

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee	Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee	13th September 2005
Report Title	Fire and Rescue Service Regional Control Centre for the West Midlands.
Summary	This report confirms the location of the Fire and Rescue Service Regional Control Centre for the West Midlands. It also identifies a number of issues that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority will need to consider for the future.
For further information Please contact:	Balbir Singh Policy and Planning Officer Tel: 01926423231 balbirsingh@warwickshire.gov.uk
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?	No.
Background papers	The Fire and Rescue National Framework document 2005/06. Crime and Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report dated 17 th February 2004 on the Fire and Rescue Service Modernisation Agenda. Crime and Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report dated 5 th April 2005 on the minutes of the Regional Management Board meeting held on the 25 th January 2005. Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report dated 17 th June 2005 on the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue service Departmental Asset Management Plan. Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report dated 19 th July 2005 on the minutes of the Regional Management Board meeting held on the 10 th June 2005.

Appendices:

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Other Committees | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Local Member(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Other Elected Members | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Cllr Haynes and Cllr Shilton |
| Cabinet Member | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Cllr Hobbs |
| Chief Executive | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Legal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Greta Needham |
| Finance | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Oliver Winters, Helen Murphy |
| Other Chief Officers | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| District Councils | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Health Authority | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Police | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Other Bodies/Individuals | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

FINAL DECISION: For information only. Report requested by Cllr Haynes

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Further consideration by this Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To Cabinet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To an O & S Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To an Area Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Further Consultation | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13th September 2005

Regional Control Centre

Report of the County Fire Officer

Recommendation

Members to note the report and provide an indication of the frequency and level of reports that they would wish to see on this subject in the future.

1.0 Announcement

- 1.1 Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick MP made the announcement for the Regional Control Centre (RCC) on 10th August 2005. The centre for the West Midlands region will be in Wolverhampton Business Park, Wolverhampton, WV10 6NX. This site is adjacent to Junction 2 of the M54 motorway. The RCC will be built on a site within an existing business park that already contains a number of significant buildings that have already been occupied. The developers have entered into a contract with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to provide a high quality self-contained building comprising 2,800 sq M of accommodation over three floors.
- 1.2 The new centre will become the Regional Fire Control for Warwickshire, West Midlands, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Hereford and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Services. It is anticipated that the West Midlands RCC will be completed towards the end of 2008. At this time the West Midlands RCC will become part of a network of nine RCC's covering the County.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Currently there are 46 fire control rooms in England, based at local fire brigades. The FiReControl project is working to move from the existing system of control rooms into 9 new amalgamated Regional Control Centres. This change is directly linked to the wide-scale programme of reform and modernisation taking place throughout the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service.
- 2.2 In 1999, the government commissioned Mott MacDonald to carry out a review of fire control rooms, resulting in a report, which was published in April 2000. This report recommended the reduction in the number of control rooms across the country. Following this, in December 2002, Sir George Bain carried out a further

independent review of the fire service, entitled 'The Future of the Fire Service: Reducing Risk, Saving Lives'. This report, compiled during a period of industrial unrest within the fire and rescue service, established a blue print for the future of the fire and rescue service.

- 2.3 Much work was carried out in 2003 – the government published their White Paper 'Our Fire and Rescue Service' and Mott MacDonald updated their report 'The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales'. The outcome of this work was the publication of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework document 2004/05. This document, amongst other issues, required Fire and Rescue Authorities to establish Regional Management Boards, which were charged with establishing RCCs. The Framework Document has been revised for 2005/06 in which the Governments commitment to Regional Control Centres was strengthened.

3.0 Rationale for the Project

- 3.1 There are many reasons behind the move to Regional Control Centres. However, the following three areas appear to provide the best summary:

3.2 The resilience argument

3.2.1 We are living in a changed environment and facing an increased level of threat post September 11th. The existence of this threat has been reinforced by the events in London during July of this year. There is a need to make sure that our fire controls are equipped to be able to handle any kind of large-scale incident ranging from environmental disaster to a terrorist attack. Fire controls, are part of the country's Critical National Infrastructure, and must fulfil a robust set of criteria to demonstrate that they meet the required security and resilience requirements, which are now necessary. Each new RCC will therefore need to be security accredited.

3.3 Building on best practice

3.3.1 Existing control rooms operate in very different ways from each other. There is disparity in everything from brigade management standards, operational protocols, shift patterns, resource availability, conditions of service and financing. This therefore prevents the current fire controls from offering a common national response capability. RCC's will operate using the best practice found in existing controls. They will use the same state-of-the-art technology, systems, processes and methods as each other. All RCC will have the same organisational structure, and roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined to make sure that career development is a real possibility. This will be supported by a national training curriculum, which will be coordinated on a national basis.

3.4 Fallback and networking

3.4.1 Regional Control Centres need to be capable of operating as a resilient network, which has the capacity to provide fallback support should any RCC

cease to be operational. RCCs will require effective inter-working between brigades on a national scale to provide the necessary levels of service.

3.4.2 A large national project team has been set up within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). This team brings together experts from a wide range of fields; change management, command and control and radio technology, project management, human resources, ergonomics, security and resilience. This team is based in ODPM offices in Victoria, London, enabling it to work closely with other teams who are currently delivering change in the Fire and Rescue Service such as Firelink, the Integrated Personal Development System, and New Dimension.

4.0 Effect on Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

4.1 This change will have a significant effect both on the staff currently employed in the existing control room and on the way the Service discharges its duties. The current control establishment is:

Control Operators 8
Crew Managers (Control) 4
Watch Managers (Control) 5
Station Manager (Control) 1

4.2 The budget allocated to Control Centre within the Fire and Rescue Services revenue budget is £637,000 of which 89% is allocated to direct employee expenses.

4.3 The migration to the RCC will see the closure of the control centre at Leamington. All 999 calls intended for the fire and rescue service will be routed to the RCC. The RCC will then mobilise the appropriate resources to attend the incident. Mobilisation to incidents within Warwickshire will be to the standard set by the Fire and Rescue Authority, which will be determined by the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

4.4 Not all areas of work currently undertaken by our control staff will be transferred to the RCC. For example the Help on Call facility will remain within the County. There will also need to be provision for monitoring the performance of the RCC and an increase in people working within support functions to act as an interface between the RCC and the Fire and Rescue Service.

4.5 Operationally the Fire and Rescue Service will benefit in a number of ways. The introduction of the RCC will coincide with the introduction of a new radio scheme, that in addition to providing improved verbal communication, will also provide access to data within the fire appliance and automatic vehicle location systems that will ensure that the nearest appliance is mobilised to an incident. Access to data and information at the incident site will greatly improve the effectiveness of our Fire-fighters and lead to an increase in their, and the public's, safety.

4.6 Generally the benefits of the RCC will be seen as improvements in the service to the public because of:

- Better technology, allowing a more effective response.
- Ironing out the peaks of demand that can currently overwhelm local control rooms and force calls to be diverted.
- Automatic back up from other regions if one region is too busy or out of action.
- Ability to mobilise direct to the nearest appropriate appliance, even if not from the 'owning' FRS.
- Enhanced operational capability through a common control system and procedures, enabling FRS's to work together more effectively.
- Efficiency savings, which will enable more resources to be used for fire prevention.
- Enhanced resilience and security.

4.7 Access to data and information on hazards en route to and at the incident site will greatly improve the safety and effectiveness of our Fire-fighters. This will also improve public safety.

4.8 With the announcement of the site, work can now begin to formalise the policies required to assist our staff make their decision about their futures. In keeping with County Council Policy the Service will endeavour to ensure that there will be no compulsory redundancies. All control staff will be given the opportunity to apply for posts at the West Midlands or other RCCs. However, given the locations of the RCCs it is likely that it will be impractical for some staff to avail themselves of this opportunity. Arrangements will therefore be made to identify posts, both within Fire and Rescue and across the County Council, to which staff could be redeployed. In all cases the County Councils existing policy and guidance in these areas will be applied appropriately.

4.9 In addition to internal policies further national guidance is awaited on matters covering retention and relocation arrangements.

5.0 County Fire Officers Comment

5.1 The development of RCCs has been on-going for sometime now as indicated above. However, even before the Mott MacDonald report the Fire Authority's in the West Midlands had identified the improved service delivery options available from a Regional radio scheme and had started to consider the future of their Control Centres. This work was not progressed at that time due to other circumstances and was subsequently overtaken by events.

5.2 The outcomes of the project will be greater resilience than is presently available, enhanced inter-operability between fire and rescue services and between fire and rescue services and other emergency services, greater capacity for call handling and resource mobilisation and greater value for money for fire and rescue authorities. In addition the service provided will be no less effective than that currently delivered.

5.3 There are still a number of issues that need to be resolved. These centre on the governance arrangements and a fuller explanation of the overall financial implications and cost to be borne by fire and rescue authorities. In addition details of technical solutions and convergence arrangements still need to be agreed so that

areas that are outside the scope of the project can be identified and local solutions developed.

- 5.4 The time scales set out for this project are extremely challenging and it will be necessary to allocate someone to work on this project full time. The options for providing this resource are currently being considered, as are the funding arrangements. The Service continues to be fully involved with the Regional Control Room project being managed through the Regional Management Board.
- 5.5 The period between now and the migration to the RCC will present the Service and the Authority with a number of challenges. However, I am sure that the management of the Service and our people have the skills, the knowledge and the will to ensure that the project will be delivered whilst maintaining a high level of service to the people of Warwickshire.

William Brown
County Fire Officer

Shire Hall
Warwick

Date 31st August 2005