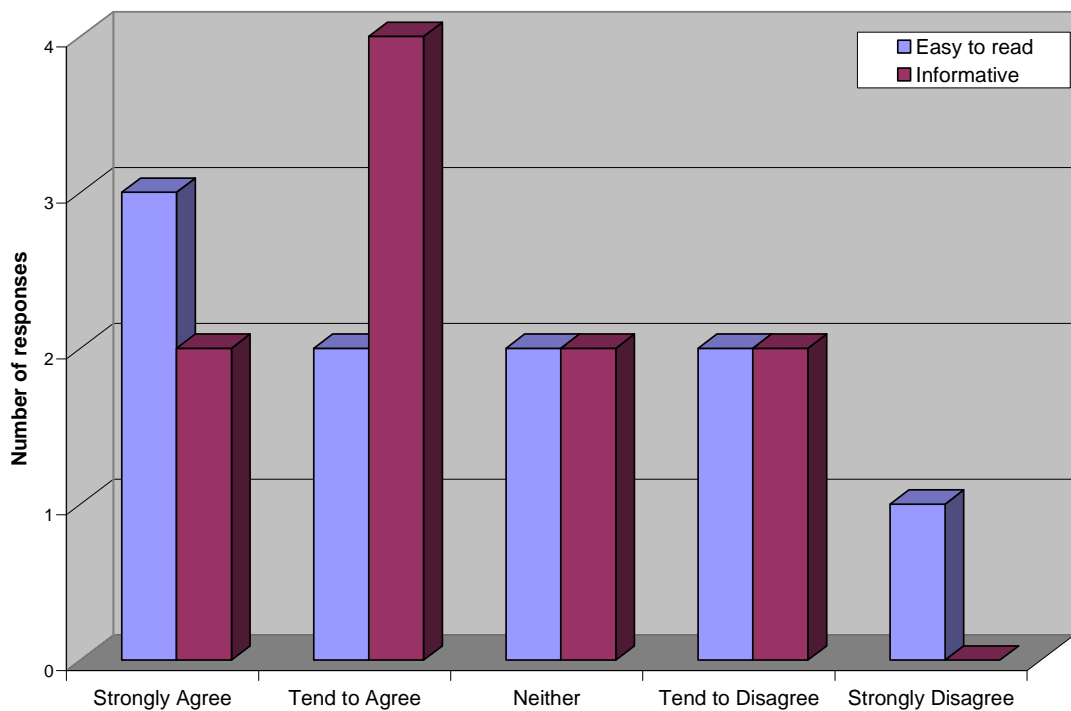
Questionnaire Response

Although 50% of respondents felt that the IRMP Proposal Document was easy to read, 30% disagreed. 60% thought it was informative and only 20% disagreed.

| Easy to Read | Count | Total % |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 30 |
| Agree | 2 | 20 |
| Neither | 2 | 20 |
| Disagree | 2 | 20 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 10 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

| Informative | Count | Total % |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 20 |
| Agree | 4 | 40 |
| Neither | 2 | 20 |
| Disagree | 2 | 20 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

Did you find the consultation documents:



Comments Received

- Short and to the point
- The council felt that the document did not make it sufficiently clear what is meant by the reduction in ridership factor and the implications of the proposals for the effectiveness and safety of crews



2. Do you agree with the Fire Authority's new Strategic IRMP Priorities?

- a. Communication
- b. Competence
- c. Capacity.

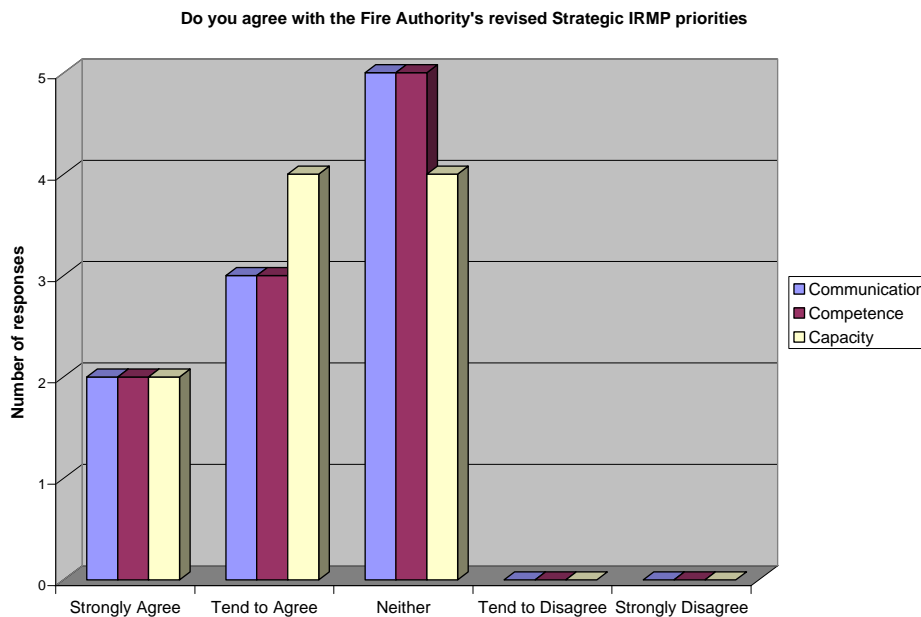
Questionnaire Response

Those people who expressed an opinion, were supportive of the Fire Authority's stated Strategic IRMP Priorities.

| Communication | Count | Total % |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 20 |
| Agree | 3 | 30 |
| Neither | 5 | 50 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

| Competence | Count | Total % |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 20 |
| Agree | 3 | 30 |
| Neither | 5 | 50 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

| Capacity | Count | Total % |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 20 |
| Agree | 4 | 40 |
| Neither | 4 | 40 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 30 | 100 |



Comments Received

- I recognise the need for effective communications, but you should not waste time and resources flogging a dead horse. In the main anyone who is interested in a subject will source the information they need, conversely anyone who is dissatisfied with a service will make it know in a variety of ways. As an ex member of the FRS and now working in the private sector I can offer a balanced view that in the vast majority of cases what the public expect is fire appliance together with a fully trained and professional crew, as quickly as possible when they are in need. The FRS provides these services beyond that provided by any of the other emergency services, and as such are held in extreme regard by the public and commerce.
- I have no competence to advise on this.



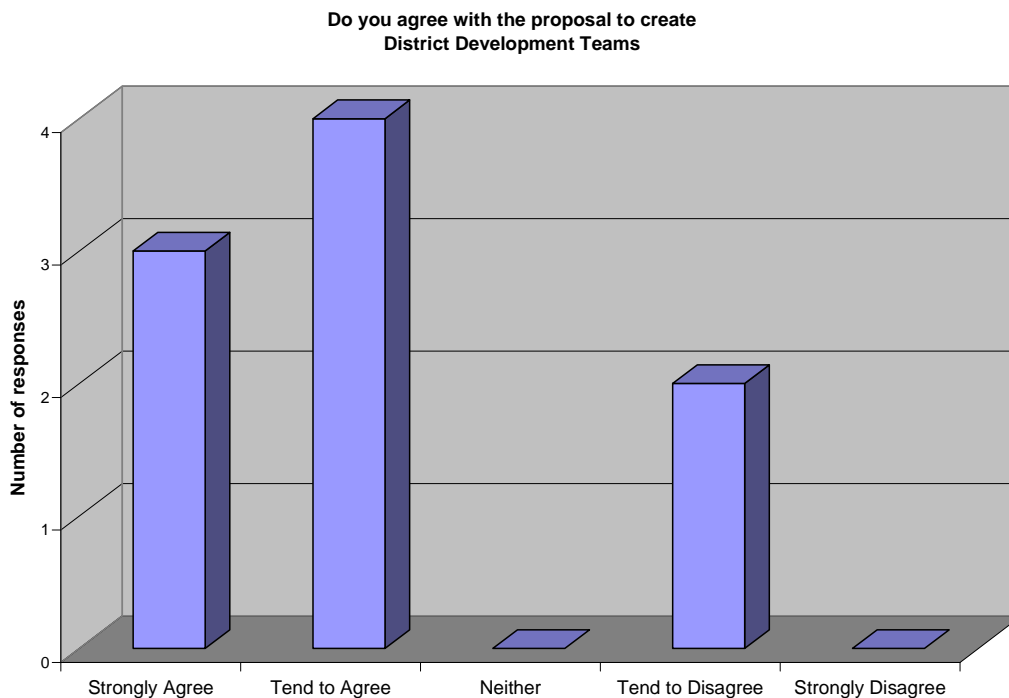
3. Do you agree with the Fire Authority's proposals

a. To create a District Development Team

Overall Response

Although 66% of people who responded to the questionnaire agree with this proposal, and 22% disagreed, there was overwhelming support from the members of the public and stakeholders that attended the scrutiny and forum panels. Panel members believe that this proposal will bring significant benefits to Retained staff and consequently to the communities that they serve.

| District Dev. Teams | Count | Total % |
|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 22 |
| Agree | 4 | 44 |
| Neither | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 2 | 22 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 100 |



Comments from the ORS Forums

- **Public Forum - Shrewsbury**

All three Shrewsbury break-out groups strongly supported the enhancement of SFRS' District Development Teams. Participants felt that the change would result in substantial benefits for the service and its RDS staff, chiefly in



respect to better training and qualifications, career prospects, confidence and morale – resulting in the easier recruitment and improved retention of retained firefighters.

The fact that the proposal will enable SFRS' RDS to gain a nationally-recognised qualification (in the form of something similar to a NVQ) was also considered to be a significant benefit in terms of general recognition, transferable skills and professional mobility:

It was also suggested that being able to certify the training and development of RDS staff will help SFRS with potential litigation in the event of casualties in that the service will be able to prove that its firefighters are trained to the highest possible standard.

The only slight concern - expressed by one of the small working groups – was the *difficulty that may be experienced in finding the time for training for retained staff.*

- **Public Forum - Ludlow**

All three of the Ludlow break-out groups wholly supported the enhancement of SFRS' District Development Teams. Participants foresaw real benefits for RDS staff in relation to training, development and morale – as well as corresponding improvements to public and firefighter safety.

Further, given that the vast majority of Shropshire (including Ludlow) is covered by the retained service, participants felt that any improvement to this service would be to the advantage to the county's communities.

There was a very slight concern about the cost implications of the proposal (and thus the potential for Council Tax rises) in one of the Ludlow sub-groups, although participants in another took the view that *Council Tax issues involving pennies should not be used as an argument to reduce service quality* and that people should not begrudge paying slightly more for a better service.

- **Stakeholder Forum - Shrewsbury**

Both stakeholders supported the expansion of SFRS' District Development Teams. They fully appreciated the difficulties involved in managing RDS crews as well as *the need for effective training to be signed-off for a range of incidents... There has to be a lot of on-the-job training.* As such, they were pleased to approve any improvements proposed by SFRS.

One stakeholder was particularly keen to endorse any measures to improve the retained service because of the potential impact of recession-induced factory closures on SFRS' ability to recruit and retain RDS firefighters. They felt that if the economic situation has had such an effect, any service improvements will be of great benefit in attracting others to serve.



The only issue on which participants felt they required more information was *where* [the District Development Teams] *are to be based*.



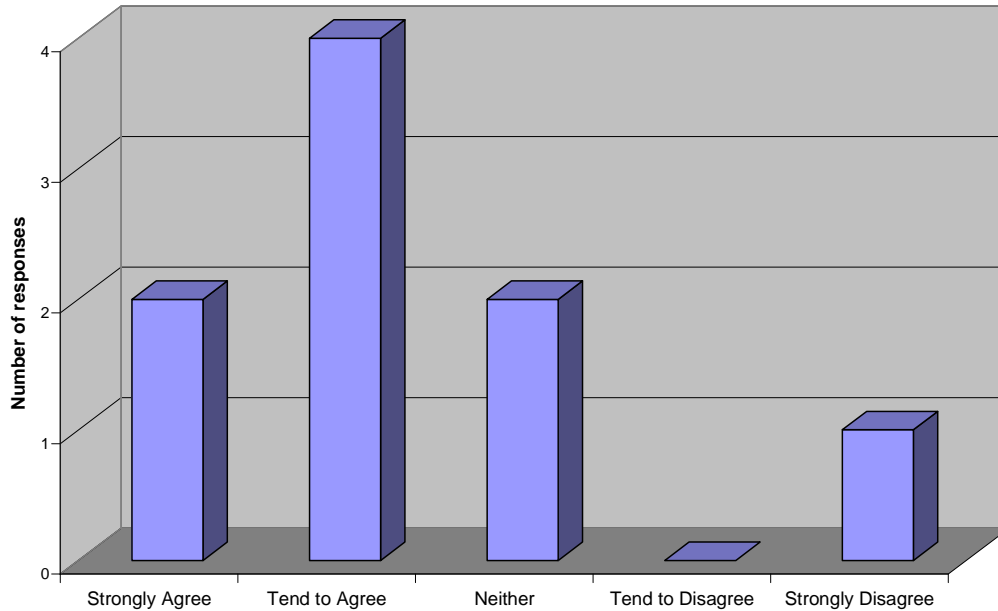
b. To reduce the Wholetime Ridership Factor

Questionnaire Response

Although 66% of people who responded to the questionnaire agree with this proposal, and 11% disagreed, there was overwhelming support for reducing Wholetime ridership factor and re-investing the savings into the District Development Teams from those members of the public and stakeholders that attended the scrutiny and forum panels. The panel members see this proposal as improving efficiency, whilst at the same time meeting an important need within the Service.

| Ridership Factor | Count | Total % |
|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 22 |
| Agree | 4 | 44 |
| Neither | 2 | 22 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 11 |
| Total | 9 | 100 |

Do you agree with the proposal to reduce Wholetime Ridership Factor



Comments from the ORS Forums

- Public Forum - Shrewsbury**

Following a thorough discussion of the issues, all participants at Shrewsbury endorsed the reduction in the Ridership Factor, primarily because it represents greater efficiency and the opportunity to reinvest resources into the strongly supported enhancement of the District Development Teams.



In fact, all three break-out groups supported the reinvestment of the released resources into the District Development Teams rather than reducing the burden on the taxpayer by realising financial savings.

The only concern expressed at Shrewsbury was whether there will be *insufficient contingency in staff levels to cover for an unforeseen emergency*.

- **Public Forum - Ludlow**

Two of the three Ludlow break-out groups feared that a reduction in the numbers of full-time firefighters at Shrewsbury could result in increased stress levels (and, in turn, sickness) amongst those remaining at the station.

Participants in one group were *confident in the ability of management to monitor this*. Those in the other suggested that SFRS take a phased approach to the proposal by *moving one person in the first instance and monitoring the situation*. This, they felt, would enable the service to observe whether or not the proposal is having an adverse impact on firefighters' stress levels prior to its full implementation.

Another concern for one group was the potential for industrial action, given that *if it's happening in Shropshire it may be happening elsewhere...it could become a bigger topic for debate which may lead to industrial action*.

Ultimately, and despite the concerns noted above, the Ludlow forum trusted the judgment of SFRS' officers on this issue and endorsed the proposal on the grounds that *if they think it's a good thing then we're sure it is*. Further, participants acknowledged (and were pleased) that the proposal would ultimately benefit them as recipients of RDS cover from Ludlow Fire Station – if, of course, the resultant savings are reinvested into the District Development Teams:

When considering how to use the resources released by the Ridership Factor reductions at Shrewsbury, fifteen of the seventeen Ludlow participants preferred to see SFRS reinvesting the resources into the District Development Teams. The remaining two participants did not wish to see any changes made to the whole-time service.

- **Stakeholder Forum - Shrewsbury**

Both stakeholders ultimately supported the proposal, particularly if the savings made are reinvested into the expansion of the District Development Teams. In fact, one stakeholder had visited their local (RDS) fire station and reported how the firefighters there *were very positive about all of this. They could see the benefits for them in terms of training. They had no problems at all*. This had reassured the participant about the merits of the proposal.

There was a great deal of trust in the Service to *continue to get the right number on each fire engine*. Whilst there was some concern that the proposal would impact upon SFRS' ability to crew its appliances in the event of, say, a



Swine Flu outbreak, it was acknowledged that the Service cannot *plan all its crewing around that*.

The stakeholders could not foresee any vehement opposition to the proposal from the general public – providing it is explained in the context of efficiency and value for money. They did stress, however, that SFRS should provide as many people as possible with as much information as possible about the proposal - particularly given that the local press is apt to take a somewhat sensationalist viewpoint towards changes to fire cover:



c. To consolidate Aerial Ladder Platform cover in Telford.

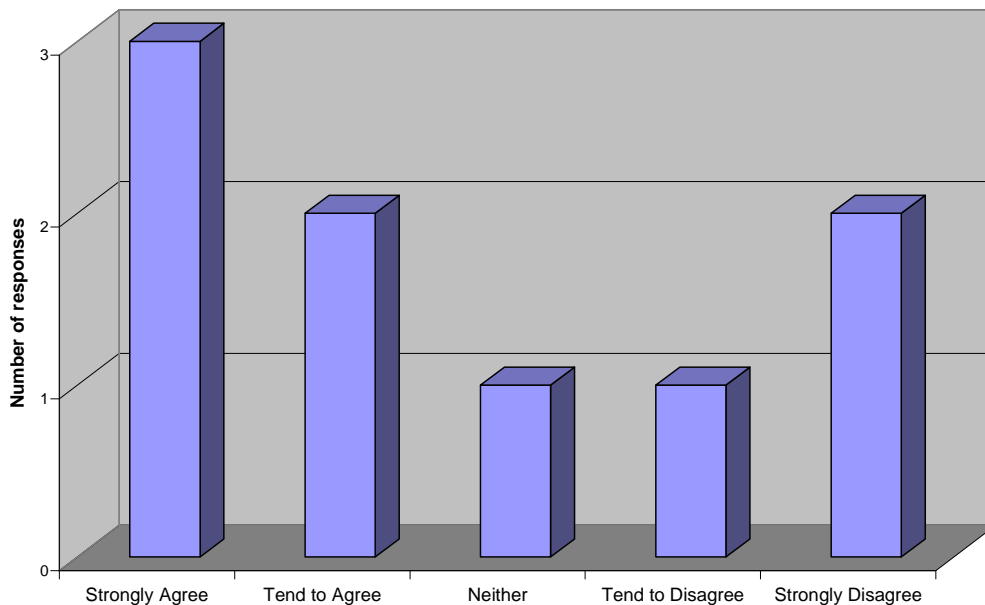
Overall Response

With 55% in favour of the proposal and 33% against, the questionnaires show that, based solely on the information contained in the IRMP Proposal Document, a small majority of people agree with the proposal to consolidate ALP cover in Telford.

The public and stakeholder panels were able to discuss both the initial proposal to consolidate ALP cover in Telford, as well as the alternative that had been raised through consultation with staff, that cover should be concentrated in Shrewsbury. Following a lot of discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of both options, both of the public panels and the stakeholder panel agreed that the Shrewsbury option appeared to be the most effective option. All panels agreed that there was very little difference between the two options, with the Shrewsbury option generally being preferred because it meant that both ALPs could be located on the same station without the need to do any additional building works.

| ALP Location | Count | Total % |
|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 33 |
| Agree | 2 | 22 |
| Neither | 1 | 11 |
| Disagree | 1 | 11 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 22 |
| Total | 9 | 100 |

Do you agree with the proposal to consolidate ALP cover at Telford



Comments from the ORS Forums

- **Public Forum - Shrewsbury**

All three Shrewsbury sub-groups fully supported the consolidation of the ALPs in one location – with an overwhelming majority expressing a clear preference for Shrewsbury (only one participant described themselves as unsure about the relative merits of Shrewsbury and Telford following a great deal of discussion in their break-out group). The general consensus was that both ALPs should be located at the same station and the primary reason for choosing Shrewsbury over Telford was financial; that is, the £25,000 cost to extend the garaging at Telford would be avoided.

One sub-group endorsed the Shrewsbury option because of the *nature of the buildings in Shrewsbury...vulnerable and dangerous wooden frame buildings that are difficult to access without the ALP. These are irreplaceable and you don't find buildings like this in Telford.*

The Shrewsbury participants also supported the relocation of the Incident Response Unit (IRU) to Telford for two reasons - firstly, that it will *reduce the competencies required at Shrewsbury* (if ALP provision is consolidated there) and secondly that, strategically, the IRU is better located at Telford.

- **Public Forum - Ludlow**

Whilst acknowledging that the options are very finely balanced, all three Ludlow groups ultimately favoured the consolidation of SFRS' ALP provision at Shrewsbury – primarily for financial reasons.

One break-out group did not feel that the ALP should be the focal point of this proposal, believing instead that at least equal weight should be given to the location of the IRU. Participants were strongly of the view that this appliance should move to Telford, as this *reduces the competencies required at Shrewsbury and fits with the 'strategic' planning of the use of the IRU.*

This same group also considered that it may be *too early to judge this situation definitively* given that possible impending financial pressures may result in the need to explore other options.

- **Stakeholder Forum - Shrewsbury**

The stakeholders agreed that the decision to consolidate ALP provision at either Shrewsbury or Telford is very finely balanced. However, participants ultimately inclined towards Shrewsbury because *they might as well have them in one place and the Shrewsbury proposal is neater.* Further, they strongly supported the relocation of the IRU at Telford (in conjunction with the consolidation of ALP provision at Shrewsbury) on the basis that this would balance the distribution of specialist training skills across the Service and that this appliance would be better located at Telford *in the event of a threat.*



Participants were also swayed by financial considerations (that is, the £25,000 cost of improving garage provision for the spare ALP at Telford), as well as the high-rise buildings at the hospital site in Shrewsbury.

There was again some concern amongst participants about how the proposal will be perceived by the general public. That is, they suggested that one or other town may feel that it is 'losing' its ALP if the consolidation is approved – which would be compounded by a lack of knowledge that the ALP does not routinely respond to every incident, but is called in by crews on a needs basis. It was argued that for people who are not aware of this information, *it would seem like losing a fire engine* – a concern that could again be fuelled by sensationalist reporting in the local press.



Comments received from the questionnaires on all proposals

- The additional support to be provided in the development of retained staff is welcome as they are a crucial part of the whole service especially in the rural areas. However, the council questions whether the availability of DDT members, at what would inevitably be short notice, would guarantee adequate replacement cover for the reduction in numbers of full time fire fighters across all areas of operation. The sources of finance for this proposal include efficiency savings from other service areas and if these savings arise form a reduction in full time staff as proposed in the changes to ridership factor then that would be a cause for concern. The consultation document states that wholetime staffing levels could be reduced by 8 without impacting on response capability, however it does not explain how that can be achieved without increasing the risk to remaining staff in providing that response. If the proposal is for a reduction from say 9 to 8 on the first appliance in attendance on each call out i.e. the XL-cab appliance crew levels, then we would ask what back up support is available if required urgently at the incident being attended or indeed elsewhere. Overall the Council is concerned that a reduction in wholetime staff would harm the capability to respond effectively to major incidents. The consultation document suggests that one ALP will be placed at TC and that there will be one parked, but un-crewed, at SY. That is acceptable provided that it can be taken to any incident if there is a breakdown on the TC ALP and that the crew can be mobilised quickly from TC to man it. The proposals also suggest that there will be less qualified ALP operatives available at any time. Whilst there are reciprocal cross boundary ALP and other appliance support from neighbouring Fire Authorities already in place, the response times would be far greater. Has there been a risk analysis carried out into increased attendance times at SFRS taking into account the specific nature of buildings which would require ALP attendance in both principal towns.
- Thank you for the copy of your authorities IRMP for 2010/11 and initial response has already been made by the Trust's Fire Advisors on the pro-forma provided in the consultation document; however after receiving additional information from your IRMP team in response to specific questions posed by the trusts fire advisors I wish to expand the response on behalf of the Trust. A 30 metre aerial appliance has been based at Shrewsbury fire Station since the early 1970's. The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital was built in the mid 1970's and has always benefited from the protection of an aerial appliance being stationed locally. Until the late 1980's the aerial appliance was routinely sent to all fire calls reported as originating in the main hospital building. Information supplied to the trusts fire advisers by your staff indicates that SFRS contingency planning has identified fire scenarios where it considers the intervention of an aerial appliance would be advantageous such as, fires involving roofs and roof based plant. The trusts fire advisers deal with fire related issues at RSH on a daily basis; they were very surprised that the potential benefits of early intervention by an aerial appliance in tackling a developing fire in the ward areas of our multi-story ward block does not seem to have been considered by your staff as part of your contingency planning. As you are aware this trust strives to reduce the



risk from fire to a level as low as reasonably practicable. You will recall that the RSH site was assessed as 'broadly compliant' within the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 when audited by your staff in August 2009; however the trusts fire advisors consider this type of incident to present a realistic scenario for operational contingency planning, particularly noting that just such an incident occurred in Warrington Hospital in May 2002. It is their opinion that early intervention by an aerial appliance at this type of incident would be crucial to a successful outcome. I consider that the withdrawal of the aerial appliance from Shrewsbury Fire Station and its relocation to Telford Central Fire Station would considerably reduce the level of service that your organisation provides to the trust. On behalf of the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust I urge you to retain a fully operational aerial appliance at Shrewsbury Fire Station.

- I feel the location of the ALP being moved the far end of the County, is this good for the people of Shropshire, i.e. when this special piece of kit is required being far end of the county will slow down the response to the incident.
- While it is appropriate to always look to provide a more efficient service (and a requirement in these days of audits and performance reviews), the cost of the FRS for Shropshire is not excessive or a burden on the tax payer. Any financial savings realised through efficiency should, I believe, be reinvested in supporting and developing the operational capabilities of the Service. Providing the changes in ridership do not impact on front line service delivery, compromise fire-fighter safety, or affect the availability of fire-fighter to maintain their competence, I would support this action subject to the above caveat on reinvestment. The consolidation of the aerial appliance at Telford would seem to be a logical step to both maintain the availability of these appliances and the operator competency and I would support this action.

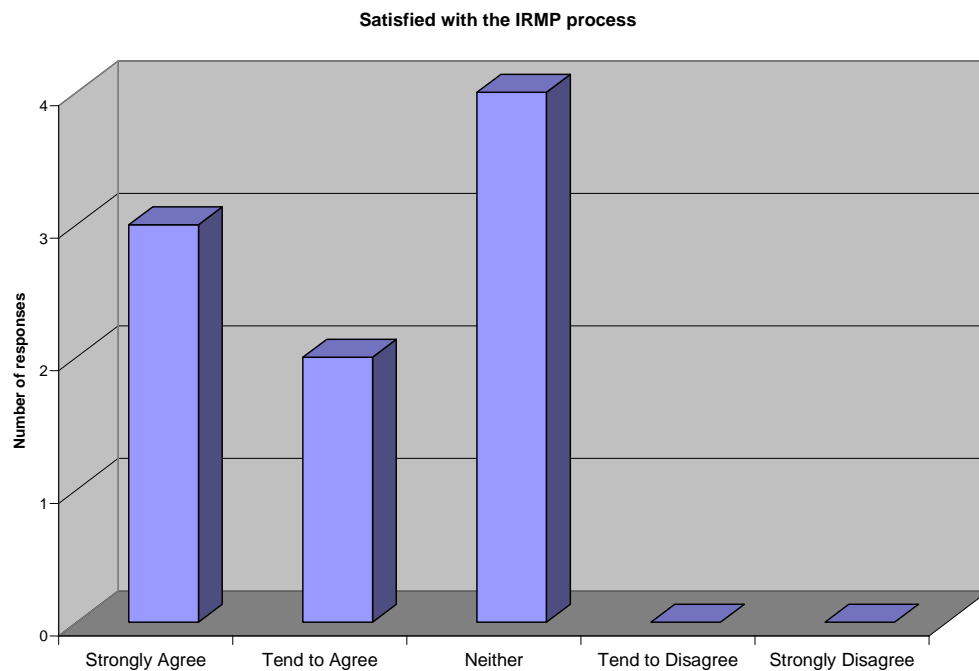


4. I am satisfied with the IRMP consultation process.

Questionnaire Response

Those that expressed an opinion stated that they were satisfied with the Authority's IRMP Consultation process, with no one saying they were dissatisfied.

| Consultation Satisfaction | Count | Total % |
|---------------------------|-------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 33 |
| Agree | 2 | 22 |
| Neither | 4 | 44 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 100 |



Comments Received

- I find the online consultation process simple and easy to follow and would commend its continued use, and where possible, expansion into other areas that you may wish to conduct consultations
- The Council would like to have had more detailed information regarding the reduction in manpower proposals including information about the risk assessment that must have been undertaken and the views of operational staff.



IRMP Members Working Group Consultation Response

The IRMP Members Working Group is very grateful to the stakeholder organisations and members of the public that have contributed to this consultation process. The feedback that has been received has been extremely perceptive and constructive and will help to inform the projects that will be undertaken as a consequence of the IRMP Action Plan 2010/11.

The Working Group note the public and stakeholder support for the proposals contained in its IRMP Proposal document. Members also note the comments relating to the difficulty for stakeholders to make an informed opinion on the proposals, purely based upon the IRMP Proposals Document. The Fire Authority is very conscious of the amount of information it includes in its consultation documents, always trying to balance the level of detail it gives, on often very technical issues, against the ease of reading for all interested stakeholders. It has found that there is great benefit from the Public and Stakeholder Panels, where people have the opportunity to question Officers and Members on the proposals, before giving their opinions on those proposals.

The Fire Authority would encourage all interested stakeholders to attend future consultation sessions. This will be especially important over the next twelve months, when the Fire Authority will need to explore potentially more significant changes to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, as it prepares itself for the economically difficult times that are likely to be facing all public services over the next few years.



Annex – Opinion Research Services’ Report on Public Scrutiny Panels and Stakeholder Forums



SHROPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Report of consultation on the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan Proposed Actions 2010/11



Opinion Research Services

Spin-out Company of the
University of Wales Swansea

SHROPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Report of Three Scrutiny Forums with the Public and Stakeholders about the Integrated Risk Management Plan Proposed Actions 2010/2011

Opinion Research Services Ltd
The Strand, Swansea, SA1 1AF

Tel: (01792) 535300
Fax: (01792) 535301
E-mail: info@ors.org.uk

© Copyright 2009 Opinion Research Services Ltd

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| ORS Project Team | 4 |
| Acknowledgements and Preamble..... | 5 |
| Introduction..... | 6 |
| Introduction | 6 |
| Inclusiveness and Representativeness | 6 |
| Conduct of the Forums – Informed Opinions..... | 7 |
| Open Reporting..... | 8 |
| Organisation of the Report | 9 |
| Report of Discussions | 10 |
| Introduction | 10 |
| Main Findings..... | 11 |
| District Development Teams | 11 |
| The Proposal..... | 11 |
| Public Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 11 |
| Public Forum: Ludlow | 12 |
| Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 13 |
| Changes to Ridership Factor..... | 13 |
| The Proposal..... | 13 |
| Public Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 16 |
| Public Forum: Ludlow | 14 |
| Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 15 |
| Aerial Ladder Platform Location..... | 16 |
| The Proposal..... | 16 |
| Public Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 16 |
| Public Forum: Ludlow | 17 |
| Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury..... | 17 |
| Conclusions | 19 |
| Overall Balance of Opinion..... | 16 |

Project Design and Management

Kelly Lock

Fieldwork Management

Kirsty Millbank

Chris Small

Scrutiny Forum Facilitation

Dale Hall

Kelly Lock

Report Authors

Dale Hall

Kelly Lock

Acknowledgements and Preamble

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority (SWF&RA) in facilitating their Public and Stakeholder Scrutiny Forums for the sixth successive year – and we trust that this independent report of findings will inform the consultation outcomes surrounding the Authority's draft *Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Proposed Actions 2010/2011*.

We thank SFRS for commissioning the project as part of an ongoing programme of consultation. We particularly thank those involved in preparing, presenting and clarifying information during the sessions – namely Paul Raymond (Chief Fire Officer), Andy Johnson (Head of Risk Management) and Andy Perry (Integrated Risk Manager). We are also pleased that members of the Fire and Rescue Authority attended the meetings, including Stuart West (Chair) and David Minnery (Vice Chair). Their attendance and enthusiastic engagement with small discussion groups within the forums helped to ensure an informed debate.

We are very grateful to all those who took part in the interesting meetings and shared their views with us. They were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions.

At all stages of the project, ORS' status as an independent organisation consulting the public and stakeholders as objectively as possible was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute usefully to thinking about the Service's development.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 On the basis of its experience of IRMP consultation across the UK and its status as the sole approved supplier of research and consultation services under the Fire Services Consultation Association National Framework Contract, ORS was commissioned to facilitate and report three important half-day Scrutiny Forums for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).
- 2 The forums were convened to discuss important proposals in SFRS' draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Proposed Actions 2010/2011. Two forums included members of the public while the third included invited stakeholders. It was agreed that ORS would work in collaboration with SFRS to facilitate the discussions and prepare an independent report of people's opinions.
- 3 All the meetings were held during November 2009. The key proposals on which people were consulted were as follows:

- Enhancement of District Development Teams
- Changes to the Ridership Factor
- Aerial Ladder Platform Location

INCLUSIVENESS AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

Public Scrutiny Forums

- 4 Two half-day Scrutiny Forums were held with members of the public in Shrewsbury and Ludlow – the details of which can be seen in the table below.

| Panel | Number of Attendees |
|--|---------------------|
| Shrewsbury (4 th October 2009, Lord Hill Hotel) | 17 |
| Ludlow (5 th October 2009, Ludlow Conference Centre) | 17 |

- 5 Of the 34 attendees across the two forums, fourteen had previously attended a similar event for one or more years, whereas twenty were new recruits.
- 6 Participants were invited by ORS and paid for their trouble and expenses in attending and taking part in lengthy and detailed meetings. Previous participants were invited via letters and

follow-up telephone calls, whereas 'fresh' panellists were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre. Having been initially contacted by phone, they were then written to – to confirm the invitation and the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is the most effective way of ensuring that all the participants are independently recruited.

- 7 Overall, the forums achieved a wide cross-section of men and women by drawing participants from different areas and by including people with diverse backgrounds and ages. Across the two events, participants' ages were as follows: 18-34 (10 participants); 35-54 (8 participants) and 55+ (16 participants). They were also varied in respect to gender (17 males and 17 females) and social grade. While the 34 participants cannot be described as a statistical sample, they reflected the diverse populations of Shrewsbury and Ludlow – and so a wide range of people had the opportunity to scrutinise SFRS' proposals in detail.
- 8 Because the participants were diverse in terms of gender, age, socio-economic and professional status, housing tenure and other criteria, we are satisfied that the forums are soundly indicative of how public opinion in Shropshire would incline on the basis of similar information and discussions. In summary, the meetings are reliable guides to the opinions of diverse informed people reacting to SFRS' IRMP proposals.

Stakeholder Forum

- 9 SFRS also invited many of their stakeholders to two half-day consultation forums – one in Shrewsbury and the other in Ludlow. Two stakeholders attended the former and, unfortunately, none attended the latter. Whilst the attendance was not as high as SFRS would have liked, the Shrewsbury meeting worked well in achieving informed and considered debate.

CONDUCT OF THE FORUMS – INFORMED OPINIONS

- 10 Extensive information was provided at the forums – as the basis for participants to understand, question and debate the issues fully. In order to make the forums as informed as possible, SFRS prepared a detailed and comprehensive PowerPoint presentation about the content, meaning and implications of its IRMP. Overall, the presentation covered the following range of issues:

The meaning and background to *integrated risk management*

Challenges (particularly financial) facing SFRS

SFRS' draft proposals in detail

Enhancement of District Development Teams

Changes to the Ridership Factor

Aerial Ladder Platform Location

11 The forums began with the aforementioned detailed and informative presentation by SFRS to provide respondents with a substantial context of information as a basis to consider the proposals. This approach was used for several main reasons:

Members of the public are typically poorly informed about how the fire and rescue service operates and is managed; and they normally have little idea of how risk is determined

The challenge was not to ask people's general impressions of the fire and rescue service, but rather to scrutinise proposals – so the forum needed to focus on them and the reasons for them

The prospect of changes to the fire and rescue service is typically controversial and so it was important to provide a deliberative framework within which people could consider the issues clearly.

12 The forums were then given the opportunity to ask questions and seek points of clarification, before dividing into small groups and considering the proposals in some detail. Finally, there was a plenary session where the groups fed-back their findings to other attendees.

13 The consultation process should be considered as 'testing' the acceptability of the conclusions of the Plan – by presenting its principles and proposals clearly for discussion. The key questions the researchers were asking were:

If the Forum members are informed of the background to, and arguments for, specific proposals, how convincing do they find them?

What do they think of the proposal to enhance the District Development Teams?

What do they think of the proposed changes to the Ridership Factor?

What do they think of the proposal to consolidate SFRS' Aerial Ladder Platform provision in one location?

Overall, do the proposals seem reasonable?

Are there any public or stakeholder concerns that have been overlooked in the IRMP?

14 The presentation and briefing material prepared by SFRS for the public was both informative and fair, in the opinion of ORS.

OPEN REPORTING

15 The forums were conducted using ORS' open reporting techniques – in which not only the stimulus material but evolving questions and discussions are recorded in real time in PowerPoint on a screen for all participants to see as the discussion proceeds. This approach ensures clarity of interpretation and allows those expressing points to check the accuracy of the reporting. The final balance of opinion is also reported clearly on the screen before the meeting ends; and people are asked about the fairness of the discussions and reporting.

ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

- 16 This is a concise report of lengthy meetings, which reviews the sentiments and judgements of participants about SFRS's Integrated Risk Management Plan Proposed Actions 2010/11.
- 17 Some verbatim quotations are used, not in order to endorse them, but to illustrate different points of view vividly. While quotations are used, the report is not just a transcript of the discussions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants - but, while summarising the main themes and highlighting the key points, this report seeks to be faithful to what was said.
- 18 Direct quotations always appear in *italics* (but without quotation marks).

INTRODUCTION

19 This chapter is arranged in the following sequence:

Scrutiny of Enhancements to District Development Teams

The Proposal

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

Public Forum: Ludlow

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

Balance of Opinion

Scrutiny of Changes to Ridership Factor

The Proposal

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

Public Forum: Ludlow

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

Balance of Opinion

The Proposal

Scrutiny of Aerial Ladder Platform Location

The Proposal

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

Public Forum: Ludlow

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

Balance of Opinion

Conclusions

Overall balance of opinion

MAIN FINDINGS

District Development Teams

The Proposal

20 SFRS proposes to enhance its District Development Teams from two officers per area to four.

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

21 Initially, participants asked a number of clarification questions about how the proposal to double the size of the District Development Teams would work in practice – particularly in relation to working patterns, roles and responsibilities and the potential for flexibility:

How long do the existing support officers work each week?

So you mean that the eight people now are firefighters, but the other eight will be full-time management?

How many people would the four teams of four be responsible for?

Would there be flexibility across the four districts?

22 Ultimately, all three Shrewsbury break-out groups strongly supported the enhancement of SFRS' District Development Teams. Participants felt that the change would result in substantial benefits for the service and its RDS staff, chiefly in respect to better training and qualifications, career prospects, confidence and morale – resulting in the easier recruitment and improved retention of retained firefighters:

Better training and advancement of retained personnel

Any promotion prospects are good for morale

It will give the staff more confidence and proof of assurance

A much better trained and qualified retained workforce supported by wider certification

Will improve RDS personnel generally and retention

If this happens, you will recruit more easily if people will be trained.

23 The fact that the proposal will enable SFRS' RDS to gain a nationally-recognised qualification (in the form of something similar to a NVQ) was also considered to be a significant benefit in terms of general recognition, transferable skills and professional mobility:

It's great the retained staff will get a nationally recognised-qualification like an NVQ. If ever they do want to move on elsewhere this will be transferable

This system will enable the RDS to demonstrate their training achievements to potential employers.

24 It was also suggested that being able to certify the training and development of RDS staff will help SFRS with potential litigation in the event of casualties in that the service will be able to prove that its firefighters are trained to the highest possible standard.

25 Participants were particularly satisfied that the proposal appears to be *supported by the workforce and unions*.

26 The only slight concern - expressed by one of the small working groups – was the *difficulty that may be experienced in finding the time for training for retained staff*.

Public Forum: Ludlow

27 As at Shrewsbury, participants at Ludlow asked questions about how the proposal would work in practice – this time around...

What will the new additional pairs do compared with what the current pairs do?

28 All three of the Ludlow break-out groups wholly supported the enhancement of SFRS' District Development Teams. Participants foresaw real benefits for RDS staff in relation to training, development and morale – as well as corresponding improvements to public and firefighter safety:

[There is a] real benefit in obtaining great competencies

This will help to bolster the self-esteem, reputation and the image of retained firefighters

Increased training for retained firefighters would benefit both firefighters and the public.

29 Further, given that the vast majority of Shropshire (including Ludlow) is covered by the retained service, participants felt that any improvement to this service would be to the advantage to the county's communities:

Shropshire's reliance on the retained service surely means that any proposal which could boost their morale and spread the resources more equally is going to be of benefit

Towns such as Ludlow will benefit from the improved status of the retained fire service.

30 Participants agreed with their Shrewsbury counterparts in that they were particularly encouraged that *the union supports the proposal*.

31 There was a very slight concern about the cost implications of the proposal (and thus the potential for Council Tax rises) in one of the Ludlow sub-groups, although participants in another took the view that *Council Tax issues involving pennies should not be used as an argument to reduce service quality* and that people should not begrudge paying slightly more for a better service.

32 One of the break-out groups questioned *the cost comparison between providing this training locally versus sending people to national training centres* and argued that the current financial environment may add impetus to *looking at a national fire service framework for the*

assessment of training and development...and looking at national or regional training initiatives.

- 33 This same group also suggested that SFRS must explain this proposal to people in real terms; that is, *how is it really being used as a benefit?* Examples given in this context were that improved certification should enable the service to...

Demonstrate greater confidence in the evidence given in court...with specific examples and evidence of corporate responsibility and health and safety gains and collect statistics on how employers have benefited...how firefighters have used the NVQ in their place of work.

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

- 34 Both stakeholders supported the expansion of SFRS' District Development Teams. They fully appreciated the difficulties involved in managing RDS crews as well as *the need for effective training to be signed-off for a range of incidents... There has to be a lot of on-the-job training.* As such, they were pleased to approve any improvements proposed by SFRS.

- 35 One stakeholder was particularly keen to endorse any measures to improve the retained service because of the potential impact of recession-induced factory closures on SFRS' ability to recruit and retain RDS firefighters. They felt that if the economic situation has had such an effect, any service improvements will be of great benefit in attracting others to serve.

- 36 The only issue on which participants felt they required more information was *where* [the District Development Teams] *are to be based.*

Changes to Ridership Factor

The Proposal

- 37 SFRS proposes to reduce its wholetime staffing levels at Shrewsbury Fire Station by eight firefighters and either reinvest the savings to enhance its District Development Teams or realise financial savings for the taxpayers and residents of Shropshire – although participants were also given the option to support 'no change to the wholetime service'.

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

- 38 Participants at Shrewsbury asked a number of initial questions about the proposal to reduce the Ridership Factor at Shrewsbury Fire Station. They sought clarification on the nature of the District Development Officer role, how the additional officers will be recruited, the views of the FBU on the proposal and whether such a change has been implemented elsewhere:

Would the transferred officers still be operational or would they be just training officers?

Will the transferred officers be recruited internally?

What does the FBU think of this?

Has this been done before?

- 39 One participant questioned *why do all the eight have to come from Shrewsbury?*
- 40 The only concern expressed at Shrewsbury was whether there will be *insufficient contingency in staff levels to cover for an unforeseen emergency.*
- 41 One participant was candid in assessing the relative merits of wholetime and RDS firefighters; they felt that the latter are inevitably somewhat inferior, given their less comprehensive training and development programmes. The person questioned whether it is *worthwhile to transfer wholetime resources into the RDS* and sought reassurance that *the full-time firefighters' experience and training will not be wasted* in doing so. It should, however, be stressed that this was a minority view and not echoed by other participants at the forum.
- 42 Following a thorough discussion of the issues, all participants at Shrewsbury endorsed the reduction in the Ridership Factor at Shrewsbury Fire Station, primarily because it represents greater efficiency and the opportunity to reinvest resources into the strongly supported enhancement of the District Development Teams. Some typical comments were that this:

Increases the efficient use of finance and staff

Saves money by going from 1.46 to 1.39 Ridership Factor

Means we would lose the eight full-time firefighters but have better RDS firefighters available.

In fact, all three break-out groups supported the reinvestment of the released resources into the District Development Teams rather than reducing the burden on the taxpayer by realising financial savings.

Public Forum: Ludlow

- 43 Participants in Ludlow initially sought to establish the views of SFRS' wholetime firefighters and the FBU on the proposal:

How do the full-time firefighters feel about the reduction in their numbers?

How do the unions feel about this?

They were reassured and encouraged to hear that the FBU is supportive of the service in its effort to find efficiencies in this way.

- 44 Two of the three Ludlow break-out groups feared that a reduction in the numbers of full-time firefighters at Shrewsbury could result in increased stress levels (and, in turn, sickness) amongst those remaining at the station:

There is a danger that if you reduce the service to minimum personnel levels there is a risk of increased pressure and stress in staff and therefore sickness which in turn makes the public more at risk

We have concerns about increased stress levels in full-time firefighters.

Participants in one group were *confident in the ability of management to monitor this*. Those in the other suggested that SFRS take a phased approach to the proposal by *moving one person in the first instance and monitoring the situation*. This, they felt, would enable the service to observe whether or not the proposal is having an adverse impact on firefighters' stress levels prior to its full implementation.

45 Another concern for one group was the potential for industrial action, given that *if it's happening in Shropshire it may be happening elsewhere...it could become a bigger topic for debate which may lead to industrial action*.

46 Ultimately, and despite the concerns noted above, the Ludlow forum trusted the judgment of SFRS' officers on this issue and endorsed the proposal on the grounds that *if they think it's a good thing then we're sure it is*. Further, participants acknowledged (and were pleased) that the proposal would ultimately benefit them as recipients of RDS cover from Ludlow Fire Station – if, of course, the resultant savings are reinvested into the District Development Teams:

Is it not common sense for us to support this in order to protect and enhance our retained firefighters and local fire cover?

47 When considering how to use the resources released by the Ridership Factor reductions at Shrewsbury, fifteen of the seventeen Ludlow participants preferred to see SFRS reinvesting the resources into the District Development Teams. The remaining two participants did not wish to see any changes made to the wholetime service.

48 It should be noted here that one of the small groups at Ludlow found the concept of efficiency savings somewhat difficult to grasp. Participants claimed to find it *initially obscure to fathom what are real gains in efficiency savings*, although they were ultimately satisfied that there are indeed gains to be made by altering the Ridership Factor at Shrewsbury. They certainly felt that this is a matter that *needs explanation* in the case of the general public.

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

49 The Shrewsbury stakeholders asked a number of questions about SFRS' proposed changes to the Ridership Factor at Shrewsbury Fire Station, particularly in relation to the duties of the firefighters at Shrewsbury, the amount SFRS spends on overtime payments currently and whether a reduction in the Ridership factor would affect SFRS' ability to guarantee five-four crewing:

What do the 15 firefighters crew at Shrewsbury now?

How much do you spend on overtime now?

If this is done, will you keep guaranteed five-four crewing?

50 Both stakeholders ultimately supported the proposal, particularly if the savings made are reinvested into the expansion of the District Development Teams. In fact, one stakeholder had visited their local (RDS) fire station and reported how the firefighters there *were very positive*

about all of this. They could see the benefits for them in terms of training. They had no problems at all. This had reassured the participant about the merits of the proposal.

51 There was a great deal of trust in the Service to *continue to get the right number on each fire engine*. Whilst there was some concern that the proposal would impact upon SFRS' ability to crew its appliances in the event of, say, a Swine Flu outbreak, it was acknowledged that the Service cannot *plan all its crewing around that*.

52 The stakeholders could not foresee any vehement opposition to the proposal from the general public – providing it is explained in the context of efficiency and value for money:

It's acceptable; making sure you are down to the limit in terms of staff and using overtime to plug the gaps. It should be more acceptable than saying 'we're going to take more firefighters on and you're going to have to pay more in your Council Tax!'

Firefighters have had a bad press in the past...sleeping at night and playing pool. So this sounds perfectly reasonable in terms of efficiency.

They did stress, however, that SFRS should provide as many people as possible with as much information as possible about the proposal - particularly given that the local press is apt to take a somewhat sensationalist viewpoint towards changes to fire cover:

These sorts of proposals can be sensationalised in the press...cuts to fire stations and firefighters!

These things can always get bad publicity and the reporting of these matters can be very controversial.

Aerial Ladder Platform Location

The Proposal

53 SFRS proposes to consolidate its ALP provision at one location – Shrewsbury or Telford.

Public Forum: Shrewsbury

54 All three Shrewsbury sub-groups fully supported the consolidation of the ALPs in one location – with an overwhelming majority expressing a clear preference for Shrewsbury (only one participant described themselves as unsure about the relative merits of Shrewsbury and Telford following a great deal of discussion in their break-out group). The general consensus was that both ALPS should be located at the same station and the primary reason for choosing Shrewsbury over Telford was financial; that is, the £25,000 cost to extend the garaging at Telford would be avoided:

Bring the ALPs to Shrewsbury and save money for training and equipment

Shrewsbury is cheaper...no loss of £25,000.

55 One sub-group endorsed the Shrewsbury option because of the *nature of the buildings in Shrewsbury...vulnerable and dangerous wooden frame buildings that are difficult to access without the ALP. These are irreplaceable and you don't find buildings like this in Telford.*

56 The Shrewsbury participants also supported the relocation of the Incident Response Unit (IRU) to Telford for two reasons - firstly, that it will *reduce the competencies required at Shrewsbury* (if ALP provision is consolidated there) and secondly that, strategically, the IRU is better located at Telford:

Could it help with the West Midlands if the IRU was based in Telford?

57 Only one alternative suggestion was made at the Shrewsbury forum, where one participant proposed the following:

If you alternate the ALPs, why don't you just move one crew around with the ALP? Would this be an alternative to putting them on the same station?

Public Forum: Ludlow

58 Whilst acknowledging that the options are very finely balanced, all three Ludlow groups ultimately favoured the consolidation of SFRS' ALP provision at Shrewsbury – primarily for financial reasons:

Prefer consolidation of ALP at Shrewsbury to save the £25,000.

Indeed, one group was particularly keen to stress that *although there is the £4,000 cost for training, £21,000 is a lot of money to re-invest where it is needed in other areas.*

59 Only one Ludlow participant would prefer to see the ALP located at Telford *due to the types of industries involved there* - chemical factories and power plants for example:

Are there not chemical industries near Telford where the ALPs might be an important resource? Would the ALP be useful there? The issues for me are the types of incidents in factories in Telford and the risk management for the power station in Telford.

60 One break-out group did not feel that the ALP should be the focal point of this proposal, believing instead that at least equal weight should be given to the location of the IRU. Participants were strongly of the view that this appliance should move to Telford, as this *reduces the competencies required at Shrewsbury and fits with the 'strategic' planning of the use of the IRU.*

61 This same group also considered that it may be *too early to judge this situation definitively* given that possible impending financial pressures may result in the need to explore other options.

Stakeholder Forum: Shrewsbury

- 62 Initial questions asked by the Shrewsbury stakeholders centered around potential relocation issues for firefighters, the nature and typical location of the incidents attended by the ALP and the working patterns of specialist crews:

Do the staff who operate the ALP live in Shrewsbury? Would there be relocation issues?

How often are ALPs used as rescue platforms?

Where are the ALPs most likely to be used?

What do the specialist trained people do when they are not operational?

- 63 The stakeholders agreed that the decision to consolidate ALP provision at either Shrewsbury or Telford is very finely balanced:

[They] are all acceptable options...the advantages are so finely balanced

There is no obvious response-time advantage in either location...there's really very little to choose between the two proposals.

However, participants ultimately inclined towards Shrewsbury because *they might as well have them in one place and the Shrewsbury proposal is neater*. Further, they strongly supported the relocation of the IRU at Telford (in conjunction with the consolidation of ALP provision at Shrewsbury) on the basis that this would balance the distribution of specialist training skills across the Service and that this appliance would be better located at Telford *in the event of a threat*.

- 64 Participants were also swayed by financial considerations (that is, the £25,000 cost of improving garage provision for the spare ALP at Telford), as well as the high-rise buildings at the hospital site in Shrewsbury:

There is also the practical question of how to house the ALP at Telford; it would cost £25K to build a new garage

There is a hospital with high buildings at Shrewsbury – so the ALP could be very useful here

- 65 There was again some concern amongst participants about how the proposal will be perceived by the general public. That is, they suggested that one or other town may feel that it is 'losing' its ALP if the consolidation is approved – which would be compounded by a lack of knowledge that the ALP does not routinely respond to every incident, but is called in by crews on a needs basis. It was argued that for people who are not aware of this information, *it would seem like losing a fire engine* – a concern that could again be fuelled by sensationalist reporting in the local press.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall Balance of Opinion

- 66 It is encouraging to note that, once again, all participants actively engaged with the consultation process, carefully deliberated the issues under scrutiny and provided SFRS and SWF&RA with considerable feedback on the proposals contained within the draft IRMP Proposed Actions 2010/2011.
- 67 With regard to the proposals themselves, the balance of opinion was overwhelmingly for enhancing the existing **District Development Teams**. A few very minor concerns were expressed but, on the whole, the change was strongly endorsed by participants who foresaw significant benefits for SFRS, its RDS staff and its communities.
- 68 Reducing the **Ridership Factor** at Shrewsbury was a less straightforward issue for participants; more concerns were raised about this proposal than either of the other two. However, the overwhelming majority of participants ultimately supported the change on the grounds of greater efficiency and value for money – and most strongly advocated the reinvestment of savings into enhancing the District Development Teams.
- 69 All participants endorsed the **consolidation of SFRS' ALP provision** in one location, with most expressing a clear preference for Shrewsbury over Telford. It should also be noted that the fate of the IRU was an important consideration for participants – all of whom agreed that it should be relocated at Telford for strategic reasons, and to ensure the distribution of specialist skills and competencies across the service.
- 70 All three sessions worked well in stimulating debate and it is hoped that the feedback received proves useful to the Authority in developing a way forward for its Fire and Rescue Service. Overall, the researchers believe that the forums are good guides to how informed members of the public and stakeholders react to the proposals when they are explained within the context of the IRMP strategy and it is clear that, on the whole, participants trust the evidence and reasoning of SFRS in respect to its planning and proposals. Indeed, one of the Shrewsbury stakeholders exclaimed that they had been so persuaded by the evidence presented at the meeting that they had *moved up one box to “strongly agree” on all points in the consultation questionnaire!*

Opinion Research Services Ltd
The Strand
Swansea
SA1 1AF

Tel: (01792) 535300
Fax: (01792) 535301
E-mail: info@ors.org.uk

© Copyright 2009 Opinion Research Services Ltd