

**MEETING: 13 JULY 2020**

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**SUBJECT: IRMP RESPONSE REVIEW UPDATE**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the IRMP 2017-20 plan and to seek the Authority's agreement to authorise the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to delay implementing the outstanding proposed changes to operational response resulting from the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-20.
- 1.2 The report also seeks the Authority's agreement to authorise the Chief Fire Officer to transfer proposals 2 and 3 from the 2017-20 IRMP into the revised Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process for 2020-2023 allowing for new ways of working to be considered and lessons to be learnt from the worldwide pandemic – Covid 19.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The IRMP process is the vehicle the Authority uses to make significant changes to its shape, ensuring that functions are planned, designed, and delivered in a way that balances available resources and community risk. This is a national process required under the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018.
- 2.2 Since 2010, our IRMP actions have been developed against a background of significant reductions in the budget available to the Authority as a result of changes in Government spending and funding.
- 2.3 At the meeting in February 2019 (min 61/18 refers), members approved the implementation of proposal 1 of the IRMP Response Review, and authorised the CFO to carry out the necessary work to allow the Authority to fully consider the implications of implementing proposals 2 and 3 if future Central Government funding was not forthcoming and requested further reports on these matters.

## **3 FINANCIAL OUTLOOK**

- 3.1 The government announced that 'austerity was over' on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019 when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid MP set out his Spending Round plans for public sector spending in 2020/21. He announced that all government departments would see at least an inflationary increase to their existing funding. He also confirmed that a more detailed Spending Review would

be carried out in the summer of 2020 to allocate public sector resources into the medium term (usually covering the next 3-4 years).

- 3.2 The improved outlook for the economy was sustainable according to the Chancellor and the MTFS approved by Members in February 2020 is predicated on the Fire and Rescue Service receiving annual increases in funding in line with RPI. Whether or not this position is sustainable is very difficult to predict with the uncertainty caused not only by a one year settlement, but the unknown impact on public finances of both the current coronavirus pandemic and BREXIT planned for later in the year. The financial position for the Authority will therefore not be clear until the outcome of the Spending Review is known and a multi-year funding settlement is put in place by the government which takes into account these factors.
- 3.3 A further uncertainty on the Authority's financial resources is the unknown impact of the government's planned changes to how local government resources are to be distributed, under the 'self-sufficiency' agenda which have been further delayed to 2021/22 because of work on BREXIT.
- 3.4 At the time of writing this report there is no clear information available relating to possible government intervention in respect of the potential impact of reduced council tax and business rates income for 2020/2021 although additional Covid19 grant funding was provided for the additional costs incurred by local authorities which was welcomed. The scale of the income reductions could result in the need for a mid year budget rebalancing review if not adequately addressed and adds further uncertainty to funding for the Authority. This coupled with the fact that no date has been announced in respect of the proposed Comprehensive Spending Review in the Autumn 2020 is adding to the uncertainties already identified.
- 3.5 In summary there remains considerable and significant uncertainty over fire and rescue service funding and there is insufficient detail to be able to confirm at this stage what the financial prospects of the Authority are both in year and also over the medium term, at this stage. What is clear is that planning for the fire service remains very difficult in these very unique and challenging circumstances.

#### **4. IRMP 2017-20 RESPONSE REVIEW PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 Members will recall that the final report relating to the IRMP Response Review, considered at the February 2019 meeting, included the following proposals:

**Proposal 1** - Dynamically adjust the distribution and availability of appliances based on risk and demand

- Relocating a fire engine from Gosforth to Newcastle Central to respond more effectively to risk and demand;
- Relocating a fire engine from Washington to Sunderland Central to respond more effectively to risk and demand;

- Relocating two targeted response vehicles from Washington to Newcastle Central and Sunderland Central and crew on a risk-basis to respond more effectively to risk and demand;
- Relocating heavy rescue tender from Newcastle Central to Washington;
- Relocating heavy rescue tender from Hebburn to South Shields;
- Broadening the role of targeted response vehicles to include attendance at other incidents.

**Proposal 2** – Introduce a range of duty systems based on risk and demand

- Introducing the Day Crewing (On Call) duty system at Wallsend and Hebburn to respond more efficiently to risk and demand;
- In normal circumstances, cover from 20:00 to 08:00hrs to be provided by a fire engine from Tynemouth and South Shields respectively;
- On Call appliances with crews available on a pre-determined delay to respond more efficiently to risk and demand;
- Propose a fire engine at Farringdon becomes an On Call appliance with crews available on a pre-determined delay to respond more efficiently to risk and demand.

**Proposal 3** – Adjust the staffing model to deliver a more effective and efficient use of resources

- Adjusting start and finish times of shifts to provide a dayshift of 8 hours duration starting at 09:00hrs ending at 17:00hrs and a nightshift of 16 hours duration starting at 17:00hrs and ending at 09:00hrs;
- Formalising arrangements to introduce further flexibility into staffing facilitating greater effectiveness and efficiency across the operational workforce;
- Removing the extended day shift from the whole time duty system;
- Moderating staffing levels across the Service;
- Amending staffing levels in mobilising control following the introduction of mobilising and resource management system upgrades and ensuring opportunities are taken to maximise productivity within the control room.

4.2 Members decided to enact proposal 1 and instructed the Chief Fire Officer to begin the implementation and monitoring of the elements of that proposal. Following debate regarding proposals 2 and 3 members elected to defer a final decision regarding these options until more certainty was available about the longer term financial outlook for the Authority.

4.3 Added to the uncertainty and impact caused by being required by the Health and Safety Executive to consider potential changes to the Day Crewing (Close Call) ("DC (CC)") staffing model at Birtley and Rainton Bridge community fire stations,

the potential to reconsider the deferral of a decision on proposals 2 and 3 has become more of a reality for the Authority.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 As set out in Sections 3 of this report there remains significant financial uncertainty for the Authority over the medium term even though the government are indicating an end to austerity and an improving public sector funding position. Compounding the uncertainty is the current coronavirus response. The Authority however will not be able to plan its service with any great certainty until full details of its resources over the medium term are known and fully understood.

## **6. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

## **7. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no direct health and safety implications in respect of this report.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the contents of this report;
- b) Authorise the Chief Fire Officer to carry proposals 2 and 3 from the 2017-20 IRMP into the revised Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process for 2020-2023 allowing for new ways of working to be considered and lessons to be learnt from the worldwide pandemic – Covid 19.
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

- Fire Authority Report – IRMP How We Respond Relative to Risk, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018;
- Fire Authority Report – Update IRMP Response Review, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018;
- Fire Authority Supplementary Report – IRMP Response Review Consultation Period, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018.
- Fire Authority Report – IRMP Review, How We Respond Relative to Risk, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019;