

Proposal 1 - The merging of our Fire Control function with at least one other organisation

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) currently has its own Fire Control centre based in Shrewsbury. All 999 calls received by the emergency operators, requiring a response from the Fire Service, are directed to this Control centre so that the necessary information can be obtained and appropriate fire engines and other resources can be dispatched to the incident. With our call demand having reduced by more than 40% in the last 10 years and significant developments having occurred in emergency service mobilising IT systems, it should be possible to change the way we currently run this very important function to improve our current service.

SFRS is currently exploring various options to collaborate with other emergency services in the provision of a combined Control centre, capable of dealing with all emergency calls for those services. One option we are exploring at this time is a possible joint project between ourselves, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police. Although no decisions have been made yet, there is a possibility that this type of collaboration could result in the location of any joint Control Centre being outside the borders of Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. For example, in the collaboration project being explored at this time, this could see a new Control Centre being located somewhere in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire or Shropshire.

The benefits to come from such a venture would need to be clearly quantified prior to the Fire Authority agreeing to enter into such an arrangement, however it is possible that the Service could reduce the current costs of staffing its Control centre by up to half; which could amount to a reduction in its annual budget of up to **£300k**. In addition, the joint location with the Police Control operators could also see benefits from a practical level, when both organisations are responding to the same incidents.

However, the detailed impact assessment has identified a number of issues that may give cause for concern about this proposal, upon which the Fire Authority would clearly want to seek some level of assurance before it agreed to make such a change. These include:

- **Local knowledge** - Although there are IT solutions now available that can assist the emergency services in identifying where a 999 call is being received from, there are some members of our staff and the public who are concerned that they are not able to substitute the Control Operator's local knowledge, and therefore total reliance on the IT solutions could result in an incorrect decision being made about where the incident actually is – possibly delaying the attendance to the real location.
- **Large area** - Some members of the public are concerned that the area to be covered by a combined Control Centre would be too large for a single call centre to handle. Again, these concerns are, to some extent, related to being able to identify the correct location of the incident, but they are also related to the workloads of the staff working in these centres. This would be a significant consideration during the exploration stage of any possible project, with the staff numbers having a direct impact on the potential savings likely to be achieved.
- **IT resilience** - The high level of dependence on IT systems also raises some concerns amongst stakeholders, especially in relation to any detrimental impact that would follow if those IT systems were to fail. IT failures do occur on occasion, even with the current system we operate, and therefore people are concerned that the final fall-back position that is currently operated in most Controls (ie. relying on pen and paper), could be impractical for a larger area, where more incidents are occurring.
- **Staff issues** - With most of the savings that could accrue from this type of collaboration predominantly coming from a reduction in the number of staff required, some people are concerned about the potential detrimental impact this could have on staff morale, health, well-being and their family life.

The Fire Authority is keen to get your views on this proposal, particularly as they relate to the potential benefits and impacts outlined above.