

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING: 20 JULY 2009

SUBJECT: FUTURE UNIFORM PROVISION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, FINANCE OFFICER AND CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out, for the consideration of Members, proposals with regard to the future provision of uniform for staff and seeks Authority approval to proceed with these proposals.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will be aware, for the last ten years the four Fire and Rescue Authorities in the North East have worked closely together on the contractual provision of a common style of uniform. This arrangement has been effective in a number of ways
- It has provided some economies of scale in procurement
 - It has served to encourage further shared service arrangements, such as workshops and stores
 - It has been a demonstrable part of a wider commitment to regional collaboration among Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) in the North East
- 2.2 The current uniform contracts are due to expire in 2009 and it is necessary, therefore, to put in place arrangements new contractual arrangements for future uniform provision.
- 2.3 Members will also be aware that, since the region's collaborative uniform procurement contract was established, a national arrangement for uniform procurement - the Integrated Clothing Project (ICP) - has been introduced through a contract administered by Firebuy. The original intention of this was to provide a national identity for the fire and rescue service and to achieve economies of scale. Furthermore, in order to encourage the use of the contract, the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) stated the following:

"It is anticipated that all FRA's will participate in the ICP. Any FRA proposing not to, must seek the agreement of the CLG to ensure that their proposals do not conflict with the National Procurement Strategy before issuing any OJEU notice or other invitation to tender or negotiate. Any authority which proposes to join contractual arrangements put in place by another body must similarly obtain the Office's agreement if supplies will continue beyond the ICP implementation date" (Fire Service Circular 28-2006).

- 2.4 In effect this means that any FRA proposing not to adopt the ICP contract is required to submit a business case to CLG seeking approval to any alternative approach.
- 2.5 Whilst the ICP clothing is undoubtedly of a high quality, the four North East FRA's, in common with a number of other FRA's, have some concerns about the ICP project particularly in relation to the flexibility of the contract and the potential costs associated with adopting the proposed uniform.
- 2.6 In terms of flexibility, the ICP option, whilst offering a comprehensive range of uniform items, does not allow FRA's to pick and choose items from the ICP catalogue. If an Authority opts to use the ICP contract then they must take all of their clothing requirements from ICP. Additionally, the grey and red colour scheme of the ICP clothing is also non-negotiable.
- 2.7 In terms of costs, there are also concerns that adoption of the ICP uniform could significantly raise the proportion of the Authority's resources spent on clothing. Given that all the FRA's in the region are strongly committed to increasing efficiency in line with government requirements, there was a significant concern with regard to this aspect of the ICP option and it was felt to merit further investigation.
- 2.8 In the light of these concerns, it was agreed that officers within the four FRA's would work together through the Regional Procurement Board, to consider the options for future uniform provision. This work has been ongoing over a number of months and the outcome of this is set out below.

3 REGIONAL APPROACH

- 3.1 Colleagues from across the region agreed to adopt a common approach to developing proposals for future uniform provision based on two potential options for uniform provision, namely
- The ICP option
 - The retention of the current style of uniform with some minor enhancements, including the replacement of the current white shirt and navy polo shirt with a new navy shirt (This change will provide both a harder wearing garment and a smarter service image than the current polo shirt is capable of and will standardise on one type and colour of shirt overall).
- 3.2 Within this approach, the means of carrying out a high level evaluation of the two options were also considered and a broadly consistent set of criteria was adopted. These criteria were
- Clothing is fit for purpose and of sound quality
 - The cost of procurement provides a value for money solution
 - There is a relatively high user satisfaction with the chosen option
 - Clothing promotes the identity of the Authority

- 3.3 It was also agreed that an integral part of the evaluation would be a mechanism to capture the opinions of staff across all four FRA's. This was done through an extensive consultation exercise, using the same questionnaire across all four FRA's. The questionnaire covered issues relating to all of the criteria outlined above, with the exception of cost.
- 3.4 Furthermore, at the same time as the survey was being undertaken, representatives of the four FRA's worked together to evaluate the projected financial cost of both of the options measured over a five year period. The findings of these two areas of work are set out in the next two sections of the report.

4 CONSULTATION APPROACH AND FINDINGS

- 4.1 To enable as many personnel as possible to view the uniform, a small number of personnel were issued with sample ICP clothing, and a similar number of personnel were issued with navy blue shirts. Mannequins showing both options were also provided in Service HQ.
- 4.2 Following a consultation launch, staff wore the uniforms from 2nd March to 26th April 2009, after which they completed a "wearers" questionnaire, whilst all staff were encouraged to complete an "observers" questionnaire.
- 4.3 In addition, during the consultation period, the Firebuy ICP DVD (showing the garment evaluations and trials at the HSE Laboratories in Buxton) was available to all staff on the Intranet, and a demonstration of the ICP garments by the ICP Project Support Manager was also held.
- 4.4 The response rate to the questionnaire was very high at 67%. This is significantly higher than the average return rate of 30-35% and reflects the fact that the subject of uniform is very important to personnel. A summary of the results is set out below;
- 4.5 **ICP option:**
- 83% of Wearers and 86% of Observers believed that the colour scheme of the ICP option to be poor
 - 72% of Wearers and 82% of Observers believed that the ICP option does not portray a professional image of the Fire & Rescue Service
 - 83% of Wearers and 84% of Observers would not be happy to wear the ICP option whilst representing Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service
 - The fit and comfort of the ICP station wear received more favourable results, with 78% of Wearers finding the comfort satisfactory or good, and 61% finding its fit satisfactory or good
 - 50% of Wearers, but only 19% of Observers found the style of the ICP uniform to be satisfactory or good.

4.6 Non ICP option:

- 95% of Wearers and 73% of Observers surveyed believed the colour scheme of the non ICP option to be good
- 79% of Wearers and 66% of Observers believed that the non ICP option does portray a professional image of the Fire & Rescue Service
- 84% of Wearers and 88% of Observers would be happy to wear the non ICP option whilst representing Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service
- 84% of Wearers found the comfort of the non ICP uniform to be satisfactory or good, and 84% found its fit satisfactory or good
- 100% of Wearers and 94% of Observers found the style of the non ICP uniform to be satisfactory or good.

4.7 The results above indicate a large preference for retaining the current style of uniform, with some small enhancements. It is also interesting to note that the colour scheme of the ICP clothing, and its related ability to portray a professional image of the fire and rescue service, was a particularly contentious issue.

4.8 Trades Unions did not comment explicitly on the options but requested that the FBU and Health and Safety department be afforded the opportunity to comment on the consultation results, and to raise any outstanding issues regarding the chosen option prior too moving into a procurement phase.

4.9 Furthermore, the results of the consultation exercise were shared with staff through team briefings and made available on the Intranet.

5. RESEARCH INTO COSTS

5.1 As referred to above, in order to consider which of the two options provided the best value for money solution, an analysis of the potential financial implications of both the ICP option and the non ICP option was undertaken. This was based on indicative estimates of both the initial uniform issue costs and ongoing uniform replacement costs for both options, measured over a five year period.

5.2 Significantly, if the ICP option were to be the agreed then, due to the key differences in style and colour compared to the current uniform, it would be necessary to provide a comprehensive initial uniform allocation to all staff to ensure uniformity within the service. This obviously carries with it notable cost implications. However, if the non ICP option were to be agreed, it would only be necessary to issue the shirts to provide uniformity of appearance.

5.3 The table below shows the difference in initial set-up costs for the two options:

INITIAL ISSUE	COST
Initial issue for ICP	£611,273
Initial issue For Non ICP	£39,667
Cost difference	£571,606

5.4 As can be seen the initial cost of the non ICP option is substantially less than the ICP option and can be contained within current budget levels. Should the ICP option be the preferred choice, then this would result in further expenditure of £571,606.

5.5 In addition, due to the general high cost per item of the ICP clothing it is anticipated that the ongoing replacement costs would be significantly higher than the current uniform replacement costs. At this time the budget for replacement uniform is set at approximately £89,500 for the year and this is based on historical data relating to known replacement rates within the service. Using this data in relation to ICP clothing, the budget would have to rise to approximately £151,000, a difference of £61,500 per annum.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

6.1 A range of risks has been considered in this process, including financial risks to the FRA; impacts on image in society and workplace relations; health and safety risks and reputational risks. Risk analysis will be further built into any procurement process.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Neither option is considered to pose a health and safety risk given that the non ICP option is a continuation of the current arrangements and the ICP option has been rigorously tested at the national level. Health and Safety implications will be fully considered during any future procurement process, with regard to both uniform, PPE and their compatibility.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

8.1 The equality and diversity implications of both the options have been considered and were also included in the Wearer/Observer survey and, clearly, the range of uniform available to staff needs to reflect the diverse needs of the Tyne and Wear community and all actual and potential staff members. However, either of the two options would allow the procurement of a wide range of items. Additionally an impact needs assessment will form part of the procurement process to ensure that all of the issues relating to this matter are addressed.

9 SUMMARY

- 9.1 As set out in earlier in this report with regard to the decision making criteria, we are seeking a uniform solution which ensures that;
- Clothing is fit for purpose and of sound quality
 - The cost of procurement provides a value for money solution
 - There is a relatively high user satisfaction with the chosen option
 - Clothing promotes the identity of the Authority
- 9.2 Taking these into account, together with the outcome of the research into the opinions of staff and the costs associated with the two uniform options it would appear that the non ICP option would meet the needs of the Authority more effectively than the ICP option. In essence the non ICP option appears to better represent the TWFRA identity as well as being deemed fit for purpose and of sound quality by the majority of staff. Perhaps even more significantly, it is also much lower in cost.
- 9.3 However, should Members wish to opt for the implementation of the non-ICP option it will first be necessary to approach CLG with a business case setting out the reasons why this decision was adopted and requesting their consent to undertake the necessary procurement work. This will be done in conjunction with our partners in the North East Fire and Rescue Services. Both Northumberland and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service intend to adopt the approach set out in this report, whilst Cleveland is currently considering which approach to adopt.
- 9.4 Finally, it is worth noting that the CLG has approved similar requests from other FRA's who wish to pursue an alternative to the ICP option.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Members are requested to consider the above content of this report and;
- a) Endorse the Non ICP approach to the provision of a uniform contract, and;
 - b) Agree to the production and submission of a business case to CLG, in conjunction with our Fire and Rescue Service partners in the North East, seeking consent to the procurement of uniform outside of the ICP national arrangements.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Report on the wearer consultation

Creating the Safest Community

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

- Report on the observer consultation
- Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11
- Fire Service Circular 28-2006