

MEETING: 28th FEBRUARY 2011

**SUBJECT: CONSULTATION REPORT: REVIEW OF THE RETAINED
FUNCTION AT GATESHEAD SOUTH
FIRE STATION**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs Members of the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken in the Birtley area, in respect of the proposal to remove the retained fire engine from Gateshead South Fire Station, and seeks their approval to proceed with the proposal.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will recall, one of the actions contained in the 2010/11 Integrated Risk Management Plan was a proposal to review the feasibility of removing the retained fire engine (T13P2) from Gateshead South Community Fire Station and this work was undertaken and a report of the findings duly compiled.
- 2.2 The report highlighted the fact that, over the last three years, the retained fire appliance, T13P2, had only attended a total of 91 incidents and, in addition, the average attendance time of the retained appliance in respect of these incidents was 07:26 minutes.
- 2.3 Furthermore, examination of the data also revealed that, when the retained fire appliance was unavailable due to staffing shortfalls or mechanical defect, and a second fire engine was required to provide operational assistance in the Gateshead South area, the supporting wholetime appliance mobilised from a neighbouring station attended more quickly than T13P2, with an average attendance time of 06:58 minutes, a faster time than the retained fire engine.
- 2.4 The report detailing these the findings was presented to the Fire Authority on 22nd November 2010 further to which Members approved, in principle, the removal of T13P2 from the operational fleet, subject to the outcome of a further public consultation exercise on the proposal (Minute 44/2010 refers).

2.5 This consultation exercise is now complete and Members are requested to consider the content of this report which provides information relating to the consultation exercise.

3 CONSULTATION PROCESS

3.1 In keeping with past practice, a consultation plan was developed and a range of meetings were planned and conducted between December 2010 and January 2011. The meetings were as follows:

- Public meetings in Birtley and Kibblesworth
- Briefing for the MP for Blaydon, David Anderson MP
- Briefing for Ward Councillors from Birtley and Lamesley
- Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) meeting in Gateshead
- Safer, Stronger Communities and Culture Partnership in Gateshead
- Discussion with the existing retained duty staff.

3.2 At these meetings the findings of the review were explained following which questions were invited from those attending the meetings. A synopsis of the content of these meetings is set out in the following section of this report.

Public Meetings

3.3 A total of twelve people attended the two public meetings, which were widely advertised in the locality. A number of issues were discussed with the main questions relating to levels of fire cover, with those present requesting assurances that the existing high level of service to the community would not be reduced if the retained appliance was removed. It was confirmed that this would be the case.

3.4 Those who attended the meetings agreed that the response figures shown within the presentation demonstrated an overall improvement in the speed of response without the retained fire engine, with a broad consensus that these figures alone proved the existing high level of service would be maintained. One person did request to see the raw data underpinning the findings of the review and this has since been provided. To date no further questions have been received from that individual.

Elected Member and MP Briefings

3.5 One ward councillor from the Birtley and Lamesley wards attended a Councillor briefing and Dave Anderson MP met with fire service staff at his

office. Following constructive discussion, the recommendation was acknowledged on the basis of providing a more efficient service to the community.

LSP and Safer, Stronger

- 3.6 Presentations were carried out at the Gateshead Local Strategic Partnership and Safer, Stronger Communities and Culture Partnership by the Gateshead District Manager. A member of the Safer, Stronger Communities and Culture Partnership commented that the analysis has been carried out thoroughly and it was correct that a better service would prevail without the retained appliance.

Meeting with retained staff at Gateshead South CFS

- 3.7 Consultation with the eight retained firefighters affected by the review has been undertaken. The affected staff requested information on the arrangements for withdrawal of the fire engine from operational service. It is pleasing to note that all eight firefighters have been transferred into the wholetime service.

FBU Consultation

- 3.7 The FBU have stated they are formally opposed to the decision but recognised that for a number of reasons the appliance was not available on a basis that was sustainable in the long term, they also recognised that the rationale behind the decision is evidence based. The FBU confirmed that the Retained staff are satisfied with the manner in which their personal circumstances have been handled to date, but were also disappointed at the actual decision to remove T13P2 from the fleet as they all took pride in their role as Retained Firefighters.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The consultation plan provided the community and partners with an opportunity to discuss and challenge the outcome of the review.
- 4.2 Whilst some of the consultees were initially concerned about the proposal, the broad consensus after the meetings was that the proposal would result in a more efficient and effective delivery of service.
- 4.3 Consequently, the Chief Fire Officer proposes that the retained fire engine, T13P2, is removed from the operational fleet on the grounds of effectiveness and efficiency and requests that Members give their approval to this.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- i) Review the contents of this report
- ii) approve the removal of T13P2 from the operational fleet, as recommended in the FA report of 22/11/2010.
- iii) Receive further reports as necessary

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Review of Operational Effectiveness of T13P2
- FA Report 22/11/2010 'Review of The Retained Function at Gateshead South Fire Station (Station 13)'