

**REPORT TO:** Safer Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Operational Director Communities

**PORTFOLIO:** Communities

**SUBJECT:** Cheshire Fire Authority Making Cheshire Safer – Integrated Risk Management Plan 2013-14 and beyond (Consultation Document)

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To inform members of the consultation document Cheshire Fire Authority Making Cheshire Safer – Integrated Risk Management Plan 2013-14 and the possible implications for Halton

### **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That:**

- The report be noted;
- Members comment on the Draft Cheshire Fire Authority Making Cheshire Safer – Integrated Risk Management Plan 2013-14 and if appropriate respond to the consultation by the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2012 deadline

### **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Cheshire Fire Service has developed a Strategy – Planning for a Safer Cheshire, setting out the approach and the direction it intends to take from 2011 – 2015. The Strategy is supported by a series of annual Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP). These publications include up to date risk information and outline how resources will be used cost effectively to reduce the potential risk to life in local communities.
- 3.2 Cheshire Fire Service has now published a draft document IRMP, which outlines the proposals for 2013–14 and beyond. With budget cuts of up to £5 million expected over the next four years, Cheshire Fire Service has carried out a fundamental review into how its frontline emergency response service could be delivered most effectively in the future.
- 3.3 A comprehensive package of options has been developed with virtually the same number of fire engines but staffed differently than now, which will enable the fire service to hit its savings targets, including estimated salary savings of between £3-5 million over the next four years.

3.4 The key principles behind the proposals include:

- Replacing the current sophisticated but complex emergency response standards with a blanket 10 minute standard for life risks - fires and road traffic collisions
- Building up to five new stations to improve response times in key areas, with two of them acting as operational hubs near key motorway junctions
- Urging partners to share facilities where practical, such as the joint project at Poynton Community Fire Station
- Reducing the number of wholetime firefighter posts on stations which have two fire engines
- Bringing in 12-hour day shifts on some stations and increasing the number of part-time or 'on-call' firefighter

#### **4.0 The Consultation Process**

4.1 The consultation runs from **24th September to 17th December 2012** and will influence important decisions around:

- Whether the proposed new stations should be built
- Which of the different options for the future crewing of specific stations should be implemented and when
- Whether the Authority should move from its current emergency response standards, to a 10 minute blanket response for incidents where lives are at risk.

#### **5.0 Costs and funding**

5.1 It costs between £1.6 and £2 million a year to run each of the six wholetime stations with two fire engines and £1 million a year for Macclesfield which has one.

5.2 Day Crewing stations cost around £700,000 a year, nucleus crewing £740,000 and On-call approximately £150,000. To make it easier to recruit and retain On-call firefighters, options to improve pay and conditions are being reviewed, as well as the impact of allowing people to live or work more than 5 minutes from the station.

5.3 The Authority's current budget is £44.1 million. As part of the moves to tackle future funding cuts it is planning to increase its Council Tax by 3.9% a year – the maximum permitted under Government guidelines, equivalent to £2.62 in 2013-14 for an average household. It is proposed that one off costs for building new stations would be met from reserves and balances or by taking out loans.

#### **6.0 Risk and Activity**

6.1 There have been reductions of over 40% in the number of incidents attended over the last seven years yet the amount of staff involved in responding to emergencies has reduced by 1%. Over the same period the number of fire engines and other response vehicles has increased.

6.2 In addition, the Service maintains the same level of emergency response in most areas 24/7 - even though there are major drops in incident numbers at night

compared to daytime. The Authority, therefore, intends to better match its resources to reflect the likely risks and activity levels.

## 7.0 Response Standards

- 7.1 The Service currently has sophisticated but complex emergency response standards setting out how quickly fire engines aim to get to incidents. It means the majority of homes in Cheshire - nearly 97% - currently have an emergency response standard between 10-21 minutes. In practice, most attendances are usually quicker.
- 7.2 The current response standard for road traffic collisions (RTCs) is 11 minutes. It intends to replace these with a blanket 10 minute standard for life risks - fires and road traffic collisions.

## 8.0 Current position across Cheshire

- 8.1 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service currently have 24 community fire stations which are staffed according to local risk and activity levels. There are:-
- **Seven wholetime stations** in the main urban areas with crews working day and night shifts to provide 24/7 cover.
  - **Five day crewing stations** in smaller urban areas with firefighters living in Authority-owned houses alongside the stations. They are on duty in the day but respond from home through a pager at night.
  - **Two nucleus crewed stations** – here firefighters work 12 hour shifts covering the period of peak activity, with “on-call” staff who live within five minutes of the station covering the rest. We are considering increasing this to 6 or 7 minutes to aid recruitment.
  - **Ten “on-call” stations** – these are in mainly rural areas, and staff - formerly known as retained firefighters - who live or work within five minutes of the station are alerted via a pager day and night.

## 9.0 Current Position in Halton

- 9.1 Halton currently has two Wholetime stations, one in **Runcorn** and one in **Widnes**. Both have two fire appliances each with fire crews working Wholetime. The current position for the each of the other Cheshire areas is set out in the summary document attached as **Appendix 1**.
- **Runcorn** has seen a 5.6% reduction in the number of attendances at incidents and has an average of 2.28 calls per day, with 70.5% dealt with by one fire engine.
  - **Widnes** has seen a 24.7% reduction in the number of attendances at incidents, with an average of 1.78 calls per day, while 68.3% of attendances are dealt with by one fire engine.

## 10.0 Proposals for Halton as part of the Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan

- 10.1 The draft Integrated Risk Management Plan puts forward a number of proposals for Halton, as set out below, with the provisional salary savings, highlighted in bold:-

### **Runcorn**

1. Remove the second fire engine entirely – **£800,000** or
2. Replace it with a ‘midi’ fire engine used during busy periods such as bonfire night – **£750,000** or
3. Change how the second fire engine is crewed from Wholetime to On-call (24/7) – **£650,000** or
4. Change its crewing to a 12 hour day shift only – **£350,000** or
5. Change its crewing to a Nucleus Crewing model (12 hour day shift and On-call at night) – **£200,000**

### **Widnes**

1. Stop crewing the second fire engine with support provided by the new station at Penketh – **£800,000**. (Proposals are set out to build a new Wholetime community fire station in Penketh, Warrington with two fire engines, the first transferred from Warrington and the second operated by on-call staff.)

- 10.2 The proposals for the each of the other Cheshire areas are set out in the summary document attached as **Appendix 1**.

## **11.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are possible policy implications, however this document is at the consultation stage and no firm decisions have been made. Any policy implications will be around the council priorities as set out below

## **12.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES**

- 12.1 There are possible implications for the Safer Halton priority. Although no firm decisions have been made, there are concerns that proposals put forward, which change how the second fire engine at Runcorn is crewed and to stop crewing the second fire engine at Widnes with support provided by the new station at Penketh, could negatively impact on the service received by Halton’s residents .

## **13.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 13.1 It is important that the council consider the consultation document and identify any areas of concern or areas where we would like to support the Fire Service’s approach, so that they can achieve budget savings whilst maintaining an effective service within Halton which meets the needs of the borough.

## **14.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

14.1 This document is at the consultation stage and no firm decisions have been made, however Cheshire Fire Service will complete an Equality Impact Assessment on any proposed changes before they are adopted.

## **15.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1072**

**Cheshire Fire Authority Making Cheshire Safer – Integrated Risk Management Plan 2013-14 and beyond**

<http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/Assets/1/IRMP-10-draft-P6-1.pdf>