Making Cheshire Safer: Our Plans for 2018/19

Cheshire Fire Authority is the public body responsible for ensuring local communities are protected by an effective fire and rescue service.

In 2015 the Authority approved a five year strategy, 'Planning for a Safer Cheshire', that outlined challenges facing the organisation and set out the principles it would adopt in responding. This will be supported by a series of annual action plans or Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) as they are also known. These will be consulted on each year.

A draft action plan, ***Making Cheshire Safer: Our Plans for 2018-19,*** has now been approved for consultation and we would like your views on what we are proposing.

This summary document aims to provide details of key proposals as well as some information about what has been considered during their development. A full version of the document and further information can be viewed on the Service's website **www.cheshirefire.gov.uk.** We would like you to tell us whether you agree with our proposals and if you think there are alternative ideas or anything else that we should consider.

Focus on the future

Four years ago the Authority embarked on its first comprehensive Emergency Response Review to ensure it was able to respond to future demands.

This resulted in the implementation of a huge programme of activity; including changes to the way some stations were staffed; a new 10 minute response standard for life risk incidents; the introduction of 12 hour shifts and the building of new fire stations in Alsager, Penketh, and Powey Lane in Mollington as well as a fire station and innovative safety and lifeskills centre at Lymm, Safety Central.

This work has ensured that the organisation was able to both balance its budget – saving £7.7m - and have sufficient funds to provide firefighters with the best equipment to protect both them and the communities they serve. It has also enabled us to continue our extensive community safety work.

This was followed by a second Emergency Response Review, which was initially consulted upon last year and is underway at the moment. Work to examine several options as part of that review continues and are explained in further detail later in this document.

In developing the options we are seeking your views on, careful consideration has been given to the thousands of residents, businesses, partners and staff who contributed to our previous annual consultations. Teams have also reviewed comprehensive incident data, spoken to neighbouring fire and rescue services, major industrial companies and other key stakeholders. More information can be found on our website.

Key projects and proposals

Increasing our precept

Council tax currently accounts for about 65% of the Fire Authority's funding, with the remaining 35% consisting of funds from central government. The Authority recently agreed a four year financial settlement with the Government until 2020/21. While this provides some certainty over the level of central funding until 2020/21, the Authority still needs to make revenue savings of £4m from its day-to-day operations by that point.

In addition to reviewing the way services are provided by the Fire Authority, we are proposing to increase the Authority's share of council tax (called its precept) by 1.99% to help balance its budget and want you to let us know your views.

Reviewing our emergency response

We continually review the way in which we staff our stations to reflect local risks and demand. This review process has formed the basis of the changes seen across the organisation over the past four years.

The authority replaced two of our three aerial appliances, based at Chester and Lymm to reflect specific risks and enable them to be deployed effectively across Cheshire when required. Work will continue to review the operation of the Authority's third aerial appliance, currently based at Macclesfield Fire Station.

We plan to continue work to review the crewing arrangements at Penketh and Wilmslow Fire Stations. Penketh currently houses one fire engine staffed by a wholetime crew and one fire engine staffed by an on-call crew who live or work nearby and respond to emergencies via an alerter. Wilmslow operates the nucleus duty system, where day time cover between 7:00am and 7:00pm is provided by wholetime firefighters and night time cover is provided by an on-call crew.

Please tell us your thoughts on these plans or if you think there are any alternative options or other factors that we should consider.

Cardiac response

The Fire Authority has piloted a project at four fire stations that sees fire crews respond to cardiac arrests alongside the North West Ambulance Service in a bid to get life saving treatment to patients quicker. Reducing the time it takes to start treatment can often make a big difference in someone's chances of survival.

The Fire Authority is keen to expand the cardiac response programme to all fire stations in Cheshire and would like you to tell us if you agree with our proposal and if there are any other considerations we should take into account.

Station build programme

Part of reviewing the way the Fire Authority's resources are structured to reflect local risks and demands also involves considering whether its fire stations are located in the most appropriate location or are still fit for current requirements.

No decision has yet been made on any redevelopment of stations in Chester, Crewe, Ellesmere Port or Warrington. However, if such proposals were progressed, the end result would mean there would still be a fire station in each town (or city) – albeit maybe in a different area to enable a more effective delivery of services.

Any construction of replacement stations would be met through the Fire Authority's capital budget and other sources of funding that are separate from its revenue budget, which funds its day-to-day operations.

In Chester, Crewe and Warrington, the Fire Authority has been approached by parties interested in making use of the current sites of the fire stations. If progressed, these discussions could lead to the development of replacement stations – or shared premises with other public services – that would better suit the needs of the Authority than the fire stations on the existing sites.

In Ellesmere Port, local agencies have been discussing the potential for a shared public services 'hub' on Civic Way in the town centre. If the Authority moved into the hub, this would release some resources from the sale of the existing fire station on Wellington Road.

The Fire Authority would like to know if there are any specific factors that you think we should consider if we look at building a replacement station in any of these locations.

How can you have your say?

We are keen for you to let us know what you think about our proposals and if you think there are other things we need to consider, before members of Cheshire Fire Authority make a final decision on our draft plan on 14th February 2018.

We will be holding a series of public roadshows across Cheshire throughout October and November and will be regularly updating our website and Facebook and Twitter pages – please get in touch to share your views. Further details can be found on our website or by using the contact details below.

Please have a read through this document and the draft Plan and then take a few minutes to share your views. This can be done online at **www.cheshirefire.gov.uk** or by completing a questionnaire that can be obtained at one of our roadshows, by calling 01606 365404 or emailing **consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk**

You can also contact us via **www.facebook.com/CheshireFRS** or through our Twitter handle **@CheshireFRS**

All responses must be received by us no later than Tuesday 2nd January 2018.